

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF MANIPULATION AND ABUSE OF POWER IN AURÉLIE MOEREMANS' MEMOIR BROKEN STRINGS

Alda Febrianti Zulri ^{a*)}, Resti Amalia ^{a)}

^{a)} Universitas Bangka Belitung, Bangka, Indonesia

^{*)} Corresponding Author: aldafebrianti04@gmail.com

Article history: received 06 July 2026; revised 26 July 2026; accepted 29 August 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33751/jhss.v10i02.416>

Abstract. This study examines the discourse of manipulation and abuse of power in Aurélie Moeremans' memoir *Broken Strings: Fragments of a Stolen Youth* using selected Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. The problem addressed is that manipulative and power-abusive language patterns in memoirs of grooming and relational abuse remain under-explored, as most CDA research has concentrated on fictional or political-media discourse. This study used a descriptive qualitative method with content analysis as the research design. The data of this study are all linguistic units that contain discourse of manipulation and abuse of power. The primary data source in this study is the first edition of the memoir *Broken Strings: Fragments of a Stolen Youth* by Aurélie Moeremans. The secondary data sources consist of supporting literature relevant to van Dijk's CDA theory and previous studies on manipulation and abuse of power in discourse. The data in this study were collected using the read-and-record technique (*simak dan catat*) and selected using a purposive sampling technique based on specific criteria. To analyze the data, the researcher used three steps of the data analysis procedure: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification. This study reveals that manipulation and abuse of power in the *Broken Strings* occur through grooming, emotional devaluation, threats, surveillance, coerced consent, and blame reversal. Those strategies create a pattern that makes the victim's thoughts controlled is a care and limitation of freedom.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis; manipulation; abuse of power; grooming; memoir

I. INTRODUCTION

Literary works often serve as a space for writers to represent their personal experiences while also exposing the power dynamics hidden behind the events of their lives. One such example is the memoir *Broken Strings: Fragments of a Stolen Youth* by Aurélie Moeremans, which recounts her experiences with emotional manipulation and abuse of power dating back to her teenage years [1]. This work has garnered widespread public attention because it addresses the issues of grooming and psychological manipulation topics rarely discussed openly while also demonstrating how language is used as a tool of domination by those with greater power over their victims.

Two concepts anchor the analysis in this study and are defined here before the theoretical framework is introduced. Grooming is understood as a deliberate, gradual process by which a perpetrator prepares a child, the significant adults around that child, and the surrounding environment for abuse, typically proceeding from trust-building and flattery toward isolation and escalating demands [2]. Once such a relationship

is established, the perpetrator's continued dominance is frequently sustained not through discrete violent incidents but through coercive control: a pattern of controlling behaviors, including isolation, surveillance, intimidation, and the micromanagement of daily life, that has been described as functioning more like hostage-taking than assault, denying the victim's personhood and liberty in a cumulative and systemic way [3]. Because both grooming and coercive control are enacted primarily through language, before, during, and after any physical act of abuse, they are especially well suited to discourse-analytical study.

The memoir itself belongs to a broader literary category sometimes discussed under the term *testimonio*: first-person survivor narrative that bears witness to abuse, oppression, or violence the author has personally endured, and that carries an evidentiary as well as an aesthetic function, challenging official or dominant versions of events with the authority of lived experience [4]. Read as *testimonio*, *Broken Strings* is not only a literary object but a discursive act performed by a survivor recounting, and thereby reclaiming authorship over,

an experience that was for years narrated primarily by her perpetrator.

Indeed, several studies have used Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how language represents social domination and inequality in various types of texts, including political, media, and literary works. The first study was conducted by Al-Zubaidi [5], which examined power exercise and resistance in selected texts using Van Dijk's CDA framework. This study found that discourse can represent the exercise and resistance through language used. Second, a study conducted by Arshad, Razzaq, & Rani [6] examines abuse of power, gender discrimination, and resistance in the novel entitled *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini using van Dijk's CDA framework of manipulation and abuse of power. This study shows that discourse can be used by people to exercise power, discriminate against others, and control others. Third, Jenniffer and Lavanya [7] examine the correlation among discourse, cognition, society, and social domination in the novel entitled *The Story That Must Not Be Told* by Kavary Nambisan using van Dijk's discourse-cognition-society framework. This study reveals that discourse in the novel can construct and maintain relations of domination between different social classes.

Next, a study conducted by Qaiwer [8] analyzes abuse of power, representation of social groups, legitimization, and the construction of "US" and "THEM" in Donald Trump's political discourse using Van Dijk's CDA framework of discourse and manipulation. This study reveals that Trump uses discourse to manipulate and ideological strategies to exercise his power through his speech. Next, Hamadne & Abdul Muttaleb [9] examine the construction of in-group and out-group dichotomy in Dunya Mikhail's poetry using van Dijk's ideological square. This study reveals that the language in that poetry can construct ideological divisions through positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. Furthermore, Pomerantz et al. [10] examine Linguistic indicators of coercive control in the sex-trafficking narratives using linguistic analysis of coercive-control discourse. This study reveals that linguistic patterns, in essence, can be used to reveal coercion, control, and restricted agency. Finally, Nasiha [11] examines how coercive control and restricted victim agency are depicted in the novel entitled *Big Little Lies* using Coercive-control theory. This study reveals that awareness of abuse does not necessarily result in freedom from coercive control.

Previous studies have examined manipulation, abuse of power, and coercive control in novels, poetry, political discourse, and other narratives. However, few studies have examined these issues in first-person survivor memoirs, particularly by tracing how relational control develops through language from grooming to emotional control, threats and surveillance, and blame shifting. Therefore, this study fills the gap by examining the longitudinal discursive escalation of relational control in Aurélie Moeremans's *Broken Strings: Fragments of a Stolen Youth* using Critical Discourse Analysis. The novelty of this study is tracing the longitudinal discursive escalation of relational control through survivor narration. In specific, this study aims to answer these two research questions:

1. What discourse strategies represent manipulation and abuse of power in the text?
2. How do these strategies contribute to the construction of a relationship of domination between the perpetrator and the victim?

Furthermore, this study is expected contributes to providing valuable understanding related to how language is used to manipulate someone or abuse of power, especially when doing grooming, devaluation, threats, surveillance, and blame reversal, through evidence found in the victim's narrative.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This study is conducted using a descriptive qualitative method with content analysis as the research design. The descriptive qualitative method is selected since this study aims to describe or interpret the meaning of the data in the form of linguistic units without conducting a statistical measurement or hypothesis testing. As Moleong [12] states, qualitative research is a research method that is implemented to comprehend a phenomenon in a comprehensive way without conducting a statistical measurement or hypothesis testing. This study is also descriptive since it describes the data without conducting a statistical measurement or hypothesis testing. In addition, this study also selected content analysis as the research design since this study examines the linguistic features in a memoir. As stated by Krippendorff [13], content analysis is a research technique that is implemented to get replicable and valid inferences from texts or other meaningful materials in relation to their contexts of use.

The data of this study are all linguistic units in the form of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences that contain discourse of manipulation and abuse of power in Aurélie Moeremans' memoir. The primary data source is the first edition of the memoir *Broken Strings: Fragments of a Stolen Youth* by Aurélie Moeremans. This memoir is published by Ohara Books in 2025 in English, with a total of 198 pages [1]. The secondary data sources consist of supporting literature relevant to van Dijk's CDA theory and previous studies on manipulation and abuse of power in discourse. This study used two instruments: the researcher and the data sheet. The researcher plays the roles as collector, organizer, analyzer, and reporter of the data. Meanwhile, the data sheet is used to collect and analyze the data. The data in this study is collected the data using the read-and-record technique (*simak dan catat*) and the purposive sampling technique by developing specific criteria of data that are in accordance with the objective of the study [14].

The criteria of data in this study is all linguistic units that consist of manipulation and abuse of power, such as positive self-presentation, negative other-presentation, mitigation of responsibility, threats, isolation, surveillance, and emotional or psychological control. In collecting the data, the researcher conducted several steps, first, the researcher read the book comprehensively. After that, the researcher noted the data that meet the criteria of the study. After that, the researcher put the data into the data sheet. After collecting the data, the

researcher analyzed the data using Miles, Huberman, and Saldana [15] data analysis techniques: data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification.

First, the researcher condensed the collected data. Based on the condensed data, there are twenty data. After that, the researcher presented the data sheet as well as categorized the linguistic categories and interpretation based on the selected CDA framework. Last, the researcher drew a conclusion/verification based on the presented data in order to answer the research questions. Lastly, to ensure the trustworthiness of the data, the researcher conducted peer debriefing. Ethical Considerations: This study is conducted using a published memoir and does not interact directly with the survivor. This the evidence about sexual violence and psychological coercion was treated respectfully. This study also does not

blame the victim or the other parties as well as not involve unnecessary disclosure of identifying information.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Based on the data analysis that has been conducted, there are twenty data excerpts that represent four main categories of manipulation and abuse of power: grooming, devaluation and emotional control, threats and surveillance, and public humiliation and blame reversal. The linguistic features identified across the data include repetition, evaluation, metaphor, ambiguity, minimization, accusation, prohibition, threats, interrogatives, and imperatives. The results are presented in the following table

Table 1. Findings of Manipulation and Abuse of Power in Broken Strings

No.	Data	Page	Strategy	Category	Interpretation
1.	Your purity is rare. You are rare. You're not like the wild girls out there.	18	Positive Self-Presentation	Grooming Representation	The perpetrator presents the victim as pure and different from other girls to gain her trust and appear caring.
2.	It felt like an invisible debt, as if I owed him for every hour he spent waiting for me.	19	Manipulation	Grooming Representation	The perpetrator creates a sense of indebtedness, making the victim feel obligated to him.
3.	The more often he was around, the smaller the world outside became. I stopped texting friends, stopped going out except for work.	22	Domination / Access Control	Grooming Representation	The perpetrator gradually isolates the victim by reducing her contact with friends and the outside world.
4.	We'll see," then, seeing her alarm, immediately walked it back "I was joking. Of course. If you're not ready, then you're not ready. I want you for you	23	Disclaimer / Mitigation	Grooming Representation	The perpetrator disguises a potentially pressuring statement as a joke to reduce its seriousness and avoid responsibility.
5.	Now that you're my girlfriend, you should know what I like... If you kiss me here, I like it a lot," he said, "especially if you lick it	25-26	Positive Self-Presentation	Grooming Representation	The perpetrator uses the relationship to normalize and introduce sexual expectations to the victim.
6.	Why did you tell your mom? Do you want her to hate me? ... I'm tired of dating a little kid. You need to grow up. Prove that you can't be controlled anymore.	33	Negative Other-Presentation	Power Dynamic	The perpetrator blames and insults the victim to make her feel guilty and pressure her into obedience.
7.	I'm only asking for something small, why do you have to make such a big deal out of it.	38	Mitigation of Responsibility	Power Dynamic	The perpetrator minimizes his demand to make the victim feel unreasonable for resisting it.
8.	"You tricked me with your bra. I thought they'd be bigger. Good thing I like them small"	39	Negative Other-Presentation	Power Dynamic	The perpetrator humiliates the victim's body and appearance while positioning himself as the one who judges her.
9.	Don't worry, you're going to be my wife	41-42	Positive Self-Presentation	Power Dynamic	The perpetrator presents himself as a committed partner by implying a future marriage, reinforcing her attachment to him.
10.	If I said no, it meant I didn't love him. And if I didn't love him, then there was no point in him staying	46	Manipulation	Power Dynamic	The perpetrator uses emotional pressure by equating refusal with a lack of love and threatening abandonment.

No.	Data	Page	Strategy	Category	Interpretation
11.	I heard you have a new boyfriend:) “That was fast. Did you even talk to him while you were still with me?:)” “You just made a huge mistake. I have people ready to kill your parents if you don’t behave. They’re cheap. They don’t ask questions. They know how to make it look like an accident	75-76	Power Abuse / Domination	Threats, Surveillance, and Coerced Consent	The perpetrator combines surveillance, intimidation, and threats against the victim’s family to control her behavior.
12.	You’re not that smart. Don’t you ever try to report me. Do you have proof? Hmm?	79	Access Control	Threats, Surveillance, and Coerced Consent	The perpetrator undermines the victim’s confidence and discourages her from reporting him by questioning her intelligence and evidence.
13.	Bobby forbade me from working, and because of that my mom forbade me from leaving the house too... For a long time, the only phone I had was an old SMS-only device, with no internet, no outside world	80	Domination / Access Control	Threats, Surveillance, and Coerced Consent	The perpetrator restricts the victim’s employment, movement, and communication, leaving her dependent and isolated.
14.	In a little while you’ll be eighteen, and that’s when we win,	81	Positive Self-Presentation	Threats, Surveillance, and Coerced Consent	The perpetrator frames turning eighteen as a positive future event to maintain the victim’s hope and compliance.
15.	“Sit.” “Sign this.” “Don’t make this difficult.”	85-86	Mitigation of Responsibility	Threats, Surveillance, and Coerced Consent	The perpetrator uses direct commands and pressure to force the victim to comply without allowing meaningful choice.
16.	So being a good girl still applies. Getting to see your mom once doesn’t mean you stop trying” “Did you clean your room?”, “Every corner?	148	Negative Other-Presentation	Public Humiliation and Image Management	The perpetrator uses criticism and degrading comments to publicly portray the victim as disobedient and inadequate.
17.	That’s why you should stop lying. You’re not even good at it. I can always tell	149	Mitigation of Responsibility	Public Humiliation and Image Management	The perpetrator accuses the victim of lying and portrays her as incapable, shifting blame onto her.
18.	She was such a nice person... Her Mandarin was good too.”	150	Negative Other-Presentation	Public Humiliation and Image Management	The perpetrator compares the victim negatively with another woman, undermining her self-worth.
19.	The victim was publicly spat on at an electronics store.	151	Power Abuse / Domination	Public Humiliation and Image Management	The victim is subjected to public degradation, demonstrating the use of humiliation as a form of control.
20.	I’m ashamed to have a wife like you...”	152	Positive & Negative Presentation (+DARVO)	Public Humiliation and Image Management	The perpetrator shames the victim as a wife while presenting himself as the disappointed party, shifting blame and portraying himself as the victim.

Table 1 above presents 20 data identified in the study. Based on the distribution of strategies, Positive Self-Presentation and Negative Other-Presentation are the most frequently identified strategies, with 4 data each. They are followed by Domination / Access Control and Mitigation of Responsibility, with 3 data each, while Manipulation and Power Abuse / Domination account for 2 data each. Meanwhile, Disclaimer / Mitigation and Positive & Negative

Presentation (+DARVO) appear once each. Thus, it can be concluded that the data predominantly demonstrate strategies of self-presentation and other-presentation, which are used by the perpetrator to construct a favorable image of himself while devaluing the victim. Other strategies, such as domination, manipulation, and mitigation of responsibility, further support the perpetrator’s efforts to control the victim’s perceptions, emotions, and behavior.

1. Grooming Representation

Grooming is represented by the datum “Your purity is rare. You are rare. You’re not like the wild girls out there” [1, p. 18]. In this datum, the word “rare” is used to make the victim think that she is exceptionally valuable. In the context of grooming, those words can create emotional attachment and make the victim more receptive to the perpetrator’s influence. The narrator’s own retrospective gloss on this period captures how the tactic functioned: “It felt like an invisible debt, as if I owed him for every hour he spent waiting for me” [1, p. 19], showing how unsolicited generosity was converted into an implicit obligation that could later be called in. This pairing of idealizing flattery with manufactured debt is a textbook illustration of the trust-building phase described in the clinical literature on child sexual grooming, and of the positive self-presentation half of van Dijk’s ideological square, which primes trust before any demand is introduced [16].

Once trust was established, the same dynamic extended into deliberate isolation from her existing support network. “The more often he was around, the smaller the world outside became. I stopped texting friends, stopped going out except for work,” she recalls [1, p. 22], a passage that documents the systematic narrowing of her social world that is a hallmark of coercive control [3]. Boundaries were tested rather than directly violated: when she resisted going beyond kissing, he answered with an ambiguous “We’ll see,” then, seeing her alarm, immediately walked it back “I was joking. Of course. If you’re not ready, then you’re not ready. I want you for you” [1, p. 23]. This disclaimer strategy let him appear respectful while leaving the boundary itself unsettled, priming later violations as things he had technically already tested. The pattern reached its first concrete demand once the relationship label itself was invoked as grounds for compliance: “Now that you’re my girlfriend, you should know what I like... If you kiss me here, I like it a lot,” he said, “especially if you lick it” [1, pp. 25–26], tying escalating physical demands to the newly assigned label “girlfriend” rather than to any renewed consent. The finding of grooming representation confirms the findings of Pomerantz et al. [10], who demonstrate that linguistic patterns can reveal coercion, control, and restricted agency in sex-trafficking narratives.

2. The Power Dynamic Between The Perpetrator And The Victim

In the memoir, several linguistic expressions are used to control the victim’s judgment and self-worth. For instance, the datum “Why did you tell your mom? Do you want her to hate me? ... I’m tired of dating a little kid. You need to grow up. Prove that you can’t be controlled anymore” [1, p. 33], reframing her search for protection as childish betrayal and inverting the actual power relation so that her compliance became the price of being treated as an adult. A similar minimization appears a few pages later, when he complained, “I’m only asking for something small, why do you have to make such a big deal out of it,” [1, p. 38], while reminding her of family dinners and other things he claimed to have sacrificed for her a legitimization strategy that recasts any refusal as ingratitude toward an unpayable debt.

The devaluation reached its most explicit form in remarks about her body: “You tricked me with your bra. I thought they’d be bigger. Good thing I like them small,” he smirked, before adding that her skin was “so dry” and her lower lip “kind of a weird shape” [1, p. 39]. Delivered immediately after a period of idealization, this catalogue of physical flaws performs the devaluation phase of van Dijk’s ideological square, in which the same figure who once called her “rare” now inventories her inadequacy [16]. Yet devaluation was consistently followed by reassurance rather than resolution: following an incident in which he pressured her into unwanted sexual contact despite her explicit refusal, he kissed her forehead and whispered, “Don’t worry, you’re going to be my wife” [1, pp. 41–42], retroactively recasting the violation as a step toward commitment. By this point the pattern had been internalized into her own reasoning: “If I said no, it meant I didn’t love him. And if I didn’t love him, then there was no point in him staying” [1, p. 46], a line in which she reproduces his own conditional logic in her private narration. These findings are consistent with Qaiwer [8], who found that discourse can be used to legitimize the exercise of power by making a position or action appear logical even though it is actually highly detrimental to the victim. However, the findings of this study expand upon Qaiwer’s [8] findings on political discourse by adding that this phenomenon is also found in intimate interpersonal contexts.

3. Threats, Surveillance, And Coerced Consent

Where The Earlier chapters relied on flattery and minimization, the discourse escalates into explicit intimidation once she attempted to create distance. A string of casually punctuated text messages — “I heard you have a new boyfriend:”) ... “That was fast. Did you even talk to him while you were still with me?:)” — culminated in an unambiguous threat: “You just made a huge mistake. I have people ready to kill your parents if you don’t behave. They’re cheap. They don’t ask questions. They know how to make it look like an accident” [1, pp. 75–76]. The friendly punctuation and calm delivery make the threat harder to name as such, while shifting responsibility for any violence onto her future compliance [17]. When she considered reporting him, he preempted her: “You’re not that smart. Don’t you ever try to report me. Do you have proof? Hmm?” [1, p. 79], a line that exploits the structural fact that his threats were made only by phone, with no witnesses, compounded by her position as a foreign teenager not yet fluent in Indonesian. This shows how language constructs fear and shifts responsibility to the victim. It reflects Van Dijk’s manipulation [18] and confirms Arshad, Razzaq, and Rani [6] while extending their finding through the role of interrogative and conditional structures.

Isolation deepened correspondingly: “Bobby forbade me from working, and because of that my mom forbade me from leaving the house too... For a long time, the only phone I had was an old SMS-only device, with no internet, no outside world” [1, p. 80], protection and control becoming indistinguishable, as the narrator’s own image of herself as a princess locked in a tower, guarded not by a rescuer but by her own jailer, makes explicit. Surveillance, too, was reframed as romance: “In a little while you’ll be eighteen, and

that's when we win," he told her, on one occasion standing on the highway shoulder below her balcony, phone still to his ear, weeping that their love story was "sad but beautiful" [1, p. 81], a formulation that quietly converts the end of his own criminal liability into a shared victory. This phase reaches its endpoint on the morning of her eighteenth birthday, when he pushed a stack of documents toward her and said only, "Sit," then, "Sign this," adding, "It's just to help us. So we can start the process. The church. The plan. That's all," and, "I've been waiting for you... Don't make this difficult" [1, pp. 85–86], command-compliance discourse in which legally significant paperwork is minimized into a triviality and any hesitation on her part is framed as the source of conflict [18].

4. Public Humiliation And Image Management

In the memoir, several data excerpts are used to maintain coercive control over the victim. For instance, the expressions "So being a good girl still applies. Getting to see your mom once doesn't mean you stop trying" "Did you clean your room?", "Every corner?" [1, pp. 148], and "That's why you should stop lying. You're not even good at it. I can always tell" [1, pp. 149], are used to maintain coercive control by the perpetrator. In specific, the interrogative language is used by the speaker to make surveillance and demand obedience from the victim. In addition, the expression "that's why" constructs a causal link between the victim's alleged dishonesty and the abuse. This is similar with the expression "She was such a nice person... Her Mandarin was good too." By analyzing those expressions using Van Dijk's ideological square, it can be seen that the perpetrator uses those expressions to present himself as the one who has control, while the victim is the one who is under his control or dishonest and disobedient. Indeed, this study is similar to the findings of Arshad, Razzaq, and Rani [6]. However, this study extends their findings by demonstrating how interrogative and causal structures produce control.

Building on the narrative account above, this section steps back from the four categories to trace three cross-cutting patterns that run through the memoir as a whole: an escalating pipeline from grooming to entrapment, the ideological square operating in tandem with a distinct blame-reversal tactic, and the gradual internalization and silencing of the victim's own voice.

1. The Grooming-to-Entrapment Pipeline

Read chronologically, the grooming and threats-and-coercion narratives form a single developmental sequence rather than two unrelated sets of tactics. The process begins with idealizing attention and debt-creating generosity, consistent with the trust-building phase described in the clinical literature on child sexual grooming [2], before moving into isolation from peers and an ambiguous boundary test that previews the coercion to come. By the time explicit threats against her family appear, the victim has already been cut off from the social network that might otherwise have intervened, illustrating how grooming functions less as a discrete event than as the infrastructure that makes later coercive control possible [3].

This temporal structure is where memoir as a genre offers something the political speeches and single literary

scenes previously analyzed under van Dijk's framework cannot [5], [7]: because the narrative spans years rather than a single text or address, it allows the analyst to observe manipulation not as an isolated rhetorical move but as a strategy that is built, tested, and escalated over time. The coerced-signing scene on her eighteenth birthday is the pipeline's endpoint, converting years of accumulated psychological control into a single legally consequential act of formal consent that, read against the preceding data, is consent in name only.

2. The Ideological Square and Denial-Attack-Reversal

Across all four categories, positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation operate as a matched pair [19]. In the grooming and power-dynamic narratives, this pairing is relatively gentle: the perpetrator is devoted and protective while the victim is inadequate or immature. In the public-humiliation narrative, the same square hardens into an explicit pattern identified in the psychological literature on interpersonal abuse as DARVO — deny, attack, and reverse victim and offender roles — in which a perpetrator confronted with his own misconduct denies responsibility, attacks the victim's credibility, and recasts himself as the wronged party [20].

The electronics-store confrontation is the clearest instance of this in the corpus: the act of spitting on his wife is entirely omitted from his own account of what happened, her reasonable reaction is reframed as the source of his public shame, and he positions himself, not her, as the one who has been wronged ("you always make me look bad"). Because this reversal is delivered immediately after the offending act, with no gap in which the victim can name what happened before it is reframed, the discourse forecloses her ability to interpret the event on her own terms — a dynamic consistent with findings that DARVO measurably shifts observer judgments of who is responsible, even when the underlying facts are unchanged [21].

The mother-in-law's memento box shows that this square is not confined to the perpetrator alone: his mother's memory box of a previous girlfriend, and her pointed compliment about that woman's Mandarin, extend negative other-presentation into the wider family discourse. This corroborates the reading of manipulation in *Broken Strings* as a distributed practice sustained by a surrounding discourse family, not the isolated behavior of a single individual [5], [6].

3. Internalization and the Silencing of the Victim's Voice

The clearest marker of successful manipulation in the corpus is not any single perpetrator utterance but the moment the victim's own narration begins to reproduce his logic. The internalized-logic line quoted above ("if I said no, it meant I didn't love him") shows the perpetrator's conditional reasoning fully absorbed into her internal monologue, evidence of what van Dijk describes as the construction of a mental model the manipulated party comes to treat as her own rather than as imposed from outside [18].

This internalization is reinforced discursively by the epistemic-domination strategy seen in the "do you have proof?" line, which pre-empts disclosure by making the absence of witnesses itself a weapon: if reporting requires proof that by design cannot exist, then silence becomes the

only available response. Read together with the isolation strategies described in the grooming and coerced-consent narratives, the memoir documents how coercive control systematically removes each of the external resources friends, unsupervised phone access, a believable audience that a victim would otherwise draw on to resist or exit [3].

This pattern also clarifies the practical stakes raised earlier regarding Indonesia's limited legal recognition of grooming and coercive control [22], [23], a legal or social response that looks only for discrete violent incidents will miss most of what this discourse analysis identifies as the actual mechanism of domination, since the twenty data excerpts show controlling behavior operating almost entirely through language flattery, threats, minimization, and reversal rather than through physical force alone.

Across all four categories, the discourse of Broken Strings performs the two complementary moves of van Dijk's ideological square: positive self-presentation (the perpetrator as devoted, protective, and eventually a rightful husband) and negative other-presentation (the victim as immature, ungrateful, or physically inadequate) [16]. This corroborates earlier findings that CDA's manipulation framework, originally developed for political and media discourse, extends coherently to memoir as a genre of first-person testimony [5], [7]. Unlike the political speeches or literary fiction previously analyzed under this framework [5], [9]. Broken Strings presents the survivor's experiences through a first-person narrative perspective, allowing the linguistic mechanics of grooming and coercive control to be traced without the layer of authorial or journalistic framing present in third-person fictional or political texts.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This study has shown that the discourse of Aurélie Moeremans. Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that manipulation and abuse of power in Aurelie Moereman's memoir Broken Strings is constructed through idealization, minimization, interrogatives, imperatives, threats, surveillance, devaluation, and blame reversal. These strategies develop progressively from grooming to emotional control, threats, surveillance, and public humiliation. Theoretically, this study extends the implementation of Van Dijk's CDA framework by proving how language can be used to manipulate someone and conduct abuse of power in the personal context, and how it develops in survivor narration longitudinally. Practically, this study can provide valuable insight related to the discourse that consists of coercive control particularly used for threats, isolation, minimization, and blame reversal by the speaker. The limitation of this study is that this study only examines discourse in one memoir. Furthermore, the analysis results of this study are also based on the researcher's interpretation. Thus, the results of this study cannot be generalized on the other memoir as well as cannot be used to independently verify the perpetrator's intentions. Furthermore, future researchers are suggested to conduct a comparative study that compare linguistic patterns of manipulation and coercive control to several survivor

memoirs or combine other linguistic theories. Thus, further study can yield more comprehensive results related to linguistic patterns of manipulation and abuse of power.

REFERENCES

- [1] A. Moeremans, *Broken Strings: Fragments of a Stolen Youth*. 2025.
- [2] S. Craven, S. Brown, and E. Gilchrist, "Sexual Grooming of Children: Review of Literature and Theoretical Considerations," *J. Sex. Aggress.*, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 287–299, 2006.
- [3] E. Stark, *Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- [4] J. Beverley, *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth*. Minneapolis, USA: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.
- [5] R. T. A. Al-Zubaidi, "Critical discourse analysis: Power exercise and resistance in selected texts," *J. Lang. Linguist. Stud.*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 1023–1033, 2022.
- [6] A. Arshad, A. Razzaq, and R. Rani, "A thousand splendid suns as a re-representation of Afghan culture: Power abuse, gender discrimination, and voices of resistance against forced Islamization," *Dialogue Soc. Sci. Rev.*, vol. 4, no. 4, pp. 362–367, 2026.
- [7] J. L. Jenniffer and K. Lavanya, "Discourse, cognition and society: Critical discourse analysis of The Story That Must Not Be Told," *Ensemble*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 28–36, 2020, doi: 10.37948/ensemble-2020-0202-a004.
- [8] S. N. Qaiwer, "Power abuse in political discourse: A critical discourse analysis of Trump's discourse," *J. Arts, Lit. Humanit. Soc. Sci.*, vol. 52, pp. 326–345, 2020, doi: 10.33193/JALHSS.52.2020.93.
- [9] T. Hamadneh and F. A. Muttaleb, "The use of van Dijk's ideological square in the construction of in-group and out-group dichotomy in Dunya Mikhail's poetry," *Int. J. Lang. Lit. Stud.*, vol. 7, no. 6, pp. 306–319, 2025.
- [10] J. B. Pomerantz, S. J. Cohen, K. Doychak, and C. Raghavan, "Linguistic indicators of coercive control: Evidenced in sex trafficking narratives," *Violence Gend.*, vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 175–186, 2021, doi: 10.1089/vio.2020.0105.
- [11] S. U. L. Nasiha and K. H. Luthfia, "Beyond awareness: Coercive control and restricted agency in Moriarty's Big Little Lies," *Lang. Lit. J. Linguist. Lit. Lang. Teach.*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 1051–1061, 2026, doi: 10.30743/ll.v10i1.13807.
- [12] L. J. Moleong, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2017.
- [13] K. Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*, 4th ed. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2018.
- [14] M. Q. Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*, 4th ed. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2015.
- [15] M. B. Miles, A. M. Huberman, and J. Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2014.
- [16] T. A. van Dijk, *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*.

- London: Sage Publications, 1998.
- [17] T. A. van Dijk, "Discourse and manipulation," *Discourse Soc.*, vol. 17, no. 3, pp. 359–383, 2006.
- [18] T. A. van Dijk, Critical discourse analysis, in *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, 2nd ed., D. Tannen, H. E. Hamilton, and D. Schiffrin, Eds. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015.
- [19] J. J. Freyd, "Violations of power, adaptive blindness, and betrayal trauma theory," *Fem. Psychol.*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 22–32, 1997.
- [20] Tirtawening, "Aurelie's 'Broken Strings': Indonesia needs to criminalise child grooming and coercive control," *Indonesia at Melbourne*. Accessed: Aug. 25, 2026. [Online]. Available: <https://indonesiaatmelbourne.unimelb.edu.au/aurelies-broken-strings-indonesia-needs-to-criminalise-child-grooming-and-coercive-control/>
- [21] S. J. H. and J. J. Freyd, "The influence of Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender and insincere apologies on perceptions of sexual assault," *J. Interpers. Violence*, vol. 38, no. 17–18, pp. 9985–10008, 2023, doi: 10.1177/08862605231169751.
- [22] S. C. M. Post, "Indonesian actress opens up about grooming, 'fake' marriage in viral memoir *Broken Strings*." Accessed: Aug. 25, 2026. [Online]. Available: <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/people/article/3341036/indonesian-actress-exposes-fake-marriage-and-grooming-viral-memoir>
- [23] T. A. van Dijk, *Discourse, power and access*, in *Texts and Practices: Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Routledge, 1996.