

Women Leaving Violent Men: Crossroads of Emotion, Cognition and Action

av

Viveka Enander



Akademisk avhandling

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Fakultetsopponent är Liz Kelly, CBE, Professor of Sexualised Violence,
London Metropolitan University



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

Göteborgs universitet, Institutionen för socialt arbete,
Box 720, 405 30 Göteborg

Abstract

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Author: Viveka Enander
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This thesis addresses battered women's leaving processes. Leaving is conceptualised in a wider sense, i.e. as disentanglement from violent relationships beyond the physical break-up. The *general aim* of the thesis is to study how *emotion* and *cognition* are shaped around the *act* of leaving. Feminist theory on violence against women and the sociology of emotions are the main theoretical frameworks used to enhance understanding of women's exiting from violence. The thesis is built on two sets of qualitative interview material with women who have left abusive heterosexual relationships. The material consists of a total of 49 interviews.

In Paper I, **Why Does She Leave? The Leaving Process(es) of Battered Women**, three overlapping leaving processes are described: Breaking Up, Becoming Free and Understanding. Breaking Up covers action, i.e. the physical breakup. Becoming Free covers emotion and involves release from the strong emotional bond that battered women may develop to their batterers. Understanding covers cognition and is a process that entails women defining the relationships they have lived in as abusive and themselves as victimised.

In Paper II, **A Fool to Keep Staying" – Battered Women Labelling Themselves "Stupid" as an Expression of Gendered Shame**, the informants labelling themselves "stupid" is investigated. Feeling stupid for staying in the abusive relationship and "allowing" oneself to be mistreated are the main themes. It is proposed that feeling – and labelling oneself – stupid is an expression of gendered shame and reflects unfinished Understanding processes.

In Paper III, **Leaving Jekyll and Hyde – Emotion Work in the Context of Intimate Partner Violence**, battered women's emotion work is investigated. The results suggest a process in which victims initially conceptualised abusers as good, but subjection to violence led to a cognitive-emotive dissonance responded to by emotion work. Over time, conceptualisations of abusers shifted from good to bad and efforts were made to change emotions from warm to cold.

In Paper IV, **Jekyll and Hyde or "Who is this Guy?" – Battered Women's Interpretations of their Abusive Partners as a Mirror of Opposite Discourses**, the informants' interpretations of their abusers as "Jekyll and Hyde" are analysed against the background of two opposite discourses: the pathology/deviance discourse and the feminist/normality discourse. Complex mixes and combinations of understandings were found in the informants' interpretations which were, however, dominated by the pathology/deviance discourse. During analysis of the material, a third image emerged, beyond Jekyll and Hyde, i.e. the abusers as "hurt boys"; it was argued this image might prolong the Becoming Free process and serve as a direct impediment to leaving.

The results of the thesis indicate that emotion and cognition are interconnected and in process around the act of leaving.