Monsters in the Closet: The Affective Spaces of (Not) Coming Out as a Violent Man

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Abstract

From its origins in the LGBTQ community, coming out has become a narrative genre describing the experiences of recognizing and disclosing a variety of other stigmatized positions, including that of male perpetrators of intimate partner violence. Drawing on interviews with forty-four partner-violent men in Sweden, this paper explores how closets and outcomes are both discursively and spatially produced. It analyses the affective spaces of men's coming-out stories, particularly how and where they disclose their violence, and how friends and others respond to their abuse. Violent men's coming-out stories have similarities with those of other stigmatized groups. Since they experience their violence as shameful, they find it difficult to share their experiences with others and are careful not to be seen when seeking therapeutic help. At times, rumours about their violence circulate in their workplaces and cities, which affects the men's feelings and movement in urban space. Their narratives have some unique aspects. While disclosing their violence, the men distance themselves from being categorized as violent men and their coming-out stories are not narratives of embracing a fixed identity. In addition, their narratives obscure their abuse and oppression of their victims.

Keywords

Affect; coming out; disclosure; space; masculinity; violence

Introduction

This paper explores the affective and spatial dimensions of abusive men's disclosures and the responses from family, friends and others, drawing on a study of men's narratives about their intimate partner violence (IPV) in Sweden (cf. Gottzén, 2013). The interviewed men repeatedly talked about how they were ashamed of their abusive behaviour and the challenges of disclosure. Much to my surprise, the men at times evoked "closeted" experiences; some compared themselves with alcoholics publicly acknowledging their addiction, and others referred to their disclosure in terms of coming out. As 42-year-old Urban put it, "It's almost like saying that you're sort of gay, uh, all the shame, you know. It's sort of like coming out".

Perhaps I should not have been so surprised that these heterosexual men—who, in some respects, may be described as being at the forefront of patriarchy—compared themselves with gay men. From its origins in the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) community, coming out has become a narrative genre describing the experiences of recognizing and disclosing a plethora of other stigmatized positions. One can, for instance, come out as alcoholic (Romo, Dinsmore and Watterson, 2016), autistic (Davidson and Henderson, 2010) and disabled (Samuels, 2003), to name a few. These groups have lifestyles, personal characteristics or experiences that are subject to social disapproval and consequently have been closeted. For members of such groups, coming out is not only an exit from a stigmatized position but also a confirmation of an identity and an entrance to a new, empowering community.

In the academic literature, coming out tends to be a shorthand for social processes; in this paper, I instead want to highlight how closets and outcomes may be both discursively and spatially produced (Brown, 2000). Coming out is not simply an issue of publicly communicating about your violence but also a matter of where you come out; you may come out in certain places, such as domestic violence perpetrator programmes, while remaining closeted in others, for instance the workplace. This could be seen as an expression of time-space compartmentalization in contemporary Western societies, where boundaries between different parts of life enable secrecy of what is seen as problematic behaviour (Valentine and Hughes, 2012). Outcomes and closeted experiences, I argue, affect violent men's encounters with other bodies, both in terms of how they move in space and what they feel. Spaces of coming out may be characterized by shame, as Urban's account above suggests, but they could be filled with fear, anger and frustration as well. In this paper, I also argue that, while there are similarities with other coming-out stories, considerable differences exist as the men refuse to embrace an identity as violent men and instead attempt to weakening the link between their behaviour and character. Their coming-out stories, moreover, portray them as victims of rumours, which obscures the experiences of their victims.

This paper contributes to geographies of violence against women, which during the last few decades have demonstrated how men's abuse in intimate relationships creates spatial entrapment (Warrington, 2001; Pain, 2014) and that women's fear of assault and harassment from strangers inhibits their movement in public space and enables men to present themselves as chivalrous protectors of women (Day, 2001; Pain, 2001; Sandberg, 2013). Even though the gendered spatialities of violence against women have been studied, little attention has been paid to male perpetrators' relation to space (but see Meth, 2014)—which is somewhat surprising considering that masculinity is a common topic within contemporary human geography (van Hoven and Kathrine Hörschelmann, 2005; Gorman-Murray and Hopkins, 2014). In this way, this paper also contributes to critical geographies of masculinities by exploring the affective and spatial dimensions of partner-violent men's closets and outcomes. While partner abuse is often a domestic affair, I argue that it is tied to spaces beyond the home as violent men's wider affective relationships with men and women are carried out in different locations. Inquiring into these different spaces and relationships is crucial for a deepened understanding of the relation between masculinity and violence.

