

**CENTERING VANTAGE POINT IN THE PEDAGOGY OF  
FAMILY AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE**

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## INTRODUCTION

A baby is screaming on a plane. Passenger *A* is not a parent but has been on many plane rides with babies; they cannot see the baby but can hear the baby screaming. Passenger *A* concludes the baby is crying because its mother is not attending to it properly, and that the baby must be scared or distressed. Passenger *B* has their own children, sees the baby as it is screaming and, remembering how their babies looked and behaved on airplanes, concludes the baby is screaming because its ears hurt from the elevation change. Passenger *C* is the baby's mother, familiar with the sound of her baby's noises, how it moves, and when it last ate; she concludes the baby is screaming because it is tired. Passenger *D*, a person who does not have children, is wearing headphones a few seats away, hears a muffled version of the baby's screaming, and concludes the baby is cackling and, therefore, that it is happy.

Each passenger's different assessment of the sounds they heard and what they saw is informed by their unique, individual vantage point — a combination of sensory and contextual factors that explains how we experience, understand, and recall events. Considering different vantage points — an endeavor we call vantage point analysis — imbues subjectivity into experiences that otherwise are susceptible to being viewed “objectively.” Vantage point analysis is a perspective-expanding tool for understanding why, for example, when four people hear the same noise (an experience that, to any one of the them, may seem “objective”), they can leave with varying assessments of what the noise meant and what caused it. In other words, even if the baby was actually hungry, considering each actor's vantage point allows us to appreciate their subjective experience as valid and to understand the reasons they reached the conclusions they did.

Vantage point is part point of view — one's individual opinion of an experience. It is part line of sight — what is observable from a physical position. And it is part frame of mind — how someone is feeling at a particular point in time, or how their past experiences shape their present.

But none of those, alone, offer what vantage point analysis can. ‘Point of view’ can be disagreed with or deemed incorrect. ‘Line of sight’ is limited to one's *visual* perspective in a particular moment, excluding the role of other senses and internal experiences. And emotional frame of mind can limit analysis to the internal, ignoring what may be externally sensorily perceived.

Vantage point analysis demands that we consider the combination of sensory experiences (what we see, hear, taste, smell, touch) and the context that shapes how we process those experiences — including our

emotional state, personal history, social location, culture, and biases.<sup>1</sup> For example, to understand *why* the passengers each concluded what they did, we would be remiss to only consider what they saw and heard without considering their prior experiences, or to assume they saw and heard clearly without examining the physical space. Vantage point analysis provides opportunities to understand how experiences that seem contradictory can actually coexist. In considering someone else's vantage point, the focus is not on *the* truth, but rather on *their* truth.

In this piece, we share ways to incorporate vantage point analysis in the pedagogy of family and intimate partner violence (FIPV).<sup>2</sup> We first examine why habituating this analysis fosters educational benefits for new lawyers and may hold particular importance within the context of FIPV. We then offer concrete classroom exercises to help students (and lawyers) habituate vantage point analysis in the context of FIPV.

### I. THE UTILITY OF VANTAGE POINT AS A LAWYERING SKILL

Inculcating vantage point cannot allow anyone to fully understand another person's unique experience; but training students to identify different vantage points, and to recognize their own, *can* develop curiosity, empathy, cultural humility, and client-centeredness. In short, habituating vantage point analysis cultivates radical subjectivity by centering how events might be experienced and interpreted by the individuals who live them. It is not an examination of the existential question of what is, or whether there can be, objective truth. Rather, our goal in introducing vantage point analysis is to identify pedagogical opportunities to help students challenge the automatic tendency to assume their subjective assessment is the objective truth.

Vantage point analysis is particularly important for new lawyers who, like all humans, are instinctively drawn to an "egocentric default"<sup>3</sup> — an assessment of the world that centers, prioritizes, and implicitly trusts oneself and how facts and circumstances appear to us. And this is distinctly important — and can be distinctly difficult — in effectively examining the experiences of survivors of FIPV. Commonly, students approach FIPV

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<sup>1</sup> The pedagogical importance of critical self-awareness to lawyering has been examined extensively. *See, e.g.*, Sue Bryant & Jean Koh Peters, FIVE HABITS OF CROSS-CULTURAL LAWYERING AND MORE (2023), <https://fivehabitsandmore.law.yale.edu/>; Susan Bryant, *The Five Habits: Building Cross-Cultural Competence in Lawyers*, 8 CLINICAL L. REV. 33 (2001); Carwina Weng, *Multicultural Lawyering: Teaching Psychology to Develop Cultural Self-Awareness*, 11 CLINICAL L. REV. 369, 396 (2005).

