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A marked man: A case of female-perpetrated intimate partner abuse

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A marked man: a case of female-perpetrated intimate partner abuse

Abstract

Concepts of intimate partner abuse and violence are shifting, complex, situationally-contingent and multi-faceted. Whilst women's narratives of abuse have provided much-needed, if harrowing, insight into the subjective experience of intimate partner abuse, men's accounts of female-perpetrated abuse have been slower to emerge, generating much controversy and hostility even in contemporary times. This paper seeks to add to a small, but developing qualitative literature on male victims' accounts of intimate abuse and violence. Drawing on case-study data, the article charts some of the salient themes emergent from a series of in-depth interviews and the personal diary of abuse of a heterosexual male victim, and explores some of the congruences with other accounts of intimate abuse and violence. The paper concludes with a discussion of the ways in which male victims of intimate abuse might be situated within contemporary frameworks of masculinities.

Keywords: intimate partner abuse and violence (IPA&V); domestic violence; male victims; female perpetrators

INTRODUCTION

He closes the bedroom door slightly in order to get undressed. His wife interprets this as slamming the door in her face ... She delivers a full force blow to his face. It is like a thunderstorm: he sees a panorama of fork lightning, somewhat speeded up, followed perceptibly later by a searing pain right across his face and a hissing in his ears. The pain abates, but this hissing does not. His vision becomes blurred. He pleads to her to stop this. She hits him again. He goes down to the kitchen, hoping that she will calm down. She is there immediately. She pushes him into a corner and takes a kitchen knife with an 8" blade from the block. She is now holding this over-arm, above him, threatening to stick it in him...

The above extract is taken from the personal diary¹ of a white, middle-aged, senior-professional man who charted in diary form for a period of two years the abuse to which he was frequently subjected by his wife; abuse and violence which began over 20 years earlier and subsequently escalated in both frequency and extent to the point at which he was forced to flee the family home with only a few clothes and some personal possessions. His diary, together with the transcripts of a series of five (to-date) in-depth interviews, constitute the case-study data upon which this paper is based. Although the purpose of this article is not to examine prevalence rates or the gender symmetric/asymmetric nature of intimate partner abuse and violence, some brief background will nevertheless provide contextualisation.

As Palin-Davies (2006, p. 11) notes, domestic violence is extremely complex, not only in terms of its dynamics but also in terms of how, and by/for whom it is presented. The "ethics of presentation" (Katz Rothman, 2007), and indeed *non*-presentation are key in this area. A gamut of studies exists, embracing empirical studies and meta-analyses of empirical research, dating back to the 1970s, which indicates that intimate partner abuse and violence (IPA&V) are perpetrated by women and girls in heterosexual relationships as frequently as, or (in some studies) more frequently than they are by men and boys (for examples see: Morse, 1995; Cook, 1997; Fiebert, 1997; Straus, 1997, 2006; Archer, 2002; Walby & Allen, 2004; Dutton, 2007) and for very similar reasons

¹ The diary was deliberately written in the third person in order to reduce the emotional impact; see discussion on p. 6.

(Medeiros & Straus, 2006). Such gender symmetric findings, it should be said, have been strongly challenged and stingingly critiqued (e.g. Pagelow, 1985; Kimmel, 2002), as have these critiques in their turn. Quantitative studies in the area of domestic violence in general have been criticised on a variety of grounds, including methodological issues (Nazroo, 1995²), inconsistent use of terminology, reporting and recording differences, problems with the construction of official statistics, and decontextualisation of the abuse, for example, by not addressing whether violence was unilaterally initiated or responsive, in self-defense. Indeed notions of what constitutes “self-defense” are themselves worthy of critical evaluation, given that violent women often use self-defense as a rationale and justification for inflicting violence even though they themselves are the perpetrators and not the victims of the abuse (Sarantakos, 2004). Some researchers argue that IPV is primarily an asymmetrical problem of men's violence to women, with women's violence to men being less in terms of frequency, severity, consequences, and the victim's sense of safety and well-being (Dobash & Dobash, 2004), the perceived degree of threat and danger (Nazroo, 1995) and women's greater likelihood of being injured and repeatedly beaten by male partners (Archer, 2002). The gender symmetry/asymmetry debate continues unresolved, however. In the absence of conclusive data, and on the basis of a substantial research corpus, it appears that women and men, heterosexual, bisexual, gay (Renzetti & Miley, 1996), and transsexual/transsexed (Brown, 2007) of whatever age, physical ability, socio-economic and ethnic background, find themselves subject to IPA&V.

