Judith Knam

Project report
STS390, "Media, war and peace"

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Science, Technology & Society
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The report has two parts.

1. A response pack for an actual organisation.

Judith Knam's response pack is a separate file.

2. A dialogue between two students discussing the project. This dialogue is fictional. Pseudonyms were used so that the marker, Brian Martin, would not know the identity of student authors.

Judith Knam's dialogue starts on the next page.

Judith has rewritten both parts of her report to disguise the identity of the organisation.

STS390 Project Report

The religious healthcare centre – a place for older people that cares

Student No. 3062909
Due: 29.10.2008

Two students are discussing their assignment. Pseudonyms have been used.

Eden: Hey how is the assignment on violence in healthcare going?

Peta (sighs): ….well there has been hardly any research done in this area - overall the literature is very circular on the issue of older people and violence. There is little agreement regarding definitions, theoretical understandings or appropriate responses.

Eden: But wasn't that your prime reason for choosing the topic?

Peta: Yes that and because the Commonwealth Government has nominated violence against elderly as an issue of national importance[1]. With Australians having the world's second longest life expectancy[2] more and more old people are being referred to nursing homes, which is where neglect, exploitation and sexual, physical and psychological abuse are still commonplace[3].

Eden: Is that why you are examining the Sun Healthcare case study, since they would be a prime example of unethical practices and violence against their patients?

Peta: Correct, Sun was at the center of the nursing home scandal in the United States and United Kingdom; they practiced their unethical conduct for years, until citizen activist groups and whistleblowers[4] finally got the government involved; the founder and CEO

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[1] Disney, M., Cupitt, L. (2000) "Two lives two worlds: Older people and domestic violence", in Partnership Against domestic Violence, Vol.2, Iss. 1, pp. 1- 69: the elder abuse movement is professionally motivated and run mainly by social workers and nurses

[2] Department of Health: http://www.health.gov.au/internet/ministers/publishing.nsf/Content/mr-yr08-je-je190.htm, 81.4 years is how long the average Australian is expected to live, with numbers still increasing.

[3] Gartrell, A. (2006) Recent Events highlight shameful neglect of Australia's elderly, AAP Pty Ltd, p.3

[4] Whistleblowers Australia (WBA),is a national organisation whose goal is to promote a society in which it is possible to speak out about dangers to the public and environment and other vital issues, and to help those who speak out in this way to help themselves (http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/sts/bmartin/pubs/04Calland.html)

Andrew Turner applied market principles to the aged, in his quest for profit – with a complete disregard for his staff or patrons[5].

Eden: Didn't Sun at one time face 300 law suits due to their incorrect billing practices as well as the vast numbers of frail elderly who died prematurely as a result of neglect?[6]

Peta: Yes and the list goes on and on… the over-dependence on systems rather than family has led to several home scandals around the globe, but this one is especially repelling….what I am having difficulties with, is that the case study can be examined from so many angles – there are all sorts of theoretical perspectives which I could analyze in-depth. For starters the concept of lying[7] is obvious – Sun Healthcare lied to the public for years, by defrauding the government with false medical claims; moreover internally to its staff and shareholders, who it withheld information from. Hence an in-depth examination of Deontologists[8] and Utilitarian[9] perspective could provide us with a distinction between what is ethically justifiable.

Eden: Oh really, I thought it was more a case of backfire[10] – Turner tried to minimize outrage by cover-up of the events, devaluation of the activist groups who were accusing him by repeatedly saying "there is still more fat to cut"[11], he reinterpreted their accusations, he made use of official channels, and he intimidated and bribed his persistent opponents; or how else do you explain the FBI and senate to drop their first

[5] http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/sts/bmartin/dissent/documents/health/sun_update.html: A study of the quality of care by Consumer Reports magazine in August 1995 used government inspection reports to rank 43 nursing home chains. Sun compared very poorly with competitors. The ranking was based on "critical deficiencies" which relate directly to residents' health and well being; and led to 60,000 government inspections of nursing homes, which evaluated pressure sores, restraint use, staff training, infection control and environment.

[6] Ibid., p.8

[7] S. Bok. (1999) *Lying*, New York: Vintage Books, p. 13 defined a lies as "any intentionally deceptive message which is stated'; Lies are part of the broader category of deception, which includes all that we do or do not do, say or do not say, with the intention of misleading others.

[8] A theorist is Emmanuel Kant, who asserts that humans should be treated as an end in themselves and not as a means to something else (to get the Liar what they want) Immanuel Kant (1785) *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals,* Harper and Row Publishers

[9] They are concerned with the consequences of lying – they assess the rightness or wrongness of doing something by looking at the consequences caused by the act; Mill, J. S. (1998) Utilitarianism, Oxford University Press, Oxford

[10] Martin, B. (2008) The Henson affair: conflicting injustices. *Australian Review of Public Affairs*

[11] http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/sts/bmartin/dissent/documents/health/sun_update.html, p. 12

investigation? However in the end everything backfired and he went bankrupt because he underestimated the power of the public outrage.