<sup>2</sup> While we limit our discussion to student engagement with FIPV, vantage point analysis could also be used to evaluate judicial decision-making, how cases are written, and the entire adversarial system.

<sup>3</sup> 3 *Counter Intuitive Ways to Take on Another Person's Point of View*, PSYCHOLOGY COMPASS, <https://psychologycompass.com/blog/point-of-view/> (last visited Jan. 11, 2023).

with the misconception that there is an objectively-correct frame through which to understand it. They often, consciously or not, adopt stock stories about these cases — stereotypes about the “perfect victim” and the “monstrous abuser” that, when contradicted, can lead to misunderstanding, judgment, and errors in lawyering strategy. And students can fail to recognize how their own vantage point, shaped in part by their privilege and biases, informs their assessment of a survivor’s narrative, credibility, and choices.

Unchecked, the egocentric default can lead students — indeed, all legal-system actors — to impose stereotypes and stock stories on survivors by virtue of their race, gender presentation and gender identity, sexual orientation, and other observable facets of identity. It can lead to flawed, problematic, and harmful decision-making that mistakes patriarchal, heteronormative, white-centered narratives as objective truths — questioning the “woman who stays,” discrediting the survivor who focuses on emotional and psychological abuse over physical abuse, perpetuating racist tropes like the “welfare queen” stereotype, and promoting sexist assumptions “of women as unreliable-to-hysterical distorters of the truth.”<sup>4</sup> The egocentric default can also lead system gatekeepers to distrust or discount a survivor’s testimony<sup>5</sup> based on similar context-deprived and stereotype-and assumption-driven thinking.<sup>6</sup>

The capacity to explore another’s vantage point is an essential lawyering skill. It is foundational to compassion and empathy, both of which are indispensable for lawyers practicing in the FIPV context.<sup>7</sup> Exploring another’s vantage point facilitates predictions or explanations for their “cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses”<sup>8</sup> which can lead to more generous and accurate understanding. It allows for expanded creativity,<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Deborah Epstein & Lisa A. Goodman, *Discounting Women: Doubting Domestic Violence Survivors’ Credibility and Dismissing Their Experiences*, 167 U. PA. L. REV. 399, 413-30 (2019).

<sup>5</sup> Amelia Mindthoff et al., *How Social Science Can Help Us Understand Why Family Courts May Discount Women’s Testimony in Intimate Partner Violence Cases*, 53 FAM. L.Q. 243, 250–61 (2019).

<sup>6</sup> See Zanita E. Fenton, *Domestic Violence in Black and White: Racialized Gender Stereotypes in Gender Violence*, 8 COLUM. J. GENDER & L. 1, 30-31 (1998).

<sup>7</sup> Michelle Williams, *Building and Rebuilding Trust: Why Perspective Taking Matters*, in RESTORING TRUST IN ORGANIZATIONS AND LEADERS: ENDURING CHALLENGES AND EMERGING ANSWERS 171 (Roderick M. Kramer & Todd L. Pittinsky eds., 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Valerie I. Sessa, *Using Perspective Taking to Manage Conflict and Affect in Teams*, 32 J. APPLIED BEHAV. SCI. 101, 105 (1996).

<sup>9</sup> See Adam D. Galinsky et al., *Power and Perspectives Not Taken*, 17 PSYCH. SCI. 1068, 1069-70 (2006).

problem-solving, and innovation,<sup>10</sup> which enhance effective communication and conflict resolution. It reduces implicit bias, stereotypes, informational gap filling, and other cognitive shortcuts.<sup>11</sup> It is necessary for nuanced fact investigation and competent representation and is deeply client-centered. In short, the ability to appreciate another's vantage point facilitates effective, zealous lawyering by providing a framework for examining the facts you have and those you do not.