Coming-out Stories, Space and Affect

LGBTQ coming-out stories have typically reported an unhappy childhood, where the source of tribulations is a strong sense of being different (Plummer, 1995). Then, the story has a turning point, where problems appear to lead to a discovery of being queer. With this, the individual's problems seem to abound; they lead a life of secrecy, with fear of being discovered and a sense of guilt or shame. These problems are then resolved, typically through meeting other LGBTQ individuals in a community where a new sense of identity is achieved. With this, the individual has the courage to come out to family and other friends (Plummer, 1995). Central to the genre is the difference between coming out to oneself, defined as an internal process where one's sexual desire is recognized, and to others, an external communicative act where the individual publicly confirms a sexual orientation (Chirrey, 2003; DiDomenico, 2015). Disclosure can be made through spoken or written language as well as through non-linguistic, semiotic means. Like other communicative processes, coming out is relational. Saying that one "is gay" may have certain effects on the thoughts, feelings and actions of the audience receiving the message, but the statement is also dependent on the audience, which may obscure or ignore the disclosure (Chirrey, 2003).

The similarities between LGBTQ coming-out stories and those of other stigmatized groups are often highlighted, and the concept has been used to explore a number of different experiences (e.g. Davidson and Henderson, 2010; Romo, Dinsmore and Watterson, 2016). Analogies may, however, obscure differences between and within groups, for instance within the LGBTQ community. While using the same narrative genre, coming out as transgender differs from coming out as homosexual (Zimman, 2009). Among gay and lesbians, coming out tends to be

understood as a lifelong process, whereas the transgender coming out—at least for those who have transitioned and whose gender identity matches with how they are perceived by others—is rather characterized by revealing a previous gender position. When applying the concept to other groups, other difficulties appear. In the LGBTQ community, coming-out stories are often a quest for living a "true" life, embracing an identity and turning shame into pride (Plummer, 1995). For other groups such as alcoholics, disclosure is instead part of an apology and a step on the way to recovery and leaving a destructive behaviour behind (Romo, Dinsmore and Watterson, 2016). Further, while LGBTQ individuals confirm their sexual orientation or gender by coming out, declaring that one is "an alcoholic" at the beginning of the Alcoholic Anonymous narrative does not mean that one drinks but rather has the "disease" of alcoholism and therefore no longer consumes alcohol (Cain, 1991). In addition, alcoholics have typically not suffered from an external structural oppression, such as homophobia or heteronormativity.

Another problem with the concept is that coming out is not as straightforward as typically presented (DiDomenico, 2015). LGBTQ individuals may be "out" and "in" simultaneously; they may disclose to some family members while remaining closeted to others (Valentine, Skelton and Butler, 2003). Coming-out stories could therefore be seen as a normative framework that obscures sexual fluidity, where sexual practices and identities are fused, and where the individual according to the script needs to choose between being straight *or* being gay in order to assume a "true" self and a healthy sexuality (Jolly, 2001).

A further issue with coming out is that it is often used as a simple shorthand which privileges the discursive above the material. In order to fully understand closeted experiences, geographers have argued that it is crucial to explore the spaces of coming out, such as queer migration processes, relations in the home when coming out and how closets are spatially produced (Brown, 2000; Valentine, Skelton and Butler, 2003; Lewis, 2013). Lewis (2013), for instance, has shown how gay people migrate from rural areas to the city in order to gain anonymity and not burden their families. However, he has also demonstrated that places do not encompass simple definitions and that the binary between homophobic rural communities and liberal metropolitan areas is far from stable.

Following Brown (2000), I explore both the discursive and spatial aspects of coming out. In his analysis of the closet as metaphor and space, he points out that the relationship between the discursive and the material is arbitrary and unstable. Life can be like a closet in certain respects, and in others not at all. The difference between discourse and materiality is not obvious; rather, metaphors, signs and language are entangled with the spatial. For instance, queer places can be spatially close heteronormative places, such as strip clubs, while remaining unseen to outsiders (Brown, 2000), since to recognize a place as queer, one needs to be able to encode the semiotic space and its "banal sexed signs" (Milani, 2014, 203). Similarly, stigmatized bodies may be coded as strange or deviant through different visual markers (Ahmed, 2000). In contrast, individuals with what Goffman (1963,

4) termed "discreditable" stigmas—which are characterized by the "blemishes on the individual character"—may pass as non-deviant since their experiences are not immediately recognized by others but are instead identified through knowledge of the person's record of experience or behaviour.

Exploring the spatialities of coming out opens up a further theorizing of the affective experiences of the closet. The relation between space and affect has been increasingly discussed within critical geography (Lim, 2007; Thrift, 2008; Anderson, 2015). Within this tradition, and following Deleuze's work (1988) on Spinoza, affect tends to be given two primary meanings: first, it refers to specific emotions and affective states characteristic of everyday life, including anger, shame, hope and fear, and, second, affect is seen as something broader than emotions, as a particular manifestation of a body's power of acting, its lived force or the action potential of bodies—its unique capacity to affect, and to be affected by, the bodies and things that it encounters (Massumi, 2002). Emotions, it is argued, are only expressing a small part of our entire registers of embodied experience; when we feel a certain emotion, all other experiences are virtually co-present as potentialities. At the same time, affect and bodily capacities are not outside culture but are always already mediated by their history; affect and emotions are therefore difficult to separate in practice (Anderson, 2015).

Geographical work on affect emphasises the affective aspects of spatial processes and thus extends Brown's (2000) discussion about the materiality of the closet. Affects are seen as experienced in bodies but emerging from diverse encounters between bodies, which may be human and non-human materialities of various kinds (Thrift, 2008), as well as the capacities that spatial encounters between bodies enable (Anderson, 2015). For instance, disclosures and coming-out stories may impact upon the audience's feelings and actions (Chirrey, 2003), or as Cameron (2012, 581) puts it, "Stories do not simply represent … they affect, they move". But when individuals reveal discreditable aspects of themselves or attempt to keep them secret, it is not only the audience that is potentially affected, but the audience may also affect the individual coming out; people may choose to stay closeted due to fear of the expected negative responses from others. In closets and outcomes, there is thus an affective relation between bodies, where previous experiences gathered in the body as habits, traumas and desires are virtually present as potentialities and may be prompted in new encounters (Lim, 2007).

Method

This paper draws on interviews conducted between 2009 and 2012 with men about experiences of their IPV (cf. Gottzén, 2013). I have used a purposive sample of forty-four heterosexual men who participated in domestic violence perpetrator programmes at five different locations in Sweden. To be eligible for participation in the study, the men had to be in treatment (or had completed treatment during the last three months) and to have been physically violent towards a female partner on at least one occasion. Programme participation was

"voluntary", that is, the men had not been sentenced to treatment but had started on their own initiative or at the request of others. Nonetheless, almost a third of the men reported that they had previously been convicted of or charged with assault and battery. All of the men said that they had been emotionally abusive and had used "moderate" physical violence (shoving, slapping, grabbing hard, etc.). About one-third had also used severe physical violence (strangling, kicking, punching, using a weapon, etc.). The majority had been physically violent on five or more occasions. The participants were aged between 17 and 66 (the average age was 36), and most men (75 per cent) were between 25 and 45. About one-third of all the participants had an undergraduate degree; two-thirds had an upper secondary diploma, while four men had only a compulsory school education (from the age of 7 to 16). About three-quarters of the men were from the ethnic Swedish majority; some were born in Sweden to at least one foreign-born parent and just three men were foreign born.

This study was inspired by narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008; Cameron, 2012). To start with, this means that I conducted narrative interviews, where the researcher's role is to facilitate and enable the informant's storytelling by asking questions about, for instance, why he started in therapy, whether he can give examples of when he has been physically violent, whom he has told about the violence and whether he can give instances of when he has disclosed his violence.

It should be noted that this is a relatively specific group of violent men, as they were in treatment more or less voluntarily and had talked about their abuse with a therapist for some time. I think that this made them willing to talk openly about their experiences and to large extent acknowledge their responsibility for their abuse. They also seem to be more communicative than violent men in previous research (e.g. Hearn, 1998). I can only speculate how their coming-out processes differ from those of abusive men not in treatment, but since the interviewed men have sought professional help they may also be more prone to seek social and emotional support from friends and families. Nevertheless, as I detail below, they are still cautious communicating about their violence with others in their informal networks.

Interviewing these men was—to put it mildly—an affective affair. As I have discussed elsewhere (Gottzén, 2013), encountering violent men was challenging and ambivalent. I often enjoyed talking with the men and empathized with their (at times) difficult life circumstances. But learning about the details of their abuse was distressing and I was upset when they first took responsibility for their violence but then minimized it. Dealing with this ambivalence, I would argue, is central to much critical masculinity studies, as it explores men's ambivalent gendered relations where they could be vulnerable and dominating at the same time.

I also interviewed five therapists from the treatment centres in order to get their perspectives on working with partner-violent men. The interviews lasted between one and two hours and were conducted at various treatment centres. The

sampling continued until the point of data saturation, that is, until no new information emerged. For the sake of anonymity, all names have been changed. The interviews were transcribed and then coded thematically, focusing on the content of the accounts, which enabled an overview of the data. I conducted a thematic narrative analysis, which means focusing on the content of the stories (Riessman, 2008), as well as an analysis of the men's narrative practices (Gubrium and Holstein, 2008), that is, how and what versions of their violence they have communicated to others. The cases presented are representable of the data as they illustrate three themes: the stories of seeking and starting treatment, stories about rumours spreading about their violence and the men's ambivalent relation to their own behaviour and the "violent men" category.

The Gate of Shame

The interviewed men repeatedly pointed out that they see violence against women as morally reprehensible, and they, therefore, would respond negatively if they learned that somebody they knew had been violent towards his partner. They assumed that others would condemn their violence as well and were, as a consequence, cautious about telling others about it (Gottzén, 2016). This carefulness also had spatial dimensions, as in 43-year-old Tomas's narrative about starting treatment.

> Lucas: What was it kind of like to start going here?
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> Tomas: The first time I thought there would be a bunch of, bunch of aggressive criminals coming here … the first time I walked in here, I looked around, making sure no one on the street saw me when I went inside. It was almost shameful coming here.
>
> …
>
> Lucas: But how did you view this as shameful? In which way?
>
> Tomas: Well, you get that label, yeah. There's a violent man going through that door who needs help.

The treatment centres are located relatively central in the cities, sometimes in the proximity of other social or health services, other times in regular office buildings. The doors have few visual signs that help outsiders to work out that they are the entrance to a treatment centre; if there is a sign, the name is often somewhat obscure, such as "Crisis Centre for Men". Such vague name refers to the broader scope of some centres (i.e. not only violence, but also "crisis" in general), but it is also an attempt to "lower the threshold" for men to seek batterer treatment. Despite this, Tomas is afraid of being seen near the centre as he believes he will when entering be recognized as what he and the other men in the study call a "violent man" or "woman batterer". Risking being seen as deviant affects his feelings, his movement in space and his relation to other bodies. In the narrative, he distances

himself from shameful bodies, the "bunch of aggressive criminals" whom he expects attend the programme. He is also wary of other bodies; he looks around the street to make sure nobody sees him enter. We can understand Tomas's narrative using Althusser's famous example of interpellation (1971/2001), where a policeman hails a person on the street. Following Munt (2007), I would argue that there are affective elements in Althusser's interpellation model. When a person is hailed by the policeman's "Hey, you there!" there is not only a discursive relation, but the scene is also filled with affect. In order for the person to turn around when addressed, there already has to be a sense of being obliged to heed the call. The turn to power is thus affective and sensorial, where the individual is not only interpellated but also experiences themself as a subject that should be addressed. Here we can see such an interpellation played out, not through a policeman's hailing, but through the assumed eyes that could see Tomas and define him as a morally reprehensible subject. In this scene, there are numerous affective possibilities (Massumi, 2002). He could, for instance, walk straight and proudly through the door or declare to everyone around where he is heading. He does neither but is vigilant as he walks around the city. If Tomas had not felt he needed to be on his guard when entering the door, he would not have experienced being the subject he becomes the very moment he looks around. His embarrassment and cautious movement by the door are thus an affective response to norms of violence and masculinity.

It was not only questionable whether outsiders would happen to see the men close to the treatment centre, but once inside they faced new challenges. For instance, Johan, 26 years of age, thought it was difficult to open up to the therapists.

> Lucas: What do you mean when you, I mean, the first thought was that it was difficult?
>
> Johan: That other people, sort of, and it's difficult, you know, even if it's, it's sort of, this is the end. Nobody runs around talking about it, but it's still difficult.
>
> Lucas: Opening up to others, you mean?
>
> Tomas: Yeah.

Even though Johan started treatment voluntarily and his coming out was only partial, it was challenging for him to disclose such a sensitive issue to others. Note that he points out that "this is the end". It is somewhat unclear what he implies, but I interpret it as referring to the treatment centre being the final destination or to his having hit "rock bottom" (Cain, 1991) and that it cannot get any worse than admitting your abuse to others. It was also challenging to start group therapy where a handful of men discuss their violence and aggression issues

together with two counsellors. According to the therapists who were interviewed, this was because the men are forced to identify with violent men.

> Yes, the first few times when you're new in the group, you're obviously nervous, and you often think that the other men are real hooligans, and you think that you've come to a group full of violent men, and you don't see yourself as one (Therapist 2).

The therapists also confirmed the men's experiences of the violence as shameful and the challenges of starting treatment.

> It's shameful, you know, since everybody knows, well everybody knows it's not okay. You're not a good person if you cross the line, and society and everybody think that, and even old working-class blokes with outmoded attitudes have some sort of code that you don't hit someone who's smaller, the ones that are weak, and so it's obvious that- our door is called the Gate of Shame because of that, and if you know that it's not okay, you are ashamed of yourself; you could say a self-loathing (Therapist 1).

According to Brown (2000), the doorway could be seen as a liminal space between the closet and the place outside. Similarly, the Gate of Shame and walking through the door to the treatment centre could be seen as a materialization of the closet doorway. There is a movement between the two spaces, between the street and the centre, that is not simply discursive; it is not only about disclosing or not disclosing your violence, but the disclosure is also spatially produced. The Gate of Shame is thus a border between being inside and outside the closet. As Anderson (2015) has pointed out, places are not inheritably characterized by specific atmospheres; rather, they have affective possibilities. A place is not shameful in itself, but the tone and quality of a place can alter, for instance depending on its materiality and the bodies passing through (cf. Gottzén, 2017). The doorway referred to as the Gate of Shame is, in other words, made shameful through the expected and actual responses to the men's violence and should be seen as an assemblage produced by different human bodies (e.g. violent men, the gaze of others), non-human bodies (e.g. the geographical position of the treatment centre, the door to the centre) and cultural norms of violence and masculinity. Further, the very naming of the doorway defines the place as deviant and the "proper" feelings when entering the treatment centre; it helps eclipsing affective possibilities, as if shame always already envelops the entrance. The imagined encounters with other bodies affect how the men move in space; they look around, careful not to be seen, since being spotted in this place, with its particular semiotic meaning, makes it difficult for them to continue to pass as "normal", non-violent men.

