



EXAMPLE OF BI-DIRECTIONAL DYNAMIK

Anneli and Patricia from the perspective of both women

The interviews with both women took place in July 2007. When the interviews took place, they had been in a relationship for 18 months but had known each other for around 12 years. During this time Patricia was married, but began an “affair” with Anneli; she stresses that “this then became more serious”. Because Patricia saw her marriage as being in jeopardy, she broke off contact and then re-established it approximately two years prior to the interview. Patricia is physically disabled as the result of an accident. This occurred only a year before the interview, which means that it took place during the partnership. Prior to this, she was a “full-time working woman with complete freedom of movement”. Patricia works in the finance sector, Anneli in the social welfare area. Anneli is in her late 30s and Patricia in her mid 40’s.

Both women described their own violence and that of their partner. At the time of the interview the last physical attack lay two weeks in the past. Looking back, both women describe an increase in the severity of violence during the course of their relationship.

Anneli and Patricia describe the most recent violent situation as follows:

The women visited a street festival together. While there, they consumed a “relatively large amount” of alcohol. A conflict arose in which Anneli “felt abandoned”. Following a verbal dispute, the couple decided to go home. They travelled by public transport, but each in a different compartment. Anneli went home but her partner didn’t follow. According to Patricia, in contrast, Anneli had “left her alone” on public transport because she didn’t accompany her as she went ahead to one of the front compartments. This so annoyed her that she didn’t disembark at their usual station but travelled several stations further. Anneli was “very worried”, particularly as Patricia is physically disabled. When Patricia arrived home two hours later, it came to a renewed exchange of “verbal abuse”, which then escalated. Finally she “let loose on” Patricia; she “shook” and berate her. The women then hit each other, though Anneli says that she was “more aggressive” with Patricia. As a consequence Patricia left the house. Anneli was afraid of losing her and followed her. She climbed into the taxi after her, however the taxi driver refused to drive the two women. Either he or Patricia called the police who issued Anneli with a “restraining order”.

However, Anneli “did not take this seriously” and returned to the site of the incident. The police officers placed themselves in front of Patricia and Anneli attempted to “push past them”. Finally, Anneli attacked the officers, punching and kicking them. As a result, she was “hand-cuffed” and brought to the watch house. There she “continued to run amok for a while” because in her opinion she had been unjustly treated. A court case was pending at the time of the interview. Both women were concerned with how this could be averted for Anneli.

Anneli reported that in the dispute with her partner, she felt “helpless” because Patricia comes and goes and simply does what she wants. At the same time, she was afraid of losing her partner. Both statements can be interpreted as the perception of loss of control. In describing herself, Anneli stated that jealousy was a “big issue” for her. She gave the grounds for her

jealousy as her uncertainty in respect to Patricia. She had experienced her as “inconsistent” in the beginning and stated that she had no trust in the partnership. She reasoned that her lack of trust was due to Patricia’s late coming-out. She had “very strongly confronted” Patricia with this apprehension on several occasions. It can be assumed that this interpretation was intended to place a quite serious conflict into a milder light and that she repeatedly sought confirmation of her perception from her partner Patricia. However Patricia felt affronted and hurt, and was very exasperated

Later, Anneli related that she had not been violent in the past year but that it repeatedly came to attacks from Patricia. Three months earlier, a dispute had arisen about Anneli’s jealousy, during which Patricia physically attacked her. In conclusion she described the situation as “they both heftily let loose at each other”. She was no longer clear who had struck first. Both women carried haematoma from this incident. In another situation that lay only a month in the past, Patricia had thrown glasses at her at a public celebration. Anneli was surprised at the intensity of Patricia’s aggression towards her. She had not expected Patricia to lose control in public. But even before this Patricia had repeatedly hit her, “thrashed out around herself” and bit her on the finger or leg, and pulled her hair. Anneli described Patricia’s attacks as “impulsive eruptions” that she believed she would be able to control “I’ll manage that somehow, get a handle on it”. This statement suggests that she was of the opinion that she could control her partner’s behaviour. This attitude is associated with a sense of superiority over her partner.

Further, Anneli reported that she was ashamed of her violent behaviour and only related the details of what happened to those friends who would respond with “understanding”. She “naturally didn’t describe the situation in such detail” to the others since “they had totally different perspectives”.

This allows the assumption that Anneli is aware of her wrongdoing and attempts to avoid criticism by being selective about the information she passes on to different people.

In contrast Patricia assessed the violence exercised by Anneli against the background of her disability. She felt physically inferior to her partner. She perceived the violence as unpredictable and uncontrollable, it “just comes over her”. She was extremely frightened in this situation and felt helpless but was also extremely angry. She described her fear as the “mortal fear”.

Patricia had the impression that the duration between attacks had become shorter and the violence had become more severe since they moved in together. She described her partner Anneli as controlling, for example she had searched her room for signs of infidelity. Patricia reported that she remained in the partnership because didn’t want Anneli “to be left alone again” and believed she could gain control over the violent dynamic.

Patricia described herself as less jealous, which Anneli in turn interpreted as a lack of love. However, she also rationalised her own jealousy in that she limited this to incidents that were “justified”. In her jealousy, she was verbally abusive, i.e. made “biting comments”, belittled the supposed rival and then withdrew. This took the form of her “disappearing for a few days”. This behaviour was interpreted by her partner, on the other hand, as “punishment”.

Finally, Patricia reported on her assault on Anneli. At a public celebration, she threw a glass at her partner and knocked over several bottles and created a “huge scene due to her jealousy”.

Anneli tried to touch her, in response to which Patricia violently slapped her face. She described what happened as “swept once to the left and right”. Finally “it all blew over” and both went home. In the description of what happened, Patricia played down her violent behaviour retrospectively by describing the end of the incident as “blown over”. The expression “swept”

suggests that she assumes that she didn't seriously hit her partner, but was abusive in a milder form.

In the other physical conflicts that were described, Patricia perceived herself as acting in response to Anneli. For example, Anneli was the first to "push" and "shake" her. But then Patricia had "pushed back" and slapped her partner's face. She also bit her partner because she had grabbed her. However, Patricia did mention that her readiness to use violence increased under the influence of alcohol. In addition, Patricia's attack also appears to have its own motivation, namely hurt, rejection and fear of loss.

The interview with Anneli was characterised by long pauses, her statements appeared carefully weighed and considered. The result was the impression of a selective description that shrouded the extent of the violence. Patricia in turn appeared "schooled in psychology" and attempted above all to find an explanation for her partner's violent behaviour. For example, she described this as "dissociation". This perception allows the assumption that Patricia did not wish to alter her image of Anneli and could only integrate the experience of violence if she viewed it as not belonging to Anneli.

The manner in which Patricia's interview progressed invites the assumption that she placed the victim experience very much in the foreground. First toward the end of the interview did she disclose her own violent behaviour without describing it directly as such. She perceived her own violence as the response to prior events that were caused by her partner. Anneli, on the other hand, saw the reason for the escalation of violence in Patricia's behaviour, which provoked it through assault with an object.

Anneli witnessed violence in her family of origin as a child. Her parents divorced when she was seven years old. She described her mother as an alcoholic. Both women reported the excessive consumption of alcohol in the partnership. Anneli said that she needed alcohol to calm herself down and to "make situations tolerable". In contrast, Patricia found that alcohol consumption had a disinhibiting effect on the conflict and so contributed to the escalation of violence. In terms of her life history, Patricia reported that violence had influenced her life both as a person who has experienced violence and as one who has exerted violence. Her father was violent, she has had a violent boyfriend, and her sexual boundaries have been abused by men on several occasions. In addition to her experience as a victim, she reported numerous incidents of assault where she herself has slapped, punched and thrown objects. However, she regards her attacks as acts of "defence". Her perception of herself as a victim is reinforced by her earlier experience of violence and her physical disability.

Patricia and Anneli accept no responsibility for their violence and each sees its cause in her partner's behaviour. They are deeply insecure and both hold a deep distrust of their partner. The indicated jealousy is an expression of this and an associated form of controlling behaviour. Simultaneously, when the violence is exerted they feel powerless and incapable of controlling their behaviour. It is evident that power and control are the driving forces in the relationship. Control is demonstrated here as direct controlling behaviour but also as an apparent concern for the other's welfare. The fear indicated by Patricia is limited to specific situations. The dynamics of violence in the relationship are characterised by their bi-directional nature and the increase in the severity of violence over time.

Both women wish to assert their wishes and expectations of the relationship, whereby the violence used is above all an expression of exasperation and powerlessness. They attempt to find protection, stability and security in the relationship; they want to grow old together and to place their combined strength in the foreground. The wishes that they have realised in the relationship and in the partner are the foundation that holds the couple together: Both women maintain the partnership because they have not given up the hope of being able to realise their expectations.

The conflicts arise from the perception of the differences that separate the women and generate the fear of loss in both women. The conflict results in violence when they cease to seek that which binds but rather to subject what is experienced as divisive, either symbolically or in real terms, to destruction.