Yet, what is "best" for survivors of FIPV is often assessed without context, ignoring or failing to consider what the survivor actually perceived and experienced. Family law is replete with famously subjective inquiries into the best interest of the child, the fair and equitable division of marital property, or the just and fair award of alimony, to name a few. Moreover, family law cases tend to involve a number of powerful players shaping results, including judges, guardians ad litem, government attorneys, family therapists, parental alienation experts, and others. Each of those actors wields tremendous power over parents and children, in part by how their unique vantage points shape their assessment of the family's dynamics, the child's environment, incidents of FIPV, and all other aspects of the case. There is perhaps no other area of the law where so many different vantage points come together to shape a legal ruling.

But examining someone's vantage point is not complete without considering their power.<sup>12</sup> Authority and social power have been shown to inhibit one's ability (or willingness) to explore another's vantage point.<sup>13</sup> Specifically, "power [has been] associated with a reduced tendency to comprehend how other individuals see the world, think about the world, and feel about the world."<sup>14</sup> Power has also been shown to make people "less likely to spontaneously adopt another person's visual perspective,

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Platt et al., *Perspective Taking: A Brain Hack That Can Help You Make Better Decisions*, KNOWLEDGE AT WHARTON (Mar. 22, 2021), <https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/perspective-taking-brain-hack-can-help-make-better-decisions/>.

<sup>11</sup> Many scholars have addressed how failing to consider another's vantage point negatively impacts legal outcomes and lawyering. While we cannot meaningfully identify them all here, it is critical to consider the ways in which vantage point starts to resist stereotyped thinking and counteract marginalization. See, e.g., Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*, 1989 U. CHI. LEGAL F. 139 (1989); Martha Minow, *Justice Engendered*, 101 HARV. L. REV. 10 (1987); Fenton, *supra* note 6, at 56.

<sup>12</sup> See Naomi Mann, *Classrooms into Courtrooms*, 59 HOUS. L. REV. 363, 422–24 (2021); see also Paula M. Popovich & Michael A. Warren, *The Role of Power in Sexual Harassment as a Counterproductive Behavior in Organizations*, 20 HUM. RES. MGMT. REV. 45, 47, 49 (2010) (quoting *Power*, MERRIAM-WEBSTER ONLINE DICTIONARY, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/power> (Mar. 16, 2009)).

<sup>13</sup> See Galinsky et al., *supra* note 9, at 1068.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.* at 1072.

less likely to take into account that another person did not possess . . . privileged knowledge, and less accurate in detecting the emotional states of other people.”<sup>15</sup> In short, power both shapes what is *seen* and hampers the ability to consider how and why others might *see* differently.<sup>16</sup>

We do not believe it is overstated to assert that the capacity to engage vantage point analysis is a core competency. It is a tool that, if properly cultivated, can meaningfully enrich client representation and relationships. In the following section, we lay out pedagogical tools to do just that.

## II. HABITUATING VANTAGE POINT & RADICAL SUBJECTIVITY IN THE PEDAGOGY OF FAMILY AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Centering vantage point in pedagogy requires teaching students how vantage point can shape others’ experiences and how to see, identify, and disrupt their own subjectivity. Like most skills, vantage point analysis can be habituated with practice.<sup>17</sup> Below we describe exercises that cultivate vantage point analysis, which can be applied in law school clinics, simulations, classes addressing FIPV, and any other context where students may fail to see a survivor’s perspective. The pedagogical thread that ties these exercises together is a push beyond students’ egocentric default and into a deliberate examination of what might be understood outside their individual lens.

### A. *Vantage Point Analysis in Clinic and Simulations*

Consider the following: Two student attorneys discuss an upcoming custody hearing with their client. The client reports that her child’s father assaulted her a few months ago. From the students’ perspective, the client seemed impatient, even a bit angry. When the students ask follow-up questions, they perceive the client as being short with them. Following that

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<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> Indeed, some anti-IPV advocates with power during the early days of the anti-IPV movement failed to consider the vantage point of others, affecting the changes they sought. See Beth E. Richie, *Reimagining the Movement to End Gender Violence: Anti-racism, Prison Abolition, Women of Color Feminisms, and Other Radical Visions of Justice (Transcript)*, 5 U. MIAMI RACE & SOC. JUST. L. REV. 257, 261 (2015) (“[P]ower and privilege, whether you have it or not, and your perspective based on the power and privilege that you have, work together in our movement in ways that we thought might end violence for some, but has actually created harm for others.”).