Peta: I do see where you are coming from, however I think the most relevant concept for the Sun case study and the treatment of elderly in nursing homes is violence. Therefore I suggest lying and backfire as topics for future investigation, as they both evolved from the violence being there in the first place;

Eden: I think the concept of violence is anyway most applicable to the organization you chose. How come you chose this *religious healthcare centre* anyway? I mean this home for elderly people does not exactly compare the multinational conglomerate Sun Healthcare.

Peta: I reasoned that Sun Healthcare was very high profile, with a lot of media exposure and many patients; hence its unethical practices had to surface eventually. Small community nursing homes, on the other hand, can go unnoticed for decades and it is often here, where patients are less likely to complain or speak up, as not to upset the close knit community[12].

Eden: Come on, it is a catholic healthcare home, and most the nurses are female – do you seriously think they bash the seniors they are looking after? Maybe they don't look after them very well at times, but I doubt that they are violent towards their patients.

Peta: That is exactly my point: violence encompasses a whole range of behaviours, including neglect and abuse. The council of Europe defines violence as "present in every act of commission or omission which is leveled against the life, the physical or psychological integrity or the freedom of a person that seriously hinders the development

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[12] Kurrle, S. (1994) 'Elder Abuse: A Hidden Problem', *Modern Medicine*, Vol.9, No.1:
Many writers on elder abuse report that older people will not disclose violence for a range of reasons, which include: a) fear that the complaint will increase the violence; b) inability to complain because of loss of communication skills; c) fear that the complaint will precipitate committal to institutional care; d) isolation of the victim and being too ashamed to report the abuse

of the person[13]. The spectrum of violence ranges from neglect and psychological ill-treatment, financial exploitation and restriction of freedom right through to physical violence; I am not saying that *the religious healthcare centre* engages in these practices but it is definitely important for staff to be familiar with the concept so they can see it when it happens

Eden: Okay that makes sense but it is such a vague term – I don't think there is one universal definition. For this project you should definitely look into structural violence, which corresponds with the systematic ways in which social structures or institutions kill people slowly by preventing them from meeting their basic needs[14]. This form of violence often works on a subconscious, ideological level and is probably what contributes to the bad treatment of elderly in our institution – because it justifies our (often discriminating) behaviour.

Peta: I just find it so hard that make proper use of the concept, because you are right it has so many aspects – it seems to apply to any 'upsetting' action directed at someone/something else; it can be both passive (neglect) or active (abuse)…but on the other hand I think it is important to leave a lot of room for interpretation with this concept, as to account for the different forms in which violent behaviour can occur….also I am not sure yet what to make with this interesting related concept that I came across in my research…

Eden: What's that? Did you find something totally unexpected?

Peta: Well yes, I guess so – I had never heard of it before, it is called death-making, which is a theory, developed by Wolfensberger[15], which accuses the medical profession of abandoning its radical commitment to life, and instead to participating in death-making by interpreting killing old people as good science.

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[13] European Senior Citizen Union, http://www.eu-seniorunion.info/en/activities/againstviolence/default.htm
[14] Galtung, J. (1969) "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," Journal of Peace Research, Vol. 6, No. 3, p. 167
[15] Wolfensberger, W., Race, D. (2003) Leadership and Change in Human Services: Selected Readings from Wolf Wolfensberger, Routledge, New York

Eden: So where did you find all that interesting information?

Peta: Oh seriously I have taken bits from everywhere, I did some recommended readings for STS, the library of course, newspapers, abs, the internet – especially for the case study, which occurred in America, old sociology books and the religious healthcare centre - they had brochures, a website and I was allowed to interview a lovely nurse, Samantha, who has been working there for over 7 years[16].

Eden: That's a lot of info – surely you did not use it all?

Peta: No, I obviously had to make a selection of what I wanted to communicate. For instance there an incredible amount of theory on violence in the books that I got from the library and even more on the internet, but I only used the aspects that were applicable to the case study and response pack and I also in-text referenced my PowerPoint slides…that's about it!

Eden: sounds promising – I am excited to see the final product!

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[16] Samantha Smith was interviewed in October 2008; during the interview she disclosed the nursing home's opposition to euthanasia, as they are operated by a religious group. She also mentioned the offerings the nursing home has for its seniors, as to respecting and empowering them, including an occupational therapist; all this is done as to add quality to their last days

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- Whistleblowers

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