

Självständigt arbete på grundnivå

Independent degree project – first cycle

Social Work

Domestic violence

**From a violent persons point of view:
How can domestic violence be legitimized?**

Fjørtoft Siri Mariussen



Mittuniversitetet

MID SWEDEN UNIVERSITY

Campus Härnösand Universitetsbacken 1, SE-871 88. Campus Sundsvall Holmgatan 10, SE-851 70 Sundsvall.

Campus Östersund Kunskapens väg 8, SE-831 25 Östersund.

Phone: +46 (0)771 97 50 00, Fax: +46 (0)771 97 50 01.

MID SWEDEN UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Social Work

Examiner: Masoud Kamali, masoud.kamali@miun.se

Supervisor: Jorge Calbucura, Jorge.calbucura@miun.se

Author: Siri Mariussen Fjørtoft, siri_mf@yahoo.com

Degree programme: Bachelor of social work, 180 credits

Main field of study: Social work/sociology

Fall, 2012

Abstract: This article takes a closer look at interactions defined as domestic violence. The intention is to understand how using violence at home can be legitimized with the point of departure of the violent person. The article is therefore based on interviews with three people who have used violence towards a family member. Their stories illuminate processes divided into three phases; in the first phase, the informants perceived the situation which leads to violence as characterized by stress and a feeling of being inferior. In the second phase, the act of violence itself is a way of communicating a disagreement, the target being control over a chaotic situation and its actors. In the third phase, when explaining the events in a retro perspective, it is not referred to as violence, and it is not discussed within the home. The informant tends to normalize the use of aggressive behavior with a group acceptance. Their individual legitimization techniques are related to group and societal aspects in the discussion. To prevent further violence, I argue, the violent people need an established place within the healthcare system in Norway.

KEYWORDS: QUALITATIVE STUDY, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, VIOLENT PERSON

Without understanding, a phenomenon seems irrational and unpredictable. To be able to encourage what we want, and prevent what we don't want, we need to understand its meanings. When violence is meaningless, we cannot find strategies to defeat it. In this study the attention is given to a situation within the home, a situation I have defined as domestic violence. With a micro sociological approach the focus is a social interaction described by one of its actors. I have interviewed three people that have used violence towards a family member and asked them to describe certain possesses of the interaction. What does violence mean to them? Here, a relation between power and domestic violence, and the legitimizing of violence is shown.

Most of us live in a family unit during a lifetime. It is here; among people close to you, you are most likely to experience violence (www.unicef.org). With a wide definition of the term seventy percent of the world's women have experienced violence once or more here (www.who.int), men and children are also being victimized. How can our homes be the most violence place in our societies? Within the family is an independent power system separated from public laws. In some cases it bears resemblance to the societal hierarchy, making children and women the most vulnerable for domestic violence. Furthermore, the home has a unique position, where its seclusion makes family-life somehow detached from the public. With an historical anchoring the custom and laws of privacy for the family has given the space to make domestic violence a norm in western society. The acceptance has historical institutionalized roots. For example, the Catholic Church announced the man's right to use violence towards his child and wife in the "*Rules of marriage*" published in the 1500th century (www.krisesenter.com). However, the societal approval is decreasing with time: for about a hundred years it has been illegal in Norway, England and America to use violence in the home ¹ (Van Nostand, 1977). Several international conventions legally protect people against violence. Today, domestic violence has been brought to the attention by the public, institutions and organizations.

¹ In the UK and USA domestic violence was legalized until mid 1800. In 1902 it became illegal in Norway (www.krisesenter.com 2012-11-14)

This societal transformation of attitudes for domestic violence springs out partly from feministic movements of the 1970s. Their aim was to change the norms and laws around

domestic violence with a focus on man's violence towards women. The motivation was to break down the walls concealing it and to support the victimized women. In their footprints, both global and local organizations are giving attention to the problem; such as the UN, governments and local shelters for victims². As a result international conventions legally protect many of the world's people against violence in their own home³ (www.regjeringen.no). In 2000, the UN defined domestic violence as one of the biggest health problems for women around the world. On these premises WHO did a cross country research in ten countries, mapping out the frequency of physical and sexual violence. The results indicated that between the extreme high, sixty-two percent of the population in Ethiopia and "the extreme low", twelve percent in Japan, had experience it once or more in a lifetime (www.who.int). So, despite the societal attitude change it is still a frequent phenomenon within the family, apparently in all societies (Norman, 1984). It is one of the leading causes of death among women today; it takes more lives than traffic accidents and malaria combined, and is equal to cancer in the statistics (www.unicef.org and Alhabib, Nur & Jones, 2010). In many settings, it is taboo, associated with shame, and still considered to be a private matter.