<sup>17</sup> The capacity for perspective taking first arises in children as early as age four. In a seminal study, young children were asked to consider what a doll would see when put in different places on a three-dimensional model mountain display. See JEAN PIAGET & BÄRBEL INHELDER, *THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE CHILD* (Helen Weaver, trans., 1969). This experiment was designed to understand when and whether children were able to engage in perspective taking; that is, to move beyond their own egocentric view of the world and see things through the lens of another (in this experiment, the dolls). *Id.*

meeting, the students obtain a police report from the night of the assault. The report indicates that the client and her child's father had a "verbal altercation" and that "no physical altercation occurred." The students begin to question their client's story, asking whether they can even raise the claim of assault if it is "not true."

In the grand scheme of possibilities, one is that the client is "making up" the assault, as the students seem to have concluded. But the students' assessment trusts that they accurately perceived the client in their interview and seems to reflect a bias that trusts the assertions in the police report. What if the students assessed their own vantage points, the client's, and the reporting officers'? How might their assessment differ?

To move them past their egocentric default, we might ask the students to explore *their* vantage point at the time of their interview: Where were they (a conference room, the client's kitchen, a public library)? How might that environment have shaped the students' visual and aural perceptions, or their conclusion that the client was insincere? We might ask them to consider the various contextual factors that might have shaped their assessment of the client's credibility (or their ability to consider their client's vantage point at all). Those factors could include the students' feelings during the interview, family background, understanding of professional norms, social power and privilege, race, gender, experiences with marginalization, and so forth.

We then might ask the students to explore their client's vantage point during the interview: What was she seeing (in the room, on the desk, on the students' faces), and hearing (words, sounds, background noise)? What internal contextual factors might have shaped the client's experience (culture, experience with abuse, prior relationships with lawyers, social power relative to the students')? How might the same factors have impacted her vantage point when talking to the responding officers?

The students, of course, cannot know with any certainty what the client *actually* experienced during the interview from her vantage point (as we remind them). But asking these questions can disrupt the assumption that the students' initial assessment is accurate and, therefore, objective. It can open up other explanations for the client's behavior, such as trauma<sup>18</sup> or shame.<sup>19</sup> This same kind of inquiry could help students challenge the biases that might have led them to view the police report as objective, by considering the vantage points of the officers who responded to the assault.

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<sup>18</sup> Asking the students to consider the sensory component of a survivor's vantage point, specifically, can remind them how violence and traumatic experiences might impact memory recall, in ways trauma-informed lawyering literature has extensively documented. See e.g., Sarah Katz & Deeya Haldar, *The Pedagogy of Trauma-Informed Lawyering*, 22 CLINICAL L. REV. 359 (2016).

<sup>19</sup> See A. Rachel Camp, *From Experiencing Abuse to Seeking Protection: Examining the Shame of Intimate Partner Violence*, 13 U.C. IRVINE L. REV. 103 (2022) (exploring the correlation between shame, survivors, and IPV).

This structured analysis offers a framework for approaching a potential factual discrepancy from a place of curiosity and nuance, opening it up to the subjectivity of memory and experience. Critically, it also creates space to examine bias, power, stereotypes, and stock narratives that may permeate how students interpret what they observe. By engaging in this analysis, students develop a transferable skill to investigate events from a variety of angles and, ultimately, to advance their client's goals. Moreover, it advances student learning, self-growth, and best practices for zealous, client-centered lawyering.

### *B. Vantage Point in the Classroom*

Vantage point also creates opportunities to center FIPV in the classroom. Appellate decisions — the bulk of conventional law school curriculum — seldom permit the reader to consider vantage point. Indeed, appellate decisions recite factual findings from the trial record, often extensively truncating that record to resolve the discrete issues raised on appeal. Exploring vantage point in appellate cases offers opportunities to recenter context, consider how facts may be understood differently by the parties and the court, and illuminate the role of power and stereotype in systemic injustice.

Family law courses teaching FIPV often assign *Castle Rock v. Gonzales*,<sup>20</sup> in which the Supreme Court declined to treat the enforcement of temporary restraining orders (TROs) as a constitutionally-protected property interest.<sup>21</sup> In *Castle Rock*, police officers repeatedly refused to enforce a TRO on behalf of Jessica Gonzales.<sup>22</sup> In a classroom discussion, students might be asked to consider the vantage point of the officers when Ms. Gonzales asked for help: What might the officers have heard when she called, or seen when she came to the precinct? Why might they have heard or seen things as they did? How might Ms. Gonzales' and the officers' races and genders have played a role? How might police power, department culture, and their training on responding to FIPV complaints shape their perception of Ms. Gonzales? By exploring vantage point, students contextualize the *Castle Rock* decision, better understand how power, racism, sexism, privilege, and stereotypes about survivors may have shaped the Court's recitation of the facts and expand their understanding of systemic injustice.

### *C. Vantage Point, Fact Investigation, and Communication*

In the context of client work, students commonly assume that the 'facts' of their case are objective, definite, unchanging, and knowable. When an external source of information contradicts what a client has said, students may jump to conclude their client has 'lied' to them. Often absent

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<sup>20</sup> *Castle Rock v. Gonzales*, 545 U.S. 748 (2005).

<sup>21</sup> *Castle Rock*, 545 U.S. at 749-51.

<sup>22</sup> *Id.* at 751-55.



from student thinking is nuanced consideration of what might motivate someone to ‘lie,’ and how ‘facts’ themselves are subjective. The following exercises center vantage point to deconstruct those assumptions, exploring how: what we mechanically call ‘facts’ are not always objective; information can be viewed through others’ vantage points with potentially different interpretations; one’s own egocentric default causes them to inherently believe their own perception of information; and a wide range of potential vantage points help reconcile potentially contradictory information.<sup>23</sup>

First, we ask students to think of a time in the past week when they have lied — to anyone, about anything, significant or not. We ask students to share what motivated their lie. Students commonly say: it was easier than telling the truth; to please or protect the other person; shame or embarrassment; and so on. We note how significant it is that all, or almost all, of the students told a lie in the past seven days, and how prevalent that experience is for all people — including clients. We share data suggesting that ‘lying’ may be common in other professional relationships, as between doctors and patients.<sup>24</sup>

Next, we ask students to think about how they feel when they are lied to. Students typically identify feeling betrayed, mistrusted, frustrated, even angry. We then ask students to name what the word “lie” implies. They typically identify that it assigns motive and assumes negative intention. We contrast their intense reactions to being lied to and the motive ‘lying’ implies, with the far more generous explanations for their own ‘lies,’ which illuminates their egocentric default.

Sometimes, contradictions are not ‘lies’ at all, but rather the result of good faith differences in vantage point. To demonstrate this, we use several social media posts to disrupt a binary understanding of sensory perception. We ask students to listen to an audio clip that sounds like the word ‘yanny’ to some, and ‘laurel’ to others,<sup>25</sup> depending on the whether your

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<sup>23</sup> As with many of the classes we teach, these exercises were shaped by discussions with many of our clinical colleagues, including Deborah Epstein, Co-Director of Georgetown’s Domestic Violence Clinic. A. Rachel Camp, Laurie Kohn, and Tamara L. Kuennen presented on a related topic. See A. Rachel Camp et al., American Association of Law Schools, Clinical Legal Education Annual Conference, “*Lying*” Clients and the Students Who Represent Them, *Helping Students Understand Why Clients May Mislead, Provide Mistruths or Otherwise Fabricate* (May 6, 2019).

<sup>24</sup> A 2018 study found that approximately 81% percent of patients reported concealing or lying about relevant information during conversations with their doctor, most often to avoid being lectured or judged. Andrea Gurmankin Levy et al., *Prevalence of and Factors Associated With Patient Nondisclosure of Medically Relevant Information to Clinicians*, JAMA NETWORK OPEN (Nov. 30, 2018).

<sup>25</sup> The clip can be accessed online. Josh Katz et al., *The Upshot, We Made a Tool So You Can Hear Both Yanny and Laurel*, N.Y. TIMES (May 16, 2018),

ear is attuned to perceive lower or higher frequencies. Commonly, some students hear ‘yanny’ and others ‘laurel.’ The same phenomenon is demonstrated through visual stimuli in a dress<sup>26</sup> that observers see as either blue and black or white and gold, and through audio-visual stimuli in a clip that sounds like ‘green needle’ or ‘brainstorm’ depending on which phrase the listener reads as they listen.<sup>27</sup> Each of these use audio, visual, or audio-visual media to tear down the myths that sensory perceptions are either correct or incorrect, and that facts are either true or false. They provide concrete examples to illustrate how inaccurate it would be to conclude that any student was lying when reporting which words they heard, or which colors they observed.

We apply these lessons by asking students to consider a client’s vantage point when confronted with what seems like a ‘lie.’ We offer an example similar to the one we use above: finding a police report that says the client punched her abusive partner during a reported assault, where the client never shared that information. We ask students to populate reasons the client might have (a) intentionally lied despite experiencing the same sensory inputs as the officer (for example, in context, the client might have felt embarrassed, distrusted the lawyer, or misunderstood the lawyer’s role); (b) omitted the information without intending to lie (for example, in context, the client might not have known the information was relevant, was not asked questions to elicit that information, or did not realize her defensive conduct could constitute an assault); and (c) experienced different sensory perceptions (for example, the client’s trauma prevented her from forming a memory of punching her abusive partner, the client did not perceive the physical contact as a ‘punch,’ the client perceived a different reason the abusive partner sustained injuries, or, from the client’s perspective, the ‘punch’ simply did not happen). We conclude by asking students to identify one or two takeaways they will bring with them into their own consideration of factual contradictions.

Together, these exercises encourage students to consider factual contradictions through their client’s, and their own, highly contextualized vantage points. They allow students to see first how their own vantage point influences their interpretation of an experience, including one where they choose to lie; second, how their client’s vantage point shapes the same; and third, how rightly understanding a lie goes beyond what information is or is not shared, and requires considering why a client shared information the way they did. Importantly, these exercises habituate deliberate thinking, which decreases students’ rush to judgment and

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<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/05/16/upshot/audio-clip-yanny-laurel-debate.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Pascal Wallisch, *We Finally Know Why People Saw “The Dress” Differently*, SLATE (Mar. 27, 2023, 6:45 PM), <https://slate.com/technology/2017/04/heres-why-people-saw-the-dress-differently.html>.

<sup>27</sup> @ThePrisonLawyer, TWITTER (Jan. 8, 2021, 2:31 PM), <https://twitter.com/ThePrisonLawyer/status/1347626960529326080>.

assumptions, enhances their ability to connect with clients, and, ultimately, improves the quality of their lawyering.

#### *D. Narrative & Vantage Point*

In an attempt to frame how vantage point shapes how people understand experiences, we hold a class early in the semester on storytelling and lawyering. We begin by asking students to watch a video clip created in the 1940s.<sup>28</sup> The video is about a minute and a half long, has no sound, and is in black and white. In the clip, students observe three shapes moving around: a small circle, a small triangle, and a larger triangle. There is also a stationary rectangle, with a small piece in the top left that moves from left to right (as if on hinges).

We ask the students to write down what they see when watching the clip. Based on how the shapes move, the students commonly (though not universally)<sup>29</sup> report a thematically consistent narrative: the big triangle is a ‘bully,’ the little triangle is a ‘protector’ of the circle, and the circle is a vulnerable character who needs protection from the big triangle’s hostility. The rectangle is commonly identified as a house where the smaller shapes seek refuge from the bigger triangle.