The Rumour Capital

The men's fear of how others perceive them is not only apparent when they start treatment; it is also visible in their narratives about how they have been "outed". As mentioned, the men in this study communicated about their abusive behaviour with at least someone in their social network, but when doing so they seldom detailed the violent events (cf. Gottzén, 2016). The risk of communicating about the abuse was that rumours about their behaviour could spread among their families and friends, and in their neighbourhoods and workplaces. Rumours could also spread by local news or when the abuse became a matter for legal authorities or social services. While coming to the treatment centre seems to be primarily related to experiencing shame, narratives about rumours and being "outed" rather evoke fear, anger and frustration.

The rumours about 31-year-old Ingmar's violence, particularly against his son, spread in his small town, which he calls "the Rumour Capital". When asked what the rumours were about, he replies rhetorically, "What sort of bullshit hasn't come from here?" He goes on to say, "It was everything from how it'd happened to what I'd done, and anything from I'd beat him until he bled. I've heard so many things". Calling his hometown the Rumour Capital depicts it as a place where it is impossible to keep a secret such as domestic violence behind closed doors and where news of his abuse has spread far beyond the privacy of his home. Other men in the study had similar experiences and argued that different stories about their violence existed: one about what "really" happened and a number of "false" versions that flourished. When Johan confided in his closest friend about his experience, a series of rumours started. His friend talked about the abuse with another friend, and soon most of Johan's friends new about it.

> The worst thing when these rumours start is that they often escalate a bit all the time and then suddenly you really beat the hell out of her, you know. And I know that in reality it wasn't like that.

Johan argues that he is the only one who knows the truth about his abuse. In the interview, he admits that he has shoved her and thrown things at her. He however has issues with others learning about this, since he thinks that the "facts" get distorted and blown out of proportion when they start to circulate. He argues that his girlfriend's role is omitted and that his violence was due to certain circumstances, such as that his antidepressants make him "cold" and aggressive.

Twenty-three-year-old Emil argues that his girlfriend is the source of the rumours, and he differentiates between his own and her version of his violence. He willingly admits that he has been aggressive and grabbed her violently several times, but he would not call his actions assault or battery. When he told his friend about the violence he felt "very naked and you feel very stupid and feel some sort of shame and anxiety". In contrast, he expresses frustration when talking about the rumours.

There are two things a woman or girl in our society could say that no one questions, but everyone has a fucking clear idea about what happened. One is if she cries rape and the other if she cries assault. People won't ask any questions, but a big lynch mob forms because everybody already knows what happened, and because of that, I find it really hard that Anna can't see the delicacy of all of this, but she's open and talks with everyone; she says it's battery. And she could do that of course if that's what she thinks and feels, but I get into big trouble because people seriously think that I've assaulted her, beating her several times all black and blue. And that perhaps there's a police report and everything, so that really bothers me.

He sees himself as a victim of the rumours, he argues, his girlfriend is spreading.

It makes me really angry and frustrated of course. Particularly when you hear that, oh well, now she's told my boss. She can't see it's a delicate matter. She can't see that the situation can make me a hapless victim as well, but she only sees herself as a battered victim. And with time, the assault gets worse in her eyes, or becomes. So I obviously feel really- It feels like she doesn't show me any respect.

According to Goffman (1963), people with "discreditable" stigmas could easily pass as non-deviant since the problematic behaviour is not easily recognized. Since it is difficult to visually identify an abusive man (as he does not have a visible stigma), information about his behaviour is decisive. If people learn that Emil has beaten his girlfriend "black and blue all over", he will no longer easily pass as non-violent but instead will represent the deviant category of violent men, something that may cause him "big trouble". His main problem is that rumours are spreading in the local martial arts club where both he and his girlfriend are active. According to him, if people believe in her version, he will have difficulties continuing as an instructor since they have a non-violence policy. Martial arts clubs often have strict rules about which forms of contact are acceptable, against whom (e.g. only contestants and sparring partners) and where, that is, only in places where surveillance of rule-following is secured (e.g. in the ring, on the mat) (cf. Channon 2013). Violence thus becomes a matter of being practiced in the proper place: the gym, but when carried out in the wrong places, such as the street or the home, it is condemned and the consequence may be that he is not welcomed to the gym anymore. Emil discredits his girlfriend's story by portraying it as exaggerated, false and constantly changing, which enables him to present himself as a "hapless victim" and argue that his girlfriend is disrespectful. Enacting victimhood also helps him to demonstrate comprehensible feelings; the proper response to her public slander is being angry and frustrated.

Rumours affect how people respond as well as the men's relationships and movements in their cities, neighbourhoods, workplaces and schools. According to some men, learning of their violence made friends and colleagues turn against them. Seventeen-year-old Oskar assaulted his girlfriend at school, which made other pupils "look at me strangely", said Oskar, "they think that I've battered Lisa. That it was worse than it was, but, uh, they just believe a lot of crap". When asked how he experienced these responses, he recounts a party where some guys threatened him.

> Oskar: We were at this party, and some guys from [the village] where she lives came, and they came up to me and started arguing and said that I assaulted Lisa, several times, and they sort of wanted to kill me because I'd done it, and then I said that, 'that's not what happened; it was just a slap'. And they just said, 'No'; so I don't know, it's hard when they come up like that. You don't know what to say because they don't believe you really.
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> Lucas: So they threatened to beat you?
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> Oskar: Yeah, because I assaulted her, but I don't think I've done it; I just wanted to show that enough is enough. But the others think it's assault.

Oskar's narrative highlights how other people's getting wind of the violence not only affects the men's perceptions of what others think of them but also their encounters with other bodies and what these bodies are able to do. Arguing that he had assaulted his girlfriend, some young men presented themselves as chivalrous protectors of women (cf. Day, 2001), threatening him and, at least at this particular party, inhibiting his movement. In the narrative, Oskar distance himself from what he sees as the other boys' false accusations that he has assaulted his girlfriend. Instead, he argues that it has not been "assault" and that his violence was a proper response to her cheating on him. Rumours may be crucial to how affective space is produced. It affects the men's feelings—they may experience shame, fear, anger and frustration—as well as their movement in urban space (Gottzén, 2017). While being outed primarily caused fear and frustration for Emil and Oskar, 31-year-old Lars experienced shame and embarrassment when his violence became local news. He argues, "I have difficulty going outside now. I think it's damn embarrassing … you're seen as a woman batterer and that's the worst thing you could be". Similarly, 43-year-old Jimmy narrates how his abuse became local news, and as the rumours about his abuse spread in his hometown and on the Internet, he was finally forced to leave town and hide in his summer house. While experiencing different affective states, all these men's movements became restricted as a consequence of others' real and assumed responses. Just like when the men start treatment, they do not want to be seen as violent men or outed as woman batterers since, as Emil puts it, they risk having "a lynch mob" after them.

Even though he is ashamed of what he has done, he argues, "I'd rather lay bare everything" so others learn the "true picture, my picture", rather than trust rumours.

Violent Men Anonymous?

Considering the embarrassment at their violence and the rumours spreading about their behaviour and how it affects their spatial encounters with others, it is perhaps not surprising that the men in this study are rather reluctant to disclose their violence. Yet, they feel an urge to talk about their experiences in order to get support and help from friends. The therapists that I interviewed also encourage them to seek emotional support and develop disclosive relationships with others as they believe this will help the men deal with their aggression issues. The men have therefore told at least someone they know. While the men seem to be more communicative than violent men in previous research (e.g. Hearn, 1998), the quality of their disclosures can be discussed. They seldom detail what has happened; rather, they say that they have been "threatening" or "aggressive" and emphasize that they are in a crisis or depressed or that their partners have left them (Gottzén, 2016). Only a handful of men have completely disclosed their abuse. Some of these men have told their entire workplace, others have told more or less all their friends and family in relative detail (Gottzén, 2016). Twenty-seven-year-old Anton, who is one of the few, told his entire workplace immediately after he was released from custody for assaulting his girlfriend. Since he had been absent from work for several days, rumours had started to spread, he learned from his boss. He argues that he was honest about his assault, but that he was afraid of how his colleagues would respond. Some were condemning, but most have been supportive because, as he argues, he dared to speak sincerely about what he had done and also because he has "dealt with" his issues by seeking treatment. This suggests that the person coming out is not only judged by the content but also by the way he discloses the information and what actions he is undertaking to address the issues. It also illustrates that while going to treatment often is difficult, it may be used as a way to present oneself as intelligible and manage assumed negative reactions from others.

Daniel, 45 years of age, argues that he has been "pretty open about it" and told most of his friends. He has also, anonymously, been interviewed in newspapers and on the radio, and he has thought about lecturing on men's violence.

> I thought a lot about starting to work on it and lecturing because, because I think that one should deal with all men, not all, you can't reach all, but men who batter. Because there's so many victims. So I was thinking that I should damn well lecture about it. And then it would've come out anyway that I've beaten women. It wasn't anything I kept quiet about. … I thought much about how society judges the many batterers, uh, really hard on woman batterers and I, I thought that, I compared with twenty-five years ago; it wasn't okay to go to the shrink, but today it's alright; they even encourage you to

have a therapist; it's good for everyone. And then I guess I thought that this needs to get the same status; you simply need to come out in order to make it okay to get help. Somebody has to start; it could be me.

In the interview, Daniel also says that for a long time he did not acknowledge his own violence or talk about it with others, but how after his separation, he realized he needed help with his abusive behaviour and therefore sought professional help and support from his friends. His argument for coming out to others, apart from his closest friends, is to reach out to abusive men and in that way help victims of violence. He points out that society often judges violent men and compares with what he considers another stigmatized experience, namely seeking psychological help in general. He was willing to open up in order to make it easier for violent men to seek help. While his aim is to help violence victims, his analogy between partner abuse and psychological problems simultaneously obscures that IPV is a criminal offence and a way to dominate women in intimate relations. He still ponders whether he should go public but has not done it since he thinks that he is not "ready" yet. He adds that nowadays he is less candid about his abusive past and is careful not to mention it to everybody since he does not want to "constantly come out and reveal" himself (cf. Romo, Dinsmore and Watterson, 2016).

After repeatedly listening to the men alluding to the outcomes of stigmatized groups, I asked the therapists whether they saw similarities between their clients' experiences and those of, for instance, recovering alcoholics. They were reluctant to make such comparisons.

I think there's a bloody big difference between the two because it assumes that you're ill … I'm an alcoholic; either I'm a sober alcoholic or I'm an active alcoholic. We used the term violent men for many years and stopped doing so about six-seven years ago [arguing] that you're not a violent man; you are a man using violence. So I think that if you're going to have a similar Violent Men Anonymous, it would imply that you're not currently active but always violent, so to say; that wouldn't be good, I think. I rather think that you shouldn't; you could have networks for different things, but I don't think so for addicts, since it would emphasize the inner experience that 'Yeah, I'm still violent; it's just that I am coping right now; it's just a matter of time; I'll do it again' (Therapist 4).

The therapist's distinction between "a violent man" and "a man using violence" is ontologically important as the former refers to a pathological character

defined by his behaviour and the latter weakens this relation. The therapists do not want the men to embrace an identity as violent men but as "normal" men who in certain circumstances have resorted to violence. The therapists make this distinction to help the men move away from violence, since they believe embracing a violent identity will make it harder for them to desist. But this corresponds to the men's distancing from the monstrous woman batterer figure, and therefore supports their reluctance to acknowledge their patterns of violence and control—and hence not being "proper" violent men. It is therefore questionable whether men like Daniel could be seen as violent men but rather, following Deleuze and Guattari (1987), are "becoming" violent men. Becoming is the movement between different subjects, in this case the movement between being a "normal" man who has used violence and a pathologically violent man who will explode anytime. According to Ahmed (2000), there is always a certain degree of fantasy in becoming, a desire of being the Other and it is highlighted in the proximity of the Other. In Ahmed's work, the fantasy is projected towards a positively charged identity, as in her analysis of the Kevin Costner character, John Dunbar, in the 1990 blockbuster film *Dancing with Wolves*. His encounter with the Sioux sparked curiosity in, and a desire to be, the ones he previously saw as his Others, which fractured his identity as a soldier. For the men in this study, the relation to the Other is much more problematic; encountering the violent man is a nightmare rather than a fantasy. Even though they have all been physically violent towards their partners, they refuse to define themselves as violent men or woman batterers, even when they start recognizing their behaviour as violent. Yet, as a consequence of the intimate relation between their behaviour and that of a violent man, they are constantly drawn to this Other. They describe themselves, paradoxically, as moving away from a position as violent men while not seeing themselves as ever belonging to that category of men. It is therefore disputable whether they could be seen as ever having been violent men but rather as constantly moving between their understanding of themselves (and their therapists' understanding of them) as normal, non-violent men and violent men. So even if they may acknowledge and disclose their abusive behaviour, they never fully come out and embrace an identity as violent men, particularly not outside the treatment centre.

Monsters in the Closet

This paper has explored relations between masculinity and violence by focusing the affective and spatial dimensions of partner-violent men's disclosures and the (assumed and actual) responses from family, friends and others. As shown, the men often evoke different "closeted" positions and at times even compare communicating about their abuse with that of coming out as homosexual. Violent men's coming-out stories are, in many respects, similar to the narratives that other stigmatized groups present. For instance, their secrecy is at times based on an experience of shame that affects their relations to other bodies in space. Like LGBTQ youth (Valentine, Skelton and Butler, 2003), the men in this study come out to some friends and family members but not to others; some men are

outspoken, but the majority are seldom completely open about their abusive behaviour. They come out in certain places, such as the treatment centre, while remaining closeted in others (cf. Brown, 2000). They also say that people's knowing of their abuse inhibits their movement in public space as they assume and experience negative, and at times violent, responses. Similar to recovering alcoholics (Romo, Dinsmore and Watterson, 2016), they may for a period be open about their violence but decide not to come out to new friends or girlfriends. Taking these experiences into account, violent men seem to be yet another stigmatized group that evokes the LGBTQ coming-out story.

There are, however, major differences between violent men's coming-out stories and those of other stigmatized groups. Rather than being stories of a desire to disclose and confirm a secret experience or disposition, the men narrate their attempts to continue passing as non-violent and to keep their monstrous behaviour in the closet. While they come out to their therapists, other men at the treatment centres and some friends and family members, acknowledging and disclosing their abuse are not a process where they embrace an identity as a violent man in all places. They do not see or present themselves as violent men but rather as "normal men" who have used violence and through therapy are moving away from this. This form of outcome, where the individual discloses a stigmatized behaviour but does not embrace an identity, is somewhat unique, at least compared to the coming-out stories of LGBTQ members, alcoholics and many disabled people (Valentine, Skelton and Butler, 2003; Samuels, 2003; Romo, Dinsmore and Watterson, 2016).

This relates to another crucial difference from other coming-out stories, where silence and secrecy have been shown to be an oppressive aspect of the closet (Brown, 2000). In contrast, for violent men, silence could be a way to continue to exercise power and to abuse, and it is often in their best interest that the violence remains a private matter or that only their version of events is communicated. Secrecy about the violence may thus not necessarily be an issue of shame. One could remain in the closet for many reasons, out of shame but also to keep certain practices hidden without necessarily experiencing any form of embarrassment. Voluntary disclosure could then be a strategy to gain information control (Goffman, 1963), to be in charge of what others know so that they trust the men's stories rather than the rumours about their behaviour. At times, survivors may also want to keep the abuse secret in order to avoid stigmatization, since they could be blamed for the violence or for having chosen an abusive partner (Fiene, 1995). The men in this study never expressed a wish for others to learn about their behaviour, because of the fear of being seen as violent men, but realized they needed to communicate about it to others and to come out in certain places, such as the treatment centre, in order to change.

Following Brown's (2000) argument that closets and outcomes are discursively and spatially produced, this paper has explored the relation between space, violence and masculinity. Intimate partner violence is not simply a matter about men's relationships with their wives and girlfriends but also concerns how

relatives, friends, colleagues and others may respond. In this way, it extends beyond the primary site of the abuse—the home—and into a number of different spaces, such as the street, the treatment centre, the gym, the school and Facebook. In her study of poor men in South Africa, Meth (2014) demonstrated that violence could be omnipresent and argued the need to see the relation between men's domestic abuse and their exposure to violence in the street. For the men in this study, violence was not omnipresent in the sense that they were vulnerable to violence outside the home (though some men had been threatened by others), but rather that they were reminded of their own abuse when encountering others in different locales. As they were highly aware of cultural norms of masculinity, where partner abuse is seen as reprehensible, they were concerned about how others would perceive them and therefore cautious about where they came out. This suggests that coming-out stories have affective dimensions; communicating about your violence, or others learning about it, affects the men's movement, their encounters with others and their affective states. I have identified two primary forms of narratives. In stories about seeking therapeutic help, the men primarily expressed shame and how coming to the treatment centre was difficult due to fear of what others would think of them if being seen at such a place. When rumours about their violence spread in their cities and the men were "outed" against their will, they instead tended to narrate experiences of frustration and fear. In both cases, other's knowledge—or potential knowledge—about their abuse restricted their movement in space and affected their relation to other bodies. Further, as noted, few men "come out" in the same sense that coming out is for queer people, where a quest for an identity is pivotal (cf. Knopp, 2004). The men in this study may evoke different stigmatized positions and coming out—as a narrative genre— seems to be a resource to make their experiences of secrecy and disclosure intelligible. We however need to be cautious about making simple analogies as they may not only obscure differences between groups—such as between heterosexual men, who may choose non-disclosure due to fear of what others might think of their partner abuse, and gay and lesbians that stay closeted due to fear of being exposed to homophobia and hate crimes—but also simplify complex relations of power. Partner-violent men may experience hostility and threats and it is important to acknowledge their fear of communicating about their abuse in order to understand and support their attempts to change. Coming out is therefore an alluring narrative metaphor that violent men use to explain their experiences of stigma and spatial encounters with other men and women, but it simultaneously obscures their violence as it foregrounds the vulnerability of the violent man at the expense of their victims' experiences. It also contributes to keeping IPV a domestic and private matter since it supports and reproduces a culture of silence where men choose not to be candid about their abuse with others, or only communicate about it in certain, secluded places such as domestic violence perpetrator programmes.

Acknowledgements

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