Research findings indicating that women are both victims and perpetrators of IPA&V challenge many previously held conceptualizations and explanations (McHugh & Hanson Frieze, 2006), leading to calls for more in-depth studies into the experiences of male victims, an area in which relatively little qualitative research has been undertaken (Migliaccio, 2002). There is an even greater research lacuna in relation to male *narratives* of abuse, and whilst accounts of female victims and survivors offer great insight into their experiences (e.g. Lempert, 1994), with notable

² Nazroo has, however, in turn been criticised for biased sampling methods.

exceptions (e.g. Migliaccio, 2002) there is a dearth of men's narratives in the research literature. As Lempert notes, narratives demonstrate that abusive relationships have courses, and that victims' actions within these relationships can be rational, reasonable, and understandable, for via the analysis of a person's experiences, we "can make existential sense of violence from an intimate partner" (1994, p. 411). This article explores some of the key themes emergent from the abuse narrative of a white, middle-class, highly-educated, articulate, professionally successful man, who was in a relationship for over 20 years, which incorporated first psychological and then increasingly physically violent abuse by his intimate partner.

Similarities and differences between themes identified in accounts by abused women and men, of whatever sexuality, are also considered at various points in the analysis, for, as Migliaccio (2002) notes, examining the commonalities shared between abused males and females can assist researchers in bettering their understanding of the abusive experience in general. This, it should be emphasized, in no way minimizes or exculpates the appalling incidence of violence against women, and it certainly does not seek to "degender" the problem of domestic violence (Berns, 2001). As a feminist sociologist, gender-related issues are at the forefront of my concerns. Issues surrounding the use and abuse of power by women in intimate relationships, are eminently worthy of rigorous, detailed investigation by feminist (and other) scholars, for a lack of empirical research into female-on-male intimate violence limits greatly our understanding of its nature and processes. Although open to debate, De Welde (2003) has argued that "hegemonic discourses of women's powerlessness are not equipped to deal with power from women" (p. 250), and such hegemonic discourses require contestation. There are of course discourses around the use/abuse of power by women, for example in the analysis of female sexual abuse of children (Denov, 2004), and of female relational abuse (Kelkar, 1992). Indeed, Fitzroy (2001) reminds us that victims of women's violence include children, parents, siblings, disabled family members, female/male partners, colleagues, workers and strangers. In general, however, there is a *relative* dearth of qualitative research into physical abuse perpetrated by women upon their intimate partners, especially when

unilaterally generated. The purpose of the article is to focus the analysis at the micro-level; to enter, theoretically speaking, into the social world of an intimate relationship characterised by unilateral violence, including sexual violence, as viewed through the eyes of a heterosexual male victim.

To achieve this, the article is structured as follows. First, the research methods and ethical issues are portrayed. The analysis then proceeds to examine some of the salient themes emergent from this particular narrative of abuse before moving on to explore briefly the positioning of male victims of IPA&V within a contemporary framework of masculinities. For the purposes of this article, intimate partner *abuse* (IPA) refers to any abusive act deemed to have the intention/perceived intention, of generating fear, causing physical injury, intimidation, denigration, disorientation or emotional pain to the intimate partner. Intimate partner *violence* (IPV) is used specifically to refer to any act deemed to have the intention/perceived intention of causing physical injury. Carlson neatly defines abuse as: “A pattern of behaviors that can be physical, emotional or psychological, verbal, or sexual that is intended to control or demean” (1997, p. 291); a description apposite to the current analysis.

TOPICAL LIFE HISTORY APPROACH

The life history approach is particularly well-suited to an in-depth examination of the nexus of social structures and personal experiences, particularly those of a sensitive and emotionally-charged nature. Plummer posits a range of advantages of the life history approach, as particularly suited to discovering the “confusions, ambiguities and contradictions played out in everyday experiences” (2001, p. 40); a primary goal of the current study. The approach has also been discussed specifically in relation to the study of men and masculinities (e.g. Jackson, 1990), and Connell (1991) recommends the life history in researching masculinity, due to its capacity to link social structures, collectivities, and institutional changes to an individual’s life. In addition to general research insights, the benefits to participants have been highlighted, including by Atkinson (1998), who contends that a life story can be as valuable an experience for the person narrating as it is a

successful endeavour for the researcher. Here, it is perhaps more accurate to write of a “limited topical life history” (Ward, 1999), given the focus on a specific period and element in an individual’s life history – that of IPA&V. This was one of the primary aims of the pilot stage of a study; the full project seeks to explore lived-body experiences of IPA&V, via survivors’ narratives of abuse. The pilot phase involved a series of in-depth interviews with two male victims. Although the men were unknown to each other, of different generations (early 30s and mid-50s) and different European nationalities, and from very different class and occupational backgrounds, the congruence between their narratives and those portrayed in the literature on female and male IPA&V victims was striking.