This exercise frames a host of vantage point discussions. First, it serves the straightforward goal of allowing students to concretely examine how what they *see* informs the assumptions they make: how the size, movement, and position of the shapes informs the attributions and traits they assign to the black and white, two-dimensional shapes. Because the video is only visual, to really frame the sensorial aspect of vantage point, we might also ask the students to consider not what *they* see, but, using a first-person perspective, what the shapes may be seeing, hearing, or feeling in the clip.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Fritz Heider & Marianne Simmel, *An Experimental Study of Apparent Behavior*, 57 AM. J. PSYCH. 243 (1944). See Fritz Heider & Marianne Simmel, *Animation*, YOUTUBE (1944), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTNmLt7QX8E>.

<sup>29</sup> Occasionally, only one student in the class sees three shapes moving around on a screen, without a narrative frame, which illustrates how entrenched initial perceptions can be.

<sup>30</sup> In the context of memory recall, people adopt one of two vantage points: the “observer perspective” — recalling events as “spectator[s]” or “as actors in the remembered scene,” or the “field perspective” — recalling events as if they re-experience them through their own eyes. See generally Heather K. McIsaac & Eric Eich, *Vantage Point in Episodic Memory*, 9 PSYCHONOMIC BULL. & REV. 146 (2002). Because of its external orientation, memories recalled from an observer perspective tend to be less emotionally laden and therefore produce recalled information that is more fact-oriented and seemingly more objective. Memories recalled from a field perspective, by contrast, tend to be produced from a more ego-centric perspective and therefore produce information that may be understood as more subjective. See *id.*; see also Lucy M. Kenny et al., *Distant Memories: A Prospective Study of Vantage Point of Trauma Memories*, 20 PSYCH. SCI. 1049 (2009) (identifying that adopting an observer perspective in memory

We then discuss how context informs the way they assign meaning to the shapes, including the students' physical location, the instructions given, the setting (a Domestic Violence Clinic classroom), and their prior professional and personal experiences. We discuss how that context may shape their understanding of the big triangle's motivations, the other shapes' emotional responses, and the setting they impose upon the rectangular shape.

Following this initial exercise, we discuss a pre-assigned TED Talk on "The Danger of a Single Story" by Professor Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie,<sup>31</sup> with the goal of identifying how deeply engrained certain narratives are in our culture. Those narratives powerfully inform how we assess our experience, and the attributions and assumptions we make about others' behavior or motivations. Professor Adichie's examples of a single story also invite us to examine how our biases and judgments shape how we make sense of what we see, often in ways that are limited, overly simplistic, and harmful.

Following this discussion, we show the video again. This time, we ask them to shift their vantage point: watch the story through the lens of the big triangle (or another shape, depending on their first narrative). We ask: What shift in perspective was needed to see the story through another lens? What different viewpoint did they have to take? What allowed them to assign different attributions to the movements of the shapes? Most students are surprised by how a shift in their perspective allowed them to see an entirely different narrative, one that is often the opposite of their first: where the two smaller shapes 'scheme' to victimize the big triangle; where the big triangle is no longer a bully but a character trying to protect themselves — one who now evokes sympathy, in contrast to the earlier negative attributions students imposed.<sup>32</sup> The lesson here is powerful: Students see first-hand how quickly and easily physical location, sensory observation, context, and perception of emotion form the subjective lens through which they assess and approach experiences. That lens, of course, is their vantage point.

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recall can be a technique of avoiding the memory of a traumatic experience). These two memory recall vantage points are fruitful frameworks through which students can see how 'facts' that appear objective at first glance can, in fact, be subject to multiple interpretations.

<sup>31</sup> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *The Danger of a Single Story*, TEDGLOBAL (Oct. 7, 2009), [https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_ngozi\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story/no-comments](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/no-comments). See also CAROLYN GROSE & MARGARET E. JOHNSON, *LAWYERS, CLIENTS, & NARRATIVE: A FRAMEWORK FOR LAW STUDENTS AND PRACTITIONERS* (2017).

<sup>32</sup> Some students note that the second part of the exercise was quite difficult, which reinforces just how challenging it can be to disrupt one's own subjective experience.

## CONCLUSION

The definitions and exercises we share here begin the work of habituating vantage point analysis. Our hope is that teachers can equip students with the tools necessary to disrupt their egocentric default, to better understand FIPV, and to approach survivors' experiences with curiosity, contextual nuance, and humility.

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