WHAT SOCIAL NETWORKS DO IN THE AFTERMATH OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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Claims that domestic violence is best deemed a 'hidden crime' tend to equate being hidden with non-disclosure to social services, the police or other criminal justice professionals. However, the social worlds of domestic violence victims are much more intricate than this. Family, relatives, friends and neighbours usually form the immediate social world of domestic violence. They can be regarded as a 'response network' that may be mobilized in the aftermath of domestic violence. This article focuses on the analysis of three women's narratives about what happened in their social networks in the aftermath of violence. In all three cases, the culturally based understanding of how to deal with unacceptable behaviour in the social network constituted a framework for the response action. The analysis shows how social networks can be both responsible enough to intervene in the violence and responsive enough to recognize how the violence affects women and their children.

Key words: domestic violence, intimate partner violence, narrative of abused women, social network analysis

Introduction

Following ground-breaking feminist research in the 1970s and 1980s (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Kelly 1988), it has become common to claim that violence perpetrated against women by marital or opposite-sex cohabiting partners is so under-reported that domestic violence is best deemed a 'hidden' crime (Novisky and Peralta 2015). Hence, academic studies of women's help-seeking behaviours have tried to find reasons why women do not report to the police (Meyer 2010; Barrett and St. Pierre 2011; Jordan 2012; Novisky and Peralta 2015). In response, local and national governments have championed measures to encourage reporting through marketing campaigns, such as those first promoted by the Zero Tolerance Trust in Scotland (Gadd *et al.* 2004), and through safety planning using risk assessment tools that help identify women vulnerable to coercive and controlling behaviour (Au *et al.* 2008). In the policy domain, such initiatives equate being 'hidden' with 'being unreported to social services, the police or other criminal justice professionals'. It is argued that 'hidden' violence against women increases women's isolation, as well as the power imbalance in their intimate relationships (Stark 2007) and that further efforts must be made to persuade women to disclose violence to the authorities.

Yet while such a position is often assumed to originate in feminist research, many feminist studies actually show the reverse (Klein 2012). Most women and girls who have experienced domestic violence first tell someone they trust in their social network. Most of those who have been victimized marshal as much, possibly more, support over the long term from informal networks than from formal services (Dobash and Dobash

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1979; Kelly 1996). Hence, what is 'hidden' from the police and social services is rarely 'hidden' from abused women's circles of relatives and friends. Such research reveals the unequivocal importance of the responses that emanate from women's social networks. Even if violence towards women in intimate partnerships with men occurs 'behind closed doors' (Straus *et al.* 1981), the violent acts are not isolated incidents taking place in a social vacuum. On the contrary, they take place in specific social contexts, formed by family, relatives, friends and neighbours, i.e. in social relations between people that form a social structure that can be viewed as a 'social network'. As Walklate (2007: 28) has pointed out, 'becoming a victim is neither a simple nor a straightforward act'. It is a highly complex process encompassing the interaction between offender and victim, the victim's reaction to the offence (Dignan 2005; Walklate 2007) and, in some cases, further interactions between the victim and the criminal justice system. Becoming a victim involves a process that includes the individual recognizing his or her victimization and significant others socially validating and politically acknowledging that (Campbell 2005; Flood and Pease 2009; Fox and Cook 2011).

This article is concerned with what happens in abused women's social networks in the aftermath of domestic violence. It draws on three interviews from a study of 30 women that explored the responses of their social networks to their exposure to violence by marital or opposite-sex cohabiting partners. I will take the claim that domestic violence is best deemed a 'hidden' crime as a point of departure. I will ask in each case is the violence hidden? And if so, from whom? Who knows what? Does one person know more than the rest, and in that case, how is he or she positioned? Do some people act as 'gate-keepers' who control which information is shared? Does some act as distributers of information inside and outside of the network? How does this related to whether the authorities are contacted, when and by whom?

I first locate the article theoretically and methodologically, before giving a brief overview of how I performed the interviews and carried out the analysis. I then present the analysis of the three cases, before returning to the wider relevance of social networks in the concluding part of the article.

Theoretical and Methodological Approaches

Hitherto, inquiries about intimate partner violence have focused on the violent act as such, including the perpetrator, the victim and the process of victimization. The study of the causes of violence and the effects of it on victims has been of particular interest to criminologists and psychologists alike. As a consequence, few have studied the actions that emerge in the surrounding social world by way of response to domestic violence and the unfolding impacts these responses have. This article can be read as a contribution to opening up this line of study.