To provide analytic consistency and focus, this article is based on a series of five, in-depth interviews³ with just one of the pilot participants, as he also made available his personal diary of abuse, written over a 2-year period towards the end of the abusive relationship, and during which time the abuse was actually taking place. His narrative of abuse, recorded systematically in the diary, therefore provides the primary data source for the paper, supplemented by information from his interviews. Delamont (1992) emphasizes the symbolic significance of pseudonym choice, and “NH” selected his own. He lived in a relationship, which became increasingly abusive and violent, for over 20 years, including marriage and children, before deciding to leave the relationship only at a point when he felt in danger of *permanent* injury from his wife’s violence and had assured himself as far as possible that she would not abuse their two children. At the time of the interviews, NH was a very successful professional man in his mid-50s, who had left his wife over 3 years previously and was living on his own in very modest, rented accommodation, whilst still paying off a considerable mortgage for the big family home in which his former wife and children continued to live while the financial details of a protracted divorce settlement were finalised.

In the diary, NH charts in systematic form the events of two years preceding his leaving. A prologue recounts salient events before the “real-time” entries begin and an epilogue details key events occurring immediately post departure. In the final year of diary entries, the text is

³ Interviews are on-going but at the time of writing 5 interviews of between 1 and 2 hours had taken place with this particular participant.

supplemented by photos, some taken by NH with his home webcam and others by a relative; these provide a graphic record of both facial and bodily injuries. NH explained that he initially composed the diary entries in the third person, finding it too emotionally-charged and embarrassing to write in the first. Subsequently he came to consider that the relative “neutrality” afforded by these techniques enabled him to bring to bear some analytic distance on a highly stressful situation (c.f. Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005). NH initiated diary-keeping in order to document the abuse to which he was subject, as a means of enabling him temporarily to “bracket” the stressful experiences so that he could “get on with the rest of his life”, as he explained in an interview. At various junctures he even showed sections of the diary to his wife in an attempt to make her understand the pain and distress she was causing; she dismissed it as mere rantings. It should therefore be emphasized that it is the personal narrative of abuse that forms the focus of the analysis here, and from which links are made with other research. No claims regarding representativeness or generalisability are made for the topical life history study, as this was not its purpose. As Warrington (2001, p. 367) notes, questions of “validity” often arise in the context of qualitative research of this kind, and analogously I too believe that participants were telling me the “truth”, and that this “truth” was borne out by striking similarities between their accounts and those encountered in the literature from both victims and also professional workers involved with IPA&V cases.

The personal diary and the transcripts of both men’s interviews were read and re-read as part of a lengthy process of “indwelling” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994), to seek empathic understanding of interviewees’ lived experiences. Observations and responses to both the diary and the interview process were also noted in analytic memo form, and this aided efforts at boundary maintenance between the empathic understanding of interviewees, and a wish to avoid colonization of, or merger with them, seeking a dialogical rather than a monological research relationship (Frank, 2005). Using thematic content analysis and sensitising concepts, including those derived from the research literature, the principal emergent themes were identified, compared and contrasted with those encountered in the literature. It should be emphasized that this article is not a narrative

analysis *per se*, but rather an examination of specific interactional instances within one man's narrative of intimate abuse. The thematic analysis necessarily has the effect of fragmenting the endogenous narrative flow of NH's diary, but for the purposes of this article, it is the interactional exchanges upon which the analysis primarily focuses. It is thus more of a "realist tale" (Sparkes, 2002), which despite some limitations, is nevertheless a genre with the power to connect theory to data in a way that, "creates spaces for participant voices to be heard in a coherent text, and with specific points in mind ... data-rich realist tales can provide compelling, detailed, and complex descriptions of a social world" (p. 55).

ETHICAL CONCERNS

As Langford (2000) powerfully illustrates, the ethical issues involved in researching IPA&V can be particularly acute, and my paramount ethical concerns cohered around confidentiality, protection of informants' anonymity and the minimisation of distress during the research process, *en bref*, adherence to an "ethic of care" (Plummer, 2001). The research proposal was approved by the University ethics committee, and it was agreed with participants that audio and digital recordings of interviews would be transcribed by the researcher herself to maintain confidentiality. Participants were assured that all recordings and transcripts would be retained in safe storage, commensurate with practice in the researcher's Unit, and that they were free to terminate the interview or withdraw from the study at any point without need for justification. I remain very grateful for the courage and openness with which interviewees spoke, and their willingness to discuss such sensitive, personal issues. Indeed, as Owens (2006) reminds us, resisting abuse, even years after the fact, by speaking it aloud, is an act of bravery. Further, Brznyt *et al* (1997) emphasize how participants may experience nightmares after being interviewed on stressful topics, and on one occasion NH recounted how, subsequent to an interview, he had a bad nightmare, reliving his wife's physical attacks. More encouragingly, however, Langford (2000) notes that interviewees also report advantages to participation, including catharsis, being given a voice, and gaining a sense of purpose. NH indicated that these latter two factors were of particular salience to him, together with

the potential for something constructive to emerge from such a highly destructive period of his life, thereby highlighting the importance of his social agency and his stated refusal to perceive himself as a “victim”. Indeed, NH hardly ever used the term in the interviews and it does not appear once in his diary, despite the fact that serious physical abuse was perpetrated upon him; “victim” for him connoted negative self-imagery; an issue that will be reprised in the Discussion.⁴

The principal themes emergent from NH’s narrative are portrayed below, with linkages made to those identified in the research literature, as appropriate. The analysis covers the following areas: 1) defining physical violence in the intimate context; 2) the pattern of violence, 3) the stigma of abuse; and 4) reasons for non-retaliation in kind. This is by no means comprehensive coverage of the many themes that emerged, but word limit restrictions preclude a discussion of other key topics, such as reasons for staying in the relationship, and fears of public exposure as an abused husband, addressed in other papers. Although no claims of generalizability are made for this particular study, the final discussion widens the lens to theoretical generalization, tentatively to explore the positioning of male victims of IPA&V within a general framework of contemporary masculinities.

DEFINING ABUSE – THE COMPLEXITIES AND ROUTINIZATION

Researchers often distinguish between two types of physical abuse: minor and severe (NCFV, 2007). *Minor* abuse relates to acts such as shoving, pushing, grabbing or slapping; described as having a relatively low probability of causing serious physical pain or injury. *Severe* physical abuse includes assault that has a relatively high probability of causing serious physical injury or pain: choking, kicking, hitting with an object, “beating up”, using a knife or gun against the partner (NCFV, 2007). The minor/severe distinction may, however, be hard to sustain from the victim’s perspective, given that abuse categorised as “minor” may actually result in considerable pain and serious injury.

⁴ For an excellent discussion of the gender dimensions of narrative reframing of victimization, see de Welde (2003: 257).

As Regan *et al* (2006, p. 38) note in criticism of “measuring instruments” such as the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS), the outcome of putative minor abuse may be serious, as someone *shoving* a partner (minor) could result in greater harm than someone *punching* a partner (severe). Koss *et al* (1994) define physical violence more widely as including acts such as: shoving, slapping, punching, kicking, choking, throwing, scalding, cutting, smothering, or biting. In addition to all these acts (with the exception of scalding), NH indicated that he was also subject to hitting - with heavy objects such as guitars, full beer cans and also with gemstone rings that acted as “knuckle-dusters” – plus poking, prodding, severe scratching (drawing copious blood), attempts at suffocation with a pillow, and violent pulling of parts of the body – mouth, ears, genitals - which produced bleeding, bruising, and swelling.

The complexity of defining abuse in the intimate context is perhaps exemplified by the following diary entry, where there is nothing inherently aggressive in the act – one of “cuddling”. The interactionist analytic attention to the context-dependency and negotiation of meaning is apposite here, as the context, intent, and lack of reciprocity transform what might be an affectionate act into one of aggression and invasiveness. The diary entry follows the recounting of a bout of physical aggression from NH’s wife:

Then, when he is distressed by the aggression, she turns 180 degrees to feign comfort – attempts at stroking and cuddling ... which are really only another form of aggression, invading his space when he needs it to recover. Along with this, dogged insistence on her part - “I won’t leave you alone until I have had a cuddle”- this can go on for about two hours until he is emotionally drained and unable to sleep because of the invasive behaviour.

Unwanted touching and invasion of personal space, termed by Goffman (1976) “interpersonal contamination”, have been subject to extensive feminist analysis in the arenas of the home and the workplace. Extreme examples of interpersonal contamination would include rape or sexual assault where, as Stephens *et al* (2005, p. 43) indicate, the victim involuntarily incorporates the perpetrator into her/his extended self; the depth and enduring nature of the contamination being evidenced by the victim’s feelings of violation, and also in many cases, of shame, guilt, grief and rage.

The routinization and normalization, even acceptability of IPA&V by both victims and perpetrators form a salient feature of many accounts. Smartt and Kury (2007, p.1264), for example, reported that a UK survey found that one in five young men and one in 10 young women aged 13-19 considered violence against women to be acceptable. In relation to the non-reporting of “domestic” incidents, Kury *et al*’s (2000) international cross-comparative analysis discovered that victims mostly cited as a rationale for non-reporting that it was not really “that bad”. Alarming, Stanko (1985, p. 48) indicates (in relation to battered women) that abuse is often characterised by victims as the “normal” interaction of intimate couples. Analogously, abused husbands in Migliaccio’s (2002) study portrayed the normalization and acceptability of violence from their partners, and one interviewee, a martial arts expert, explained how he failed even to acknowledge that the daily violence to which he was accustomed was wrong, believing it to be “just part of life”. The abuser too may rationalize their actions, downplay their seriousness or deny the violent intent, redefining the situation to disparage the pain, injury and distress caused. NH indicated how his wife would explain her behaviour to their two children by saying: “Mummy only hits Daddy because he argues with her”, or would chide him with: “it’s only a scratch”, or “it’s just tickling”, as also recorded in the diary:

She now has him in the corner and is scratching his head on both sides with her nails. “Playful tickling” she calls it. It stings, oh how it stings. His anger with this treatment makes him feel physically sick. She insists that she is not hurting him: this is only affection. Affection that leads to a number of scratches on his face.

Denzin (1984, p. 506) terms such abuse “paradoxical violence” as it combines and often confuses spurious, accidental, playful, and real violence, so simultaneously communicating more than one interactional meaning. So, even as NH’s wife inflicted very real corporeal harm on her husband, in bad faith she denied the violence of her intent, laughing off her actions.

Whilst some abusers proffer apologies and ask for forgiveness subsequent to abusive acts, many refuse to acknowledge any wrongdoing. When asked whether his wife had ever been

apologetic or demonstrated remorse, NH indicated that he recalled only one instance when she had acknowledged in any way that anything untoward had happened in their relationship:

There was never any sense of that, or remorse, whatsoever, except, probably 3 months after I had left, when she rang to tell me to come home and she said that she had, she admitted that she'd may be got one or two things wrong. She didn't apologise for that, but that was the only statement I ever recall her saying that might acknowledge she'd done anything at all out of the ordinary. (Interview)

Violent partners often appear to lack empathy for their victim's feelings, and the consequent anxiety, stress, pain and ill health generated by their abusive behaviour (Browne & Herbert, 1997), as reflected on many occasions in NH's diary, including this entry:

He is lying in bed on Sunday morning feeling ill. His domestic situation is worrying him and his work situation is worrying him. He is feeling despondent because of these things. His wife enters the room. "Why are you still in bed?" "I'm just tired", he replies. "Yes", she says, "guilt does make you tired". She leaves the room.

THE PATTERN OF VIOLENCE – COPING STRATEGIES

In order to live within the parameters of an abusive relationship, victims report developing a range of coping strategies and tactics. Walker (1985), for example, proposes a cycle of violence comprising three distinct phases, varying in time and intensity: tension building, acute battering and then "loving", contrite behaviour. The first of these, the "tension building" stage is when "minor" battering incidents occur, which the woman (in Walker's research) learns to control by various techniques, including anticipation of her partner's whims, staying out of the way, self-blame, and never allowing herself to feel or show anger towards the abuser. In the interviews, NH indicated having employed all these techniques, and that staying out of the way was a principal means of confrontation avoidance. Sitting out in his car, sometimes for hours on end, was a well-tried tactic, for example:

He finishes work by 11:30. Phew. Rings three times from the office and twice from the mobile to see if he can bring anything home in preparation for Christmas. She tells him off for having been at work. He brings home the turkey but gets into trouble because there is not the right stuffing at the butcher's. Once home, she tells him to "get out of the house" until 17:30, when her parents are coming round. How does this fit with him never doing anything to help? He

sits in the car on the common for three hours, getting more cold and more tired. What a way to spend Christmas Eve, he thinks.

Unfortunately, as the literature indicates, attempts at arresting or in some way controlling the cycle of violence may have the adverse effect of merely delaying or even exacerbating the second phase - "acute battering" (Walker, 1985). Analogously to Walker's abused women, NH found various techniques of managing his own anger and dealing with the stress and pain, so as not to show any anger towards his wife; a display she would undoubtedly have relished, as discussed below. NH attended meditation classes where he learnt emotion management, particularly methods for calming feelings of fear, anger, distress and despair. These techniques, however, proved to be a highly problematic response to his wife's violence, which led only to further punishment:

When she is attacking him, he often (usually reflexively) tries to calm himself with Buddhist meditation techniques that he is learning. This entails clasping the hands as if in prayer. This infuriates her as she claims that he is being facetious, praying at her. Universally this leads to his being belted again. It is unfortunate that it is reflexive with him because he is belted before he can stop it.

As Walker (1985) identifies, a further means of coping with abusive relationships is self-blame, with victims employing placatory techniques to appease their abusers and reduce the potential for conflict, even to the extent of asking what they have "done wrong" to "provoke" the violence. The son of an abused husband in Sarantakos' (2004) study, for example, described a pattern in his mother's unilateral violence where she would attack her husband usually completely out of the blue, leaving him to ask what he had done to "deserve" it. When asked as to what attempts he made to halt the violence, NH indicated that on many occasions he sought to ascertain what he had "done wrong", and even to identify what he might do differently to improve matters. The standard response would be to commence a well-known, oft-played, circular game where his wife would retort along the lines of: "Don't you *know*? Are you really so stupid?" or, "Well, if you don't know that, you really are insensitive!". Any attempt at reasoned discourse would be met with

anger at being “lectured at”, or “how dare you speak to me like one of your students!”, often further degenerating into more aggressive verbal abuse and subsequent violence.

THE EFFECTS AND STIGMA OF INTIMATE ABUSE

It appears that one of the central reasons for victims’ - whether female or male, heterosexual, Lesbian (West, 2002), or gay (Renzetti & Miley, 1996) - under-reporting of IPV to the police, social services or to friends and family, is the stigma, embarrassment and even culpability often associated with this form of abuse. A study of male victims by Gadd *et al* (2002) found that few men reported their experiences of “domestic abuse” to the police, with fear of disbelief and lack of service provision highlighted as key reasons, compounding the experience of abuse. In addition to the rationales reported by women, for men it might be argued that the requirements of contemporary “hegemonic masculinity” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) strongly censure male victimization by women, so that any admission that a man has been beaten up by his wife is an admission that one is not “really” a man (Freeman, 1979). As George (2003) also indicates, men’s *reporting* of violence, including abuse within the intimate dyad, may be highly constrained by a milieu of non-acceptance and social exclusion experienced by many victimised males. This can serve to exacerbate the shame and fear of stigmatization so that men, like women, routinely attempt to conceal injuries from others, or give false explanations for visible wounds and injuries, as exemplified by two entries in NH’s diary:

At work he is yet again questioned about his facial cuts and bruising. He again blames the dog. One of his colleagues seriously suggests that he should have the dog put down. There is a hint of anger in his voice as he says so.

More beatings tonight and facial bleeding and cuts ready for his senior management away day tomorrow. He is finding it increasingly difficult to blame the dog (to others) for all of his increasingly common facial injuries.

Being in a high profile job required of NH regular attendance at social functions as part of his occupational role. Having to face large audiences in a state of exhaustion and bearing the visible evidence of his wife’s assaults compounded the stress of an already challenging situation. The

taboo against the public visibility of the stigma of battered men's wounds and injuries has been noted in the literature (e.g. George, 2002), and this knowledge can be used by violent women as a threat of public exposure and humiliation. The quote below follows on from an incident in which NH's wife over-balanced whilst attacking him:

She picks herself up and fists him in the face... He goes upstairs to get out of the way. She follows, scratches, pokes, thumps and what he hates most now, puts both of her hands inside his mouth and pulls it open further than it will naturally go. By midnight he has a blood blister on the inside of his upper lip, a black eye and scratches to his face. By 3:00 am she wakes him to complain of her "blindness" as a result of hitting her head on the sofa. She is violent with him again and he goes to sleep on the floor in the next room in only his dressing gown. She eventually retreats to her own room. He hears the 5:00 news on the radio before he falls asleep. She wakes him again at 7:15. He has had five hours sleep, his face is stinging and he has to go and face an audience of 1,000. He cries on his way to work. He HATES his life. (emphasis in original)

In addition to the abuse *per se*, the lack of comprehension as to why it is occurring and how it might be avoided all contribute to a highly stressful situation that can be manifested in physical and psychological ill health, in addition to wounds and scars - literally the stigma of abuse. In relation to male victims, Brogden & Harkin (2000, p. 42) cite destruction of self-confidence and self-esteem, demoralisation, depression, suicidal impulses, nervous breakdown and mental instability, with sleep deprivation ranked as probably the most pervasive form of abuse. Indeed, the use of sleep deprivation appears frequently within NH's diary, as quoted above and also:

She will often come into his bedroom after he has gone to bed (sometimes after he has gone to sleep) for "a chat". This is often acrimonious and intrusive and sometimes lasts until gone 2:00 in the morning. His tiredness makes work the next day difficult. He finds this all extremely disorientating...

As Williams (2007, p. 148) notes, depriving one's partner of sleep is a way in which power relations are re/constituted in and through the control of sleep, rendering the sleep-deprived person highly vulnerable. Analogies can be made with the use of sleep deprivation in other contexts as an instrument of interrogation, punishment or torture, and the systematic use of sleep deprivation constitutes a key component of the "intimate terrorism pattern of abuse" (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000), actively used to disorientate, tire out and disempower one's partner. Furthermore, insisting on

sleeping together in the same bed, as NH's wife often did against his wishes, constitutes another form of "interpersonal contamination" (Goffman, 1976) and an unhappy reversal of the usual connotation of "sleeping together" as symbolic of love, intimacy and trust:

She allows him to bed at 12:30, insisting that she sleep in the same bed. She wakes him twice in the night by prodding him, and she is awake by 5:30. He has had five hours broken sleep and he is exhausted. He complains to her about this and she hits him full on the face again. She also tries to suffocate him with a pillow. He goes to the bathroom. He has a sore jaw, a black eye and a large bruise on his leg. On the motorway, he feels himself nodding. He pulls into a service station and dozes. He wakes an hour and a half later. He has missed the start of the meeting, but he is too tired to contribute anyway. He just can't cope with this pattern to his life.

Indeed, as Pearson (1997) notes, the results of deliberate sleep deprivation may lead not only to exhaustion and illness but to professional and economic loss, as victims may find themselves reprimanded at work or even fired from jobs due to their repeated late arrival.

"REAL MEN DON'T HIT BACK" – REASONS FOR NON-RETALIATION

Given the greater size, weight and muscular strength of men on average in comparison to women, the physical strength of (able-bodied) men is often assumed sufficient to protect them from serious physical harm perpetrated by women, and to ensure that most can "walk away" from any physically abusive relationship (Pagelow, 1985, p.186). As Hollander (2001) notes, such ideas are based in part on culturally-shared beliefs regarding gendered bodies, so that female bodies are believed to be *inherently* vulnerable because of their smaller average size and perceived lack of strength. Male bodies, in contrast, are seen as potentially dangerous because of their larger size, greater strength, and potential use as a tool of sexual violence. As Roth & Basow (2004, p 246) point out, however, women are not necessarily "naturally" weaker or at least weaker to the extent commonly believed. Yet the mythical construction of women's weakness often goes unchallenged, even by some feminist researchers. Even though on average men are bigger and stronger than women, biological-reductionist accounts do not of course explain the *deployment* of physical violence, which is dependent upon a range of cultural, social and psychological factors, not least an individual's mind-

set and willingness to resort to violence as an interactional strategy. Also, objects or potentially lethal weapons may be used as “equalizers” (c.f. Pagelow 1985, p. 179) by physically smaller or weaker individuals.

Nevertheless, the question remains as to why NH, a physically-fit, well-built and muscular man, did not retaliate in kind to his wife’s physical aggression. The literature provides a range of responses, three of which are particularly salient here: patriarchal ideology, fear of being labelled as the abusive partner, and fear of exacerbating an attack. First, in relation to patriarchal ideology, as Graham-Kevan (2007, p. 4) notes, consistent with historical conceptions of male “chivalry” are contemporary “Western” discourses of strong condemnation of male violence against women. It is thus socialised into many men from a young age that a “real man” should never under any circumstance hit a woman, whatever the provocation. As a judge in Mirchandani’s (2006, p. 791) study told a man accused of domestic violence, no matter what his wife did, hitting her would not be “manly, civilized or lawful”. Analogously, as an abused husbands in Migliaccio’s study explained, with awful irony: “It had been thoroughly beaten into me as a child that ‘real men don’t ever hit women”” (2002, pp. 34-35). In the interviews, NH indicated that his primary socialisation too had engendered an abhorrence of resort to physical violence, especially toward women; his father in particular had articulated that such an act would be deplorable.

A second reason for non-retaliation is gendered labelling in that if a man responds to female violence by behaviour in kind, even in self-defense, his behaviour is more susceptible to labelling as “wife abuse” than is hers to “husband battering” (Freeman, 1979). Sarantakos (2004) found that some abusive wives calculatedly threatened to report their husbands to the police for assaults they had never actually committed, exacerbating the abused husbands’ feelings of fear and powerlessness; a fear reflected in other research where violent wives/partners called or threatened to call the police, knowing that the latter would be unlikely to believe a man claiming to be the victim of a woman’s assault (e.g. George, 1994). Similarly, husbands in Migliaccio’s (2002) study concluded that if they struck their wife in self-defense, any visible scars or bruises would convince

others that the man was the *initiator* of the violence. This rationalisation for non-retaliation emerged strongly from NH's diary and interviews; he too indicated that retaliation by force, even displaying anger at the abuse, attempting to push his wife away or raising his arms to protect himself, permitted his wife subsequently and triumphantly to claim (which she frequently did) that *he* was the violent one:

He holds his arms up against his chest to defend himself. She loses her balance and falls back, hitting her head on the sofa. She accuses him of hitting her. This is significant as he is now [deemed to be] the violent party in the relationship. He has been waiting for this moment – that she will injure herself as a result of him defending himself and then he will become the guilty one. This point is now reached. Throughout the rest of the evening, she is saying that he is the violent one in the relationship or at best he is as violent as her. He cannot live with this new set of accusations. She will destroy him totally with her deceit if this carries on. [My comments in parentheses]

Fear of exacerbating an attack is a third reason for non-retaliation with force. Dobash & Dobash (1984) found that women responded in a variety of ways to physical abuse, for example: reasoning, crying, shouting, pushing their attacker away, and hitting back, which latter response in the main served only to increase the violence. This escalation response was also noted by Migliaccio (2002), encapsulated in the words of one interviewee, who gave up restraining his wife from attacking him because : “If I stopped her, she would get more upset and she would do it some more. So I just had to let her do it...” (p. 34). Similarly, NH explained that despite the pain and injury he suffered, he almost welcomed the physical abuse as the culmination of a bout of his wife's aggression, and just wanted “to get it over and done with”. The physical assault came almost as relief in contrast to the increasing tension and stress of psychological abuse with the pervasive threat of imminent physical violence.

The themes portrayed above represent just some of those identified in the case study data; other more psychological and emotional forms of control and abuse emerged clearly, and seemed to be employed by NH's wife as part of what Johnson & Ferraro (2000) term the “intimate terrorism pattern of abuse”, a *pattern* (rather than isolated incidences) motivated by a desire for “coercive control” and “microregulation” (Stark, 2006, p. 1021-22) of a partner's everyday life. The above

analysis of NH's account of abuse, does, however, throw into relief some interesting issues surrounding masculinity, which will briefly be examined.

DISCUSSION: ABUSED MEN AND MASCULINITIES

Whilst this paper reports on pilot stage findings from a single case study, salient themes emerged from the data, and are suggestive of some cautious theoretical generalization. In relation to "exemplary masculinity" (Connell, 1995), male victims of IPA&V might be expected to struggle both internally and externally with maintaining a masculine ideal (Migliaccio, 2001). Victimization, particularly in relation to physical abuse, seems so deeply coded as a female experience in contemporary "Western" society, that a man who finds himself victimized is "feminized" in cognitive evaluations (Howard & Hollander, 1996, p. 86). Such stereotypical gender constructions may lead to disbelief, insensitivity, even ridicule and hostility on the part of legal and health care professionals in relation to a man's claim to be physically abused (Macchieto, 1992).

Such "feminization" may apply not only to others' assessment of the male victim but also to his own construction of personal identity. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, a distinction has been made between *social* identities and *personal* identities (Snow & Anderson, 1995). Social identities are defined as those we attribute or impute to others, situating them as social "objects", whilst personal identities refer to the meanings attributed to the self and developed over time in the interactional context. Consonant with interactionist perspectives, these identities are not static, but contingent, situated, processual, fluid and changing, as indeed are masculinities and femininities themselves. Furthermore, social and personal identities can of course be oppositional. In the case of a male victim of IPA&V considerable "identity work" (Snow & Anderson, 1995) may be required to maintain an acceptable masculine social and personal identity, particularly when sustained attempts are made by an intimate significant other to discredit this identity (Allen-Collinson, 2008) as was the case with NH's marital relationship. Feelings of low self-esteem noted in the literature on abused women (e.g. Lempert, 1994) are echoed in the accounts of abused men, where verbal humiliation,

debasement and degradation are regularly and frequently cited (Migliaccio, 2002). Indeed, NH's diary entry testifies to the erosive effects of such litanies of criticism and abuse from his wife:

**"You are a useless parent" she tells him constantly.
"You are a useless cook" she says,
"You're abysmal at washing, cleaning, domestic chores"
"You're useless in so many different ways".**

She has been singing this anthem for so long that he believes it... His self-worth has all but disappeared...

In an attempt to avoid threats of emasculation, an abused man may refrain from expressing his fears, asking for help or even discussing the situation with others. In an attempt to escape the "spoiled identity" (Goffman, 1972) of male "victim", and to maintain face, some abused men may exhibit outward disregard for the physical violence inflicted upon them, attempting to laugh off or deny the seriousness of their partner's aggression and its visible manifestations, particularly in front of other men. George (1994) questions whether such denial is an attempt to escape stigmatization by using self-directed humour, noting that men may view violence towards them and the resulting injuries with little *overt* concern, whilst experiencing inward trauma, all because of the need to deny a sense of vulnerability. Whilst there has been some excellent work theorising linkages between masculinities and power, there is also a countervailing need to address and theorise more fully men's experiences of vulnerability and *powerlessness* (c.f. Seidler, 2006), including within intimate relationships. Within the literature, one of the salient effects of an ideology of "chivalric masculinity" appears to be that many abused men are determined *not* to retaliate in kind to a female partner's violence. For some men, as reflected above in NH's account, hitting a woman, even in retaliation or self-defense, would appear to run so strongly counter to deep-ingrained notions of a certain masculinity as to be entirely unacceptable, even in situations of extreme danger. The prevalence of such "chivalric" attitudes, which sit alongside other very different forms of contemporary masculinity that condone, valorise or even prescribe the use of force and violence against women (and other groups such as gay men), is certainly worthy of further research.

Given that this article presents qualitative data from one specific case study of a male victim, the findings must remain tentative and necessarily limited in generalizability. It is hoped, however, that this study in a small way begins to address a gap in the literature on male experiences of IPA&V, and provides a starting point for further investigation utilizing qualitative approaches. In terms of the invisibility/inaudibility of men's narratives of IPA&V, it has been suggested that one of the main reasons why the issue of male victimisation at the hands of an intimate female partner is accorded relatively scant academic attention is the threat it poses to masculine self-images and patriarchal authority, including within academia. The acknowledgement of unilateral male victimization by a female intimate would challenge the contemporary normative gender order, and as George (1994, p. 148) points out, is an equality between the sexes that has been resisted historically, especially by men. From this perspective, recognition of any degree of gender symmetry in terms of IPA&V victimization might be expected to generate disquiet and outcry. Such research neglect of men's "hidden" narratives (Allen-Collinson, 2008) of victimisation by female intimate partners, however, leaves uncontested, and indeed serves to reinforce two populist stereotypes and hegemonic discourses: of female weakness/vulnerability/passivity and male strength/invincibility/aggression; stereotypes that feminist (and other) researchers have long sought to contest and critique.

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