² See: Beijing conference on women held by the UN (www.un.org), "Loven om kommunale krisesenter" in Norway (www.lovdato.no), non government organizational work such as www.helpguide.org

³See The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) (www.unicef.org 2012-11-14) , The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) , The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women 1993 (www.un.org 2012-11-19)

Research on the subject tends to focus on the victims. I wish to do the opposite. I focus on interactions defined as domestic violence from a conductor's point of view. Accordingly I chose to analyze three violent people's stories reflecting: a) situations leading up to the violent situation b) the violent situation c) how she or he can legitimate having used domestic violence in a retro perspective. I do this to understand why, despite the lack of acceptance on macro level, individuals can legitimize using domestic violence. To answer this I use inspiration from Grounded Theory. I create a simple model of this process, and the contexts where it occurs. I try to show the different forces that inflict in the conflict between legitimizing and de- legitimizing, on an individual level and relate that to a group- and a societal level. The results are presented in a combination between an analyzing text and two tables. The tables are an attempt to make an overview, while in the text the shades of their stories are illustrated. I wish to show the result concretely in the tables and more abstract in

the text. In that way I aim to understand how domestic violence is legitimated and possibly how it could be de-legitimated.

The article continues, however, with methodological considerations. Then, a general theoretical background to domestic violence is given to illustrate the contexts. The result is analyzed focusing on the individual stories, and developed in to a final discussion where these are related to the macro and meso tendencies.

The aim of this study is to understand domestic violence, to prevent, and protect.

Methods:

The article is based on a qualitative study. The background is gathered from articles found in “Academic search elite” and “Social service abstracts”. These databases include around three-hundred scientific approved journals. I have also collect information on the UN’s organizations homepages. I have read books of theories and methods.

I have interviewed three informants who I call Maria, Erik and Lars. To find informants I contacted several organizations that work with anger management with a presentation of this project. A psychiatrist working for a private organization in Oslo was very helpful; he contacted his clientele, and volunteers reported back to me. Randomly I picked three people, two men and one woman. They were all finished with their therapy when I interviewed them. I completed semi structured interviews over the phone which I recorded. I let them talk as freely as possible. I asked them to describe processes of interactions were they felt they expressed an uncontrolled anger towards a family member. I divided the processes up in three time frames: 1) stories that described the time leading up to a violent situation 2) stories of the violent situation 3) after the violent situation. In the last mentioned I also asked them to explain why they chose to use violence. I wrote a text that represented the interviews and sent it to the informants for corrections. Then I sorted the quotes under recurrent teams, making up concepts.

Grounded theory was developed in the 1960s by Glaser & Strauss, a psychologist and a sociologist. It opened up for change in research, from being theory directed to theory generating. It is often used to create new theories or models in fields where it is none or too much. This study is limited; I will not create a theory. However, I am inspired by Grounded Theory, as it allows me to study the informants’ words, line by line, as they are describing

interactions. Thereafter I outline emerging themes. These themes are then coded into core categories on the basis of the frequency which they occur, I call them concepts. In the analyzing text I show the relation between the interviews and the concept, by placing the stories and quotes under them. These relations are presented in a table 1, with the intention to show the correlation between each concept/case and to make this relation transparent. Apart from that, the table has little variation; the shades of the stories are outlined in the analyzing text. Wrapping it up in the discussion, table 2 is offered to make an overview of factors that possible can legitimize or de-legitimice domestic violence. This is done to clarify the core of the result, but it however a simplification of what appears to be complex. It is recommended to use both the tables and the text to get a fare picture of the outcome of the study (Cohen, Kahn & Steeves, 2000).

Ethical challenges, bias and limitations:

This project gives raise to several ethical challenges. Domestic violence is still taboo, and from the informants perspective; to be the portrayed as the one causing a problem can be sensitive. The informants volunteered, knowing the topic of the study. They could break the interview at any time, and are anonymous in the text. They approved the text written about their stories. They had the opportunity to talk to both me and the psychiatrist after the interviews. Still, a number of ethical issues are of relevance.

First of all, using informants gathered from a therapeutic context can be problematic. The psychiatrist sent the letter to his whole clientele. His role might affect who reported back to me. Did they feel pressed, since they already had a relation with him? He wrote in the mail, wish was sent with a letter from me, that participating in the study was based on voluntarism; and that the informants reported directly back to me, so he did not know who took part in the study. The identities of those who did not report back were never reveled to me. Still, that psychiatrist was the middle man might have an impact on who the informants were, and how they felt about participating in the study.

I did not know if they had used domestic violence beforehand. This was reveled in the interviews. I gave them a written promise of confidentiality. They approved their stories and the information that was reveled in this article. However, people that can be considered sick, or are in therapy in a process of self development might not stand accountable for what they say. They need protection. To question their stories and to be critical to their position may be

seen as a violation of protection. My informants were not in therapy when they were interviewed. I believe that their stories are of value, their interpretations are important. Whether a person is sick or not their stories are to be taken seriously. I think we need to listen to different kind of people to create understanding for different kind of phenomena's. To simply view violent subjects as crazy without accountability does not give room for this an understanding. I did comprehend the informants, and why they chose to act in the way they did. The intention with the text is to create a common ground for understand, not judgments'. I have tried to convey that throughout the text. I am not in a position to determine their psychological status. Deeper psychological elements are not discussed; with such an analysis the outcome might have been different. Why did they give certain examples? What did they experience prior to the violence? This is left outside the study. They all expressed that they lived normal lives. I perceived them as "the (wo)man on the street", and I have tried to express this in the article. However the time was limited to reveal the contrary. The violent situation being the focus, the diversity of the person is somehow left outside. These people are of course more than a situation where they express violence; it was of importance for me that the informants knew that this was my point of departure. I introduced my project by letting them know my focus, and we talked about the limitations such focus meant for the informants (I only included a tiny situation from their lives). To include a broader analysis of their life stories would be of interest, and would possible makes the violent situation more comprehensive. It might have given a more fare picture of the informants' as their diversities might have had appeared in the text. Time was my biggest obstacle. However, the informants appeared to be familiar with their role in the study, as we discussed this in the interview. As Maria put it: *"You would understand more if you knew more about me, but we can't talk all night. You are concentrating on the violent situation. Not me"*. The intention here is not to stigmatize or judge someone; it is to get an understanding of someone's reality in a certain interaction. This was discussed with the informants prior the interview. However, to discuss a topic that can be considered taboo and sensitive might have consequences for a person. The informants might get reactions, and it is of importance to have some sort of support post the interview. They could contact me, or our common contact, the psychologist, as they wished after and before the interview. Furthermore, they were familiar to talking about such situations from therapeutic settings. Keep in mind the difference from

the settings we shared in the interviews, and those in a therapeutic contexts. Here the informants have been quoted and their line of reasoning have been questioned and analyzed. It is sensitive, but the interviews were, from my perspective, done without judgments.

None of the informants see themselves as violent people; even though they did describe situations of violence (as defined here). You can question how constructive it is to have a self image as a violent person and whether these interviews might have led to the informants view themselves as a violent person. It might lead to further violent acts; as you view yourself as a violent person you might as well act violently. They were reflexive in their line of reasoning, and expressed a self image beyond their anger issues. Lars and Erik had been working with themselves to change the aggressive behavior. With pressure from family members or social services they had chosen therapy for this behavior, which they had completed when interviewed. They considered their behavior as problematic, but expressed a positive self image related to other aspects of their personality.

To label someone and place them within a category they do not reckon they belong in has been an ethical question in my mind throughout the working process. Under the interviews we used the term “problematic anger”, a term that is used in the therapeutic context the informants participated in. Introducing the project beforehand, I did inform them about the theme (domestic violence) and they did agree to be in the study. I told the informants I used a wide definition of the term. It is problematic to describe a group of people that use avoiding strategies, and deny being a part of this group. They all agreed, however, to what was written about them; so I believe I have made relevant ethical considerations.

The study is not an attempt to offer representatives for all performers’ of domestic violence.

Domestic violence can be illustrated in a very different way by someone else. For example; the informants volunteered, those who did not wish to speak to me might have had contrasting stories to tell. All the informants went to therapy for their aggression problems; their perception on their violence is likely to be colored by this. Their stories are indeed personal. It is compared to other studies, and opens up for testing by other researchers.

This study is not attempting to have a neutral starting point. As I have read theories prior to the interview and working in a center for victims of domestic violence I do wear glasses of a victim-perspective. When working with the interviews the center of attention has been to

categorize their words under recurrent concepts; the "me" and the "I" of the author might had an impact on the result. Translating from Norwegian to English the interference of my role is extending. Having a background and knowledge about the phenomenon makes objectivity impossible. However I wish to keep the text without moralistic judgments towards the informants' stories or any other parts.

With this perspective other important factors are left out. The macro perspective of socio- economic factors, gender inequality or racism are absent. An identification of such factors can lead to arguments of political influences for important changes in society. For example: The violent person's suppression can be analyzed with an intersectional perspective. Indeed, studies show that domestic violence is to be found in all society, and do not wear a makeup of a social class. It happens in middle class white families, as well as with the rich and poor (Norman, 1984 & Issdal 2000). Why? Here is the motivation for focusing on the micro perspective. The attention is given to the stories of the individuals and not their structural background in terms of gender, ethnicity or class. The intentions are to find what cannot be explained with a macro perspective alone.

Theoretical motivation: What is reality?

Grounded theory springs out from an idea that reality is constructed and reconstructed in social processes. It is here we defined social phenomena. The theory is based upon George Mead symbolical interactionism, in great distance of positivism. In the 1930s, Mead tried to explain how reality can be viewed with a micro sociological approach. When studying a social phenomenon such as domestic violence, it is meaningful to determine a base of how reality and social phenomena are created (Cohen, Kahn & Steeves. 2000).

According to Mead we create our reality within social interactions. As an actor we consist of an "I" which is the core and a fairly steady part of our identity, and a "me"; a backpack of attitudes, values, experiences and behavior created throughout life. We position ourselves according to "me" and "I", the other participants and the situation itself. Entering social interactions we use symbols which are created or learned together with others. The symbols can be a language, signs or for example traditions. With these, we get a collective understanding of reality. Within this social process, reality is constructed, and can be reconstructed by the change of time, space and participants. That makes the creation of reality an ever changing process (ibid).

With this perspective, a focus of social interaction and its actors are interesting. Here, the attention is given to social interactions that are classified as domestic violence. The informants have used their main tool to communicate the meaning violence has to them, the language. So their stories are my main instrument for analyzing. What is happening in the situation? What does this mean to them? The focus will nevertheless be on the research question: How do you legitimize using domestic violence? Be aware that the analysis will be colored by both “me”, “I”, and the reality I live in.

What is violence?

Domestic violence is a socially created phenomenon changing in time and space. The term is used alongside with “violence in close relations”, “family violence” and “battering”; to express violence that occurs at home, and within the family (Carlson & Worden 2005, Avgul, Tulay, Gonul & Ayse, 2012).

What is considered to be violence is disputed. It depends on the eyes watching, or the actors that are participating. Anthropologist points out the variations domestic violence can have in different contexts. A study in Indonesia indicates that the majority of women viewed domestic violence include husband's public infidelity (Bennett, Andajani-Sutjahjo & Idrus, 2011). While in New York, a study shows that a common definition is acts of physical aggression between partners, which also can include screaming (Carlson & Worden, 2005). Depending on whom, when and where you ask, the answer to what domestic violence is will have variations.

In any situation the participants' perception of what is acutely happening might differ, and that is certainly the case in a violent situation. Violence can be seen as a form of communications within a social interaction where two, possibly three, roles can be defined; the receiver (the one who violence is used against), the violent person (the one who exercises the violence) and the observer (a third person/ a witness). In a possible violent situation the participants might have a different view of the events, what role they have, and whether what is happening is considered to be violence or not (Isdal, 2000). An example is found in an Australian research; when the conductor describes a situation as; “*Ah, it was nothing*”. The other actor in the situation, the receiver responded: “*How can he say it was nothing? It was the day I almost was killed*” (Jones, 2004). Who has the right to label the events when their meaning differs? While interviewing the informants I came to realize that we did not share the same definition. This study emphasizes the violent person's point of view. Some of the

informants made it clear that what they were doing was certainly not violence. As long as their stories correspond with the used definition they are included in this study.

In everyday life, violence is often seen as a physical action; kicking, hitting, or pushing. To see violence only as an action that leads to that someone gets hurt is not sufficient. The psychiatrist Per Isdal works with violent people. He illustrates the leaning of reasoning with an example: *Situation 1:* We are going for a walk. You say things I do not like, and it makes me angry. I turn around and hit you. Your nose brakes. *Situation 2:* We are going for a walk. Suddenly I slip on some ice and stretch out my arms to regain balance. At the same time you try to catch me, to prevent me to fall. My hand hits your face and your nose brakes (Isdal, 2000). A physical act with the consequences' of hurting someone does not need to be violence. Furthermore, from my point of view, violence extends the physical.

The field of sociology and psychology tends to focus on the execution of power within the term. Not only the consequences, but also the intention appears in following definition. It is spacious to make room for different forms of violence, for example violent put into system war.

"Violence is any act which harms or hurts another person, with the intention to get this person to do or not do something against his or her will" (Isdal, 2000, p. 36)

A flaw, in my eyes, is that it can room non-violent behavior; a married woman meets a new man and wish to get divorced. Her husband is devastated. Is that violence? It can be done with the intentions of getting another person to do something against one's will, but I still don't characterize it as violence. Here, I defined violence according to the Danish sociologist Hamerlin (2002):

Violence is a physical, psychological and/or a social act with destructive use (for example with power execution) where the intention could be to harm, hurt, mistreats, or violates one or more persons. The intentions can also be to subdue the victim, abuse or undermined a social position. The intentions can be to disincline, or force the victim to do something against one's will, moral or interests. It can result in limitations of human rights, of life quality, and/or equal positions. It can be an element in a larger project or a goal in its self. The

intention can be thought through and planned or confusing or caused by a twisted sense of reality”
(www.regjeringen.no/)

Elements of power execution, the intention and consequences are mentioned. It is not only physical acts that are included. Violence can be emotional, psychological, economical, sexual, verbal or materialistic. I find this definition broad enough to cover all perspectives, but still narrow enough to eliminate non-violence. The Norwegian government, shelters for victims of domestic violence and other organizations working with domestic violence in Norway often use a more elaborated definition. The violent person is of close relation to the receiver and the following clarification is often given: (1) *Physical violence*: as a physical act with the intention of hurting others, like kicking, slapping, hitting. (2) *Sexual violence*: a sexual act against someone else's will, like touching the body, raping, verbally referring to one's sexuality. (3) *Materialistic violence*: using things to get another person to do something against someone else's will; like throwing something in the wall, breaking something of importance. (4) *Economical violence*: control the economy of another person with for example holding back a person's money or steal documents. (5) *Psychological violence*: threatening, humiliating behavior, controlling behavior, isolating another person or acting out aggressive jealousy (Krisensentersekriteriatet, 2007).

Domestic violence in research:

Following the feminist movement man's violence toward women was the first area of interest when domestic violence was brought to attention by the public in the 1970s. The stereotypical way of looking at the phenomenon is still a common practice, however today the field of research has broadened to include other angles, for example a child's perspective or violence towards men. Different academic fields highlight various aspects of domestic violence; the field of medicine for example, tends to focus on the health consequences. 4 Domestic violence can be studied from different levels. The individual, on a micro-level, is

4 Identified health consequences for victims are: physical injuries as well as a number of long term health problems such as self-harming behavior, asthma and depression. Children that experience domestic violence either as an observer or a receiver tends to be aggressive and outgoing or turn inwards away from relations later in life (DeBoard-Lucas and Grych, 2011 and Sousa, Herrenkohl, Moylan, Tajima, Klika, Bart, Herrenkohl, and Russo, 2011). The health consequences depend on the type of violence used, the number of episodes it is experienced, and the individual itself (Avgul, Tulay, Gonul and Ayse 2010, Dunkle, Jewkes, Brown and Yoshihama 2004 and Subaşı 2001).

often given attention to by psychologists, sociologists and neurologists. Sociologists and social workers are likely to highlight social consequences for the individual. Risk variables are identified, where studies indicate that for example experiences of violence in childhood and over-consumption of alcohol increases the risk of domestic violence. Focusing on groups, on a meso-level is often done by sociologists where norms and rules of a sub-culture or a group identity are related to domestic violence. On a macro level sociologists study the relation between domestic violence and other variables such as class, ethnicity and gender, or the level of violence in the society in general (Steinvåg, 2011). My study is done on a micro level using individual informants, where I try to include their meso-tendencies of group identities and finally the societal tendency that might affect them in violent interactions. To broaden the introduction previous research on the violent subject follows.

Who is performing domestic violence?

Studies show that domestic violence exists in all corners of society; it does not wear the makeup of a social class (www.un.org and Norman 1984). However, within different studies the relation between domestic violence and other variables such as class and economy are disputed⁵. Using data collected in the WHO-research the relation between geographical locations, social-economic factors and the occurrence of domestic violence were tested. It appeared to have no relation. However, in the homes of the middle range of the socioeconomic scale were more likely to report violence by a partner. Focusing on the individual factors of the victim such as controlling behavior, alcohol use, and multiple sexual partners had a positive correlation with domestic violence; and the chances of experiencing domestic violence increases if the victim had grown up in a home with domestic violence (Kiss, Schraiber, Heise, Zimmerman, Gouveia & Watts 2012). I find it problematic to consider violence with references to victims' status and behavior. Is the victim that determines the violence? As I mentioned above, I see violence as a social interaction between several actors, the violent person, the victim and sometimes even a witness. I wish to broaden the perspective by introducing an additional actor to the focus of this study; the one performing the violence.

⁵ A study from India shows a correlation with casts, making people from the low casts more likely to be victimized (Mahapatro, Gupta and Gupta 2012).

Norwegian studies indicate gender equality among the violent subjects. It is as likely that a woman is performing domestic violence as a man (Steinvåg, 2011). However, it is a difference between what kind of violence men and women use. Steinvåg refers to the

sociologist Michael Jonsson categorization of different types of violence; violence which leads to severe physical and psychological consequences' is more often done by men. Men are more likely to use violence "determined by the situation", while women are more often using violence as defense to violence. Women more frequently use violence towards their children, then men do (Steinvåg, 2011). Norman shows the relations between violence and societal power structures. The power relation between men and women is present in most western cultures, giving women an inferior role, also being more commonly victimized for domestic violence. Leaving the children at the bottom of the hierarchy, and often defenseless in a violent situation (Norman 1984).

The correlation between the use of alcohol and the use of domestic violence has showed positive; the violent subject is likely to be under the influence of alcohol when performing violence. Studies indicate that it is likely that a person that uses violence also have been victimized for domestic violence. This is of course a generalization and not always the case. Resembling this study, other quantitative research aims for portraying the violent subjects' reality, on a micro-level. These studies show that the violent subjects see themselves living in stressful marriages. They externalize their behavior; they view themselves as victims of stressful situations where they lose control (Wallach & Tsipi, 2008). The violent person attempts to place the responsibility on the victim. However, emotions of anger, loss, rage, hostility, and fear capture homes with domestic violence (Goodrum, Umberson & Anderson, 2007, Norman 1984). A conflict within the violent person arises when her/his actions don't match up with the self-image. The violent person is not violent in her or his consciousness, but becomes violent when interacting with others. "*I only used violence once, I am not a violent person*", a batter said. They use strategies of avoiding to distance them self from the violence they conducted (Goodrum, Umberson and Anderson, 2007 and Norman 1984). The violent self is haunting the subject's identity. Norman, a sociologist that uses phenomenology when portraying domestic violence, describes the violent home as a problematic place where its members are outsiders without trust. He calls it negative symbolic interactions: without the constructions of the "we-ness" that normally characterizes small groups (Norman, 1984).

Per Isdal have a psychological perspective when he aims for a general understanding of violent people; how they create a meaning with the violence they conduct. Doing so, recurrent perceptions of violent subjects build up some sort of structures of their perception. This theory carries many resemblances to previous research. He claims that the violent subject for example, uses strategies of denial when relating to the violence. Many of them use alcohol, or

over-working as a way of escaping reality. His reasoning is discussed further in the article when comparing results to previous research (Isdal, 2000).

The violent subject is much more than a violent person. The answers to why this person chose to use violence and others chose not to, extends a social expiation alone. Following, I let the person that have used violence in the home illustrate their reality, and you can view their explanation.

Results:

Finally, the results are presented. First, is a presentation of the three informants; Maria, Erik and Lars. The informants' stories are divided into the three phases as in the interviews. Following are the three informants:

Maria is a single mom in her thirties. She is living in a city in Norway. At the time of interviewing she was not working, she was at home taking care of her eight month old baby. The violence she described took place at home, with the father of the child. They are no longer a couple. She have used violent towards him, she says, no one else. *Erik* is a working class man in his early thirties. He was born in a city, but because of a hard upbringing he has relocated to a smaller village, to get a fresh start. He works full time, and lives together with his pregnant girlfriend, and her child. The violence he describes is towards himself in the presence of the other family members. *Lars* is a middle class man with a high position in a successful firm. He has a family of five: his daughter, son, dog and wife. He describes himself living a successful life: as a social and honest person who focuses on his carrier. The violence he describes takes place at home with his daughter.

The time leading up to the violent situation:

The informants describe the same day or the same week as the violent situation accurse. The concept that was most frequently referred to by the informants was the feeling of inferiority. Together with stress and powerlessness they make up the emerging concepts of these stories. What causes these factors has individual differences; however the sense of living in a chaotic reality where the personal role is undermined is present in all the informants' stories. Examples follow:

Maria describes a reality prior to the violence as inflicted by stress and chaos. The spouse has left the house for a week, without a word. She was pregnant and suspected that her boyfriend had a drug problem.

"He made me so angry. He did what he wanted to whenever he wanted"

She had no control over their situation. She felt as she had lost the battle of controlling their lives, she tells me. The feeling of powerlessness emerges from the story of Maria. She says:

"I had no control over my situation. And I was pregnant. I didn't know what I was going to do. "

The stress and the feeling of being inferior are found in Erik's story as well. Erik is describing the same day as the situation of violence took place. He had experienced a time where everything went against him. Work was stressful, and he felt he could not master his tasks. He felt inferior to his boss. At the same time he had a conflict with his friend, and his mother was sick at the time. When his girlfriend rejected him, he felt like a failure in all aspects of life, and that made him explode. Erik tells me:

"I felt as I had been swimming against the current the whole day. The pressure at work was too high for me to focus. My boss' comment had made a deep cut in my pride".

Lars had experienced a night with his daughter where he felt ignored and disrespected, he tells me.

The feeling of stress was not apparent in his story. On the other hand, Lars saw his role as a father threatened. He tells me: he felt that all the time and effort he has spent on teaching her the right and the wrongs, had vanished. He knew he had spent much time at work, but did not feel that his family members appreciated his efforts. Lars feeling of lack of control is penetrating the situation leading up to the violent episode:

"When I entered the kitchen she was talking on the phone. - What a mess! She just ignored me. She just continued talking on the phone. She talked about boys, and it made me frustrated. Is that all she cares about now? Have I not taught her anything? "

The violent situation:

Here, the informants describe the interaction where they expressed problematic anger. The given definition places these actions as forms of domestic violence. Their stories explicitly

tell me about three concepts that penetrated the stories. When the informants used violence, they have lost the sense of personal control. That is the first concept. Following is that the informants' stories indicate acting violently is a way of regaining control over the other actors in the situation. The preceding concept is that violence is a way of communicating disagreement, as a way of protesting and being heard.

Marias' story of the violent situation

"When he walked in the door, I felt as I exploded inside. Instantly I lost control. I ran towards him, screaming: Who do you think you are? I pushed him over so he fell on the hallway floor. But he knew he had nothing to come up with, it was his fault entirely, and he knew it. I guess I was trying to make him feel the pain he made me feel, so yeah, I used violence. Normally I am not violent. I was pregnant and so angry"

Here she expresses the loss of personal control when pushing and hitting the receiver, as the first concept suggests. Her intentions are to communicate to him that he had made a mistake. Here justifications appears in the quote, by saying they both knew it was his fault. Maria wants to communicate that she had enough, and for that violence is loader then words for her. Later on in the interview she says:

"I wanted to crush him, so he never did it again"

Erik tells a story of a violent situation where he feels powerless over his girlfriend's rejection. When he does not get the response he is hoping for, he loses control over himself. His intentions are to communicate his pain to her:

"Finally, home. I was happy to be home. I missed her in the day. I went straight into the kitchen where I could hear her. She was home with her son. When I tried to kiss her, she turned away to avoid my lips. I started to talk about my day, like a normal person. I might have raised my voice a little, because it was a shit day. She didn't respond. Her body language told me she had no interest in my story, she did not even want to see me. Why couldn't she show some interest? The child started to cry as usual, and they left the room, slamming the door. She had to stop to treat me like this. "Did you hear what I was saying" I ran after them. She made her point; she did not care about me. I do everything for this

women and this is how she repays me. I could feel the blood rising to my head. My eyes were ready to pup out. I screamed at her, I told her what a useless girlfriend she was, I could not stop, didn't mean to. I was just so angry. I said things so she would react, mean things. Was she dead inside? I pushed my fist in the wall, and finally she reacted. She closed her eyes. I kicked to sofa she was sitting in, and in the corner of my eyes I saw her lying down on the floor. I kept kicking the sofa, kicking and hitting. I only felt the pain she made me feel. I was hoping she felt some of it, too."

Lars wished to communicate to his daughter that he did not agree with her behavior, according to the emerging concept. He lives in a reality where her respect for him is absent, and he has lost the control over her. Using violence is Lars' way of regaining power over her. The story illustrates the relation between control and violence:

"My daughter dropped the plate with spaghetti and meat to the floor, making a real mess. Some of the spaghetti souse went on my pants. Now, when I think about it, it was really nothing. But then it felt different, it had been a long day already. And it was her reaction that made me angry. She was just laughing and talking on the phone. What are you doing? I could hear my voice was load. And she just ignored me. Did she not understand she needs to clean up? I could feel the heat of anger razing trough my body. She was leaving the kitchen when I reached her. I took the phone from her hand and threw it away. I screamed at her, I remember that. She gave me a frightened look. But at this point I had lost control. I said things I did not really mean. I pushed her towards the broken plate and the food was lying all over the floor. Now you clean up I said, and I left."

Legitimizing techniques:

The situation after the violence seems to have variation in the informants' stories. Maria and Erik express feelings of regret and shame, however none of them communicate this with the receiver. Lars, on the other hand, is satisfied post the violent situation, he tells me. He feels it is his duty to teach the receiver the difference between right and wrong, and the job is accomplished. However, later on in the interview Lars tells me that he do regret his anger when he remembers the fare in his daughters' eyes. This is something that is hard for

him to talk about. Example will appear when discussing the research-question: How do the informants legitimize the use of violence?

Analyzing the informants' stories three main concepts has emerged. It is recurrent themes that the informants use when legitimizing violence towards a family member, and are presented in order of frequency: 1) denial and avoiding strategies' 2) violence as a part of an identity 3) externalization of the violent behavior.

AVOIDING AND DENIAL STRATEGIES After the violent situation the informants use techniques to avoid relating to the violence. The aim is invisibility, and to obtain that various techniques are used. By looking at another people as worse, your own violence does not seem so bad. It is minimized and its consequences' are avoided. Erik tells me:

"I would never use violence to my girlfriend"

In similar way Lars expresses his stand point of domestic violence:

"I have read some stories about domestic violence. Imagine hitting your own child. I could never do that. You have to be crazy to that. I would never use violence."

Another avoiding method is simply not to talk about the violent situation. It is not present in the common conciseness of the home. In the absence of collective symbols' or language to reflect upon the situation, a collective meaning is not created within the family. Erik says:

"Afterwards, we pretend like nothing has happened"

Both Maria and Erik describe the time after the violence as euphoric. To be able to make the violence invisible they use a strategy of emphasizing the good in their family, when they are having a good time the violence are less visible. Maria tells me:

"The next day he wakes me up with breakfast in bed. I kiss him, and we hold each other. We never talk about the episode again. Pretend like nothing has happened. We focus on the good and what we both enjoy. It was really good time after. It is like falling in love all over again"

The episodes are not questioned or reflected upon within the family; so the subjects do not need to legitimize it. When questioned in the interview all of the informants do express

feelings of regret and shame, but this is not something they share with their partner or child. The quote is from the interview with Maria followed by Lars.

"I am not proud of the violence"

"It is not something I like to talk about. It is hard"

MAKING VIOLENCE AS A PART OF AN IDENTITY: The violent subject creates an identity where violence is normalized. Using violence is seen as a part of a group-norm that the violent subject belongs to. By collective normalization, the responsibility of the individual decreases. Making it normal one does not need to explain it. Maria exemplifies this by saying:

"I am aggressive. It is a part of my culture. We are misunderstood (by others), we are just expressing emotions. We are sensitive people. That is in my blood."

Erik stories include a view into his background. He says he feels "locked in" by the way he is been socialized, with an identity of a gangster. In his reality this part of his identity is given to him, it is not something he chose. Being born where he was born, and surrounded by certain people violence became the way Erik learned to communicate. Erik:

"I did not ask for the background I have. I wish I never was a gangster. Now I have to live with the consequences. They say the childhood forms who you become later in life. This is who I am"

Acting violently is viewed as a part of a group identity, a culture, a gender or a sub culture. It can even become a duty to use violence within some understandings of identities. Then, one does not need to legitimize it, it is a reaction to the given position that the individual have been given. Lars tells me:

"It is a part of being a man, and the leader of the family. The man is the responsible one and that is how families always have been. It is a part of my responsibility, to teach the others the difference between right and wrong".

"Raising a child is not always easy. Sometimes it can hurt".

EXTERNALIZATION: The informants explain the violence as a reaction of factors that exist outside themselves. When acting violently it is viewed as an reaction to a reality that has been served. Here, an assumption is embedded: A naturally leads to B. The violent subject becomes victimized; he or she suffers from others wrongs and flaws, using violent is a natural

reaction. When legitimizing the use of violence with external factors, the responsibility is lifted away without the need of encountering for own actions. This is illustrated when I ask Maria why using violence?

“When you are treated like shit you start acting like shit. That’s all I can say.”

Maria’s story suggests violence as a natural reaction to a situation that has been served to her: betrayal, lying and cheating directs violence. In the informant’s world she is bond to use violence.

Erik grew up in a setting where violence was a normal way of communicating:

“I was born on the wrong side of town. Everyone uses violence there, and I had to use violence, too. Now, I can’t stop”

Erik sees himself being a victim of his past. It is not his fault where he was born, and who he grew up with. Using violence is a consequence of factors he could not control.

Relation between concept and story:

It might appear contradictory to claim violence to be a part of an identity, as it is denied. These strategies can be used selectively; they can appear contradictory and do not need to correspond. And of course, every strategy does not need to be used for every violent situation. They appear in different forms, and are caused by different context and actors. The table is included to show the appearance of the concepts case by case, to strengthen the relation between the stories and choice of concept.

Violent situation

Explaining the violence

Leading up to violence

Maria	Stress Inferior Powerlessness	Communicating disagreement Lack of personal control Violence used with the intention of getting control over situation and other actor.	See herself as an emotional person, which has used violence in difficult situations. The violent situation is not discussed in the home. Have an identity with a collective acceptance for violence.
Erik	Inferior Stress Powerlessness	communicating disagreement Lack of personal control Violence used with the intention of getting control over situation and other actor.	Regrets the violence. Sees himself as immature, and a victim of his violent past. In his eyes his background captures him in violent behavior. He tells about a past with social acceptance for violence. The violent situation is not discussed