I will use a term I have introduced recently (Hydén 2016), namely the 'response network'. As I have conceptualized it, a response network is *a sociocultural structure of relationships of people bound by their actions in response to marital or cohabiting partnership violence in their social network, embedded within a specific context of time and space.* Family, friends, neighbours and sometimes social workers and the police may be included in a response network. Just as it is not 'a simple and straightforward act to become a victim' (Walklate 2007: 28), the development of a response network is a complex process. Depending on the number of people, the frequency of the violence, the degree of concurrence and

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conflict, and the capacity among the network members to deal with violence, it forms a more or less enduring, but sometimes versatile, structure. Some more distant parties, like the police or social services, are pulled in on particular occasions, while others, like close family, might be a constant. Although a response network can be hard to identify due to its fluctuating patterns of relations, I view it a useful term for keeping the analytical focus on the 'hidden' social contexts through which the aftermath of violence is played out.

Since the 1980s, the study of personal narratives has been the focus of considerable interest in the social sciences. Bruner's (1987) powerful metaphor 'life as narrative' suggested that personal, social and cultural experiences are constructed through the sharing of stories. In the 1990s, a 'narrative turn' (Hyvärinen 2010) in sociology led many researchers to suggest human lives could be better understood through the stories people tell (Mishler 1979; 1986; 2004; MacIntyre 1981; McAdams 1988; Polkinghorne 1988; Riessman 1990; 2008). I have let myself be informed by narrative analysis, and I have been part of the 'narrative turn', including the feminist efforts within it to give better voice to the stories of women living with multiple oppressions (see Squire *et al.* 2014). But because of my analytical interest in studying *responses* to violence and their impact on abused woman, analysing only the structure of the narratives was never an option for my study. I approached the narratives I elicited from victims of domestic violence as a means for understanding both what happened in women's response networks in the aftermath of violence and what these responses meant to them.

My methodological approach to social network analysis bears relations to the early Manchester School of Social Network Analysis and the predecessors of that tradition. In the 1950s and 1960s, ethnography and interview studies were introduced in social network research, such as Barnes' (1954) study of social class structures in Norwegian fishing villages, Mitchell's (1969) study of networks in African towns and the classic study of London families by Bott (1957). Quantitative studies were undertaken first in the 1970s, and have progressed substantially since (Scott and Carrington 2011; Burt *et al.* 2013), partly because of the application of statistical software package like UCINET (Borgatti *et al.* 2002) and Stata (Grund and Hedström, forthcoming) that provide extensive data management and analysis capabilities. Few researchers choose to study social networks using qualitative methods (Heath *et al.* 2009). This has prompted calls for more qualitative and/or mixed methodological approaches to the study of social networks (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994; Emirbayer 1997; Mische 2003; Fuhse 2009; Crossley 2010; Belotti 2013).

Data Collection

Over the years of researching domestic violence, I have generated a way of interviewing I have called 'teller-focused interviewing'. This form of interviewing is oriented towards narration. Only a few topics are decided on in advance. In order to support and facilitate narratives, teller-focused interviews are based on a dialectical way of thinking about the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewed as partners with different tasks and responsibilities in the interview (Mishler 1986). The model includes a series of strategies for establishing a relational safe space, supporting the teller, bridging the gap between experiencing and knowing, and dealing with the power between the interviewer and the interviewed (see further Hydén 2014).

In order to get an overview of the response network structure in the aftermath of domestic violence, and to facilitate narration, I gave the women I interviewed an outline for a 'response network map'. I then asked them to situate themselves in the middle of the map as the 'I' looking out at to proceed with filling it in (see Figures 1–3). Each woman was asked to draw those she felt closest to near her on the map and vice versa. Triangles were used to represent men and circles were used to represent women. The quality of the contact with the various individuals was marked with minus and plus signs. I then asked the woman to give me tangible descriptions about the outline she had in front of her, and asked about the *social setting* for the response network, about who the *actors* were, and what *response actions* that took place and *when* they took place. When the women started to tell their stories, the triangles and circles were assigned meaning, as were as the links between these symbols. After all, a response network is not a 'thing'; it is an experiential process that can be traced in accounts of response action.

Data Analysis

While the women drew their maps, they most often kept the 'I' position as the author/ outsider of their narratives that I had requested. When they started to tell me about the
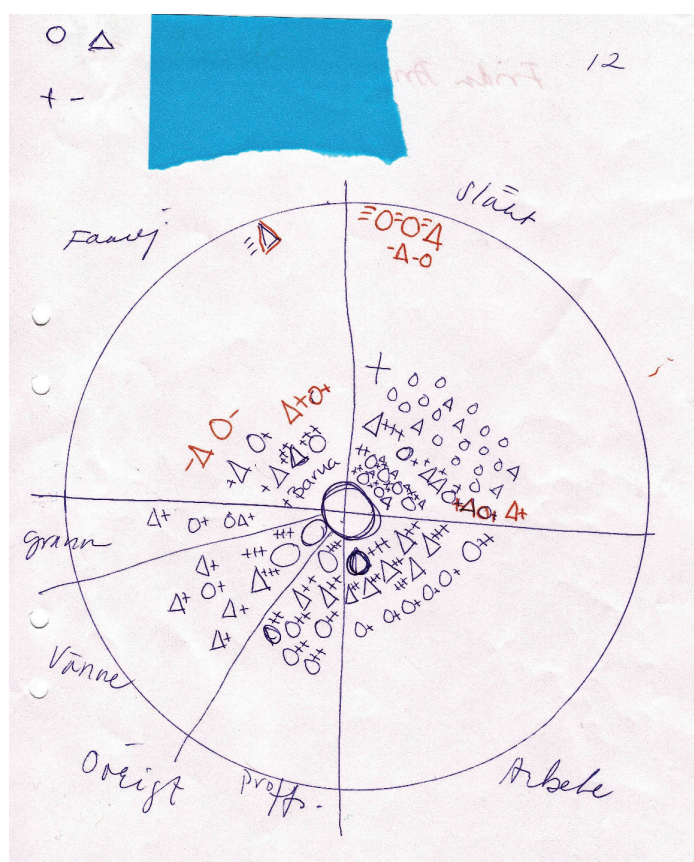

FIG. 1 Anne's response network map. familj = family; släkt = relatives; arbete = working life; proffs = professionals; vänner = friends; grannar = neighbours
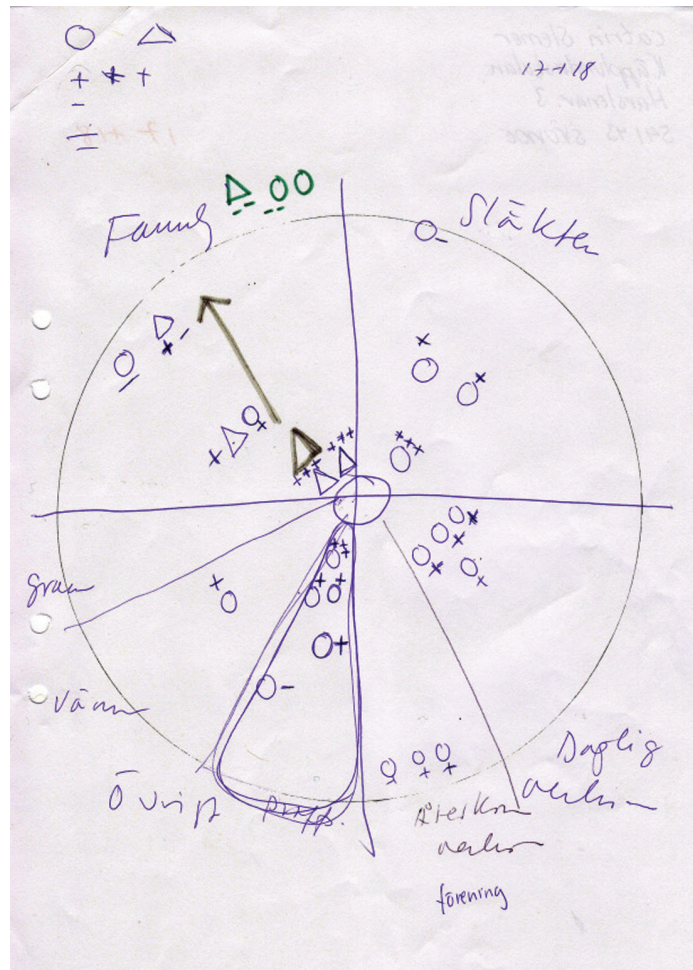
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FIG. 2 Barbara's response network map. familj = family; släkt = relatives; daglig verksamhet = working life; förening = club; proffs = professionals; vänner = friends; grannar = neighbours

actors and the actions, they gradually shifted and adopted a more complex 'me' position as *authors* but also as one of the actors in the narrative. Noticing this shift revealed rich material. It revealed evidence of network structures, as well as how each woman made meaningful sense of the responses she had encountered within her response network. This sense making exposed how the women came to redefine themselves in relation to the response networks they were embedded in.

One of the main themes in the interviews was related to issues of openness and closeness, i.e. a theme related to my interest of examining the assumed 'hidden' character of domestic violence. In the following, I will present the analysis of three of them, representing three different but common ways of dealing with these issues. I have called the interviewed women 'Anne', 'Barbara' and 'Catherine'. Anne was part of an *open response network with a commitment to stopping the violence*; Barbara was part of a *closed response network with a commitment to saving the social status of the family*; and Catherine was part of one *partly open response network but fractured through a fear of shame*. Another possible response network was within Catherine's reach, but she had decided to not disclose her exposure to violence within that network.
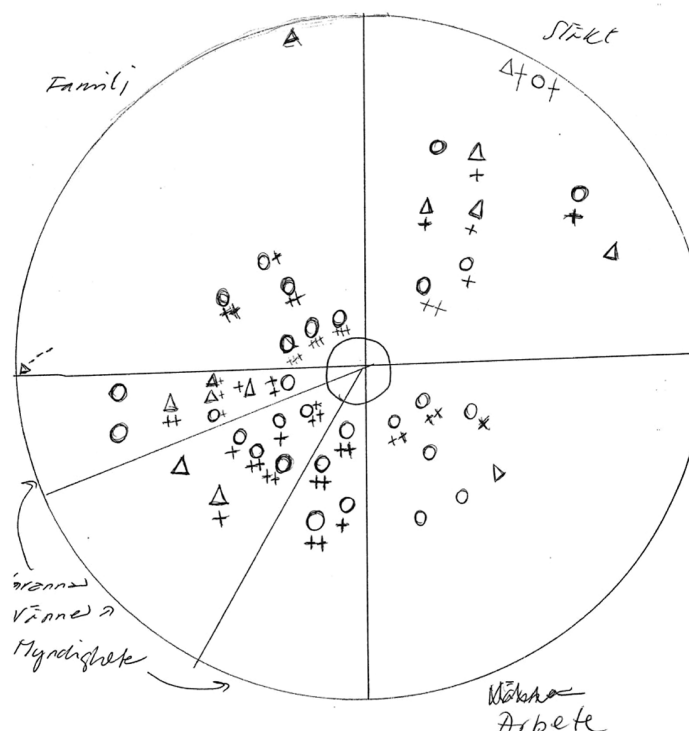
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FIG. 3 Catherine's response network map. familj = family; släkt = relatives; arbete = working life; myndigheter = authorities; vänner = friends; grannar = neighbours

The response network of Anne: Open and with a commitment to stopping the violence

The social setting

Anne was a young woman in her thirties, living with her three children and dating a man. She was working in a factory in the rural area where she lived. Her ex-husband, Dan, was working in the same factory. Anne and Dan were only 15 when they start dating. The area where they lived and the social spaces it contained were the products of centuries of interactions between the people and their surroundings. The 'rural' was linked to independence, self-reliance, a strong commitment to each other and to the land, and a moderate level of consumption. Many of the families had lived in the area for generations. Anne and Dan's families were among them. However, the population was decreasing.

The local economy was still based on farming, forestry, small industry and fishing, but certain parts of the area had seen a dramatic decline in job opportunities. Other parts had managed better through the development of small businesses and ventures in the tourist industry.

The specifics about the prevailing norms for the consumption of alcohol in this area were brought to my attention by one of the women I interviewed, as something significant for how people lived their lives. 'You'll never understand us and what's going on here if you don't participate in our barbeques or beer parties or at least spend some time at the pub', she told me. 'Alcohol connects people here. A couple of beers with neighbours after work makes you feel relaxed. Makes you feel right at home. Makes

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you feel that you belong'. One frequent story that communicated the prevailing social norms and the cultural conceptions about interpersonal violence was explicitly linked to the alcohol culture in the area. It was the story of the barbeques and the excessive drinking that took place at these events. When people were under the influence of alcohol, they often grew angry and this anger got out of hand and escalated into fights. Other people interfered and tried to stop them, often resulting in a further escalation of the violence. 'But there's always at least one person who's sober at these parties, just in case it's necessary to drive to the emergency room', I was assured. This liberal, and to a certain extent responsible, alcohol culture proved to play an important role in Anne's narrative.

The positioning of response network members

Anne took the issue of filling her network map seriously. She got to work quickly and was full of energy:

Closest to me are my three children. I cannot separate them, I have lumped them together. Then there is my new boyfriend. Here are my parents, very close. They are gold. I give them three plusses. Then there are my siblings. They are also plusses.

She positioned Dan at the fringe of her network map and gave him three minuses. She continued to add person after person: 'I could have added more neighbours and fellow employees, but I think I'll stop here'. Her map encompassed more than 80 people. Dan's parents were the only two people equipped with minuses, due to their ways of downgrading his problems with drinking and violence. Almost everyone else on her map was equipped with plusses. This filled her with joy:

It is quite nice to see on a paper that one has so many people, because sometimes, one feels very, very lonely. But to see this …. it is quite nice to see that there are just a few dark clouds (laughter).

Anne's positioning of herself as a woman who made a fool's bargain

As soon as Anne had finished filling out her map, she took the 'me' position as the narrator and talked about herself and how it had happened that she ended up in the difficult situation she was currently in. She introduced herself as a woman who had 'made a fool's bargain' when she married Dan and told me event after event that proved it. Many of these events were linked to her underestimating his alcohol problems:

He probably had those problems from the very beginning, but I didn't realize it then. Before we had children we used to take an after work beer, or I rather had cider. So I had a couple of ciders, he had a couple of beers, but he always drank more than me. There were always these beers: if we were going to his or my family, if we were staying in—always alcohol. I didn't think much about it, until much later. All his problems come from his alcohol problems: his physical and psychological abuse, his threats, everything.

Dan's drinking habits were well known locally. He was one of the barbeque and beer-party drinkers, drinking in open for everyone to evaluate. While re-evaluating her underestimation of Dan's alcohol problems, Anne did not put all the blame on herself. She was also very critical of her ex-mother-in-law:

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She should have understood. She has gone through exactly the same as I have. She lived with an abusive alcoholic, kicked him out and then started a better life for herself. But she has always protected her son from all kinds of criticisms because her 'little boy' cannot do anything wrong. He is actually more outspoken about his problems than she is. She ought to know that a woman in my situation has to save herself and her kids, or we will all succumb. She's been there herself.

Anne's positioning of Dan as a troubled man with a drinking problem and an escalating violent behaviour

One of the events that Anne brought up as crucial in Dan's trajectory—from being a keen party drinker to a violent man developing a drinking problem—was the very dramatic occasion when she was giving birth to her youngest children, a pair of twins. The first child was a girl, the second a boy. The boy's heartbeat was very faint:

They said, 'Sorry Anne, we have to make a caesarean'. They took me to another room and left Dan with the crying newborn. It all went well, but it was very traumatic. They helped me a lot afterwards but Dan never got any help. It's not the only thing that causes his problems, of course, but it was very hard for him.

The dramatic birth ended happily, leaving Anne and Dan with three healthy children. But to care for them was hard work. 'First it was quite chaotic', Anne remembers, 'but after a while I followed a strict routine. It went very well. Dan never seemed to cope, though. He never got any help for his depression. He began to party more. He was out of the house quite a lot and when he was at home he was irritated and could have quite violent emotional outburst'. Anne wanted Dan to go into treatment for his drinking problems, but he refused. Finally, Anne gave up trying to persuade Dan to get help and decided to divorce him.

Who knows what about the violence?

Dan's response to Anne's decision to leave him was to increase his violent behaviour. At the same time, he increased his already excessive drinking, along with his controlling behaviour and threatened to commit suicide by shooting himself with one of his four hunting weapons.

One day on my way from work, I had a whole convoy of police cars after me looking for Dan. He was the suspect of arson and theft and a lot of other things. He was sentenced to prison for that.

At this point, Dan's violence was not only directed towards Anne but at the community at large. Before, his violence towards Anne was known in the response network comprising about 80 persons, now almost all of the 700 inhabitants of their village knew that Dan was a suspect of arson and theft and that wished to divorce him. After the divorce, it was hard to for anybody in the response network to connect with Dan. His close family took on extra responsibility for trying to stop him from being violent. His response was to shoot through their door. Everybody in the network was frightened of him. On this occasion, only, only the police were thought capable enough to stop Dan. After a while however, Dan calmed down, even though he continued to harass Anne. Then response network members beyond the close family circles stepped in:

I can give you one example. I kept getting fines for delayed payments. I was like a living question mark because I had not got the invoice in the first place. So I called them, and they insisted they

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had sent me the bill. I discussed this with friends and neighbours and all of a sudden my next-door neighbour said 'Ah, I have seen Dan in your post box quite often, didn't think much about it, what if he collects your bills to make you got fines?' My neighbour is a retired teacher, so she is at home when the postman arrives. She promised to watch—and there he was, Dan, collecting bills in my post box! 'But I knocked on my window and swigged my fist', my neighbour said 'and off he went. I have never seen him again'.

The openness about the violence gave members of the wider social network—in which I include the 700 persons living in the rural community and some relatives that lived outside—information about the abuse Anne was living with and Anne's to means of responding to it. Anne mapped out 80 persons as the members of her response network, all participating in the efforts to stop the violence and/or to support the victims in one way or the other. The levels of *responsibility* (implying a moral imperative to act or reduce risks) and the levels of *responsiveness* (acknowledging the mixed and shifting emotions of one or all parties) (Gadd 2015) were not evenly distributed in the network. The younger men in Dan's family, especially his brother and cousin, and Anne's father took responsibility for controlling Dan. When he being physically violent, they could not stop him. They did the only responsible thing they could think of and called the police, who stopped him. The police were not, however, the only men willing to intervene. Anne positioned her fellow employees and her boss at the factory, most of them men, as moral supporters, since they found Dan's behaviour unacceptable. Some of the more distant members of the response network, such as her next-door neighbour looked out for her. The neighbour kept an eye on Dan's meddling in Anne's mailbox, alerted her to his attempts to control her life, and critically, made Dan aware that his behaviour had not gone unnoticed.

Ultimately, Anne's life became safer. Fast-forwarding a year and a half after the breakup, Dan had sought professional help for his alcohol problems and was less violent. Anne's oldest son had become quite close to his father. Dan's brother and cousin controlled the time Dan had with his children. If he was not sober when the children were about to arrive, they took them to their grandmother or back to Anne. They tried to avoid confronting him in case he would go 'crazy'. Instead they just told him that a father should not be drunk when with his children. Quite a few of Dan's friends and family continued to consider him likeable despite all he had done.

Anne never looked upon herself as a victim of violence. She considered herself as quite the contrary, as a lucky woman living in a strong supportive social network that made 'a fool's bargain' in her choice of man. She took full responsibility for that but did not burden herself with self-pity, anger or shame. She knew she was not the only woman to have made bad decision in such matters of love and loyalty. She told me, that having made some similar mistakes themselves, the women in her response network were responsive to her needs and backed her up. 'Sometimes we cannot help laughing over all the stupidity that is out there', Anne told me.

The response network of Barbara: Close and with a commitment to saving the social status of the family

The social setting
Barbara was a professional woman in her thirties with a good job. She lived in a medium-sized town with her husband Eric and their two children. She had a small circle of

friends but had never told them about the violence, because 'they live such perfect lives and would never have understood'. Only a very few people at Barbara's workplace knew about the violence. They had confronted her and she admitted it had happened. So now they knew, but Barbara did not want to talk about what had happened to her through fear of being stigmatized: 'To be exposed to violence is not anything that is expected to happen in my circles of friends'. To a certain extent, Barbara was her own 'gate-keeper', eager to control which information is shared to whom.

The positioning of response network members

Barbara's social world was very much based on the relationships with her mother, father and sister. Her relationship with her brother had been distant for a long time, but after he had become severely ill, they became closer again. Barbara found her mother quite demanding: 'She always wanted me to have the best grades'. Her father had a warmer personality: 'He is so strong. Everybody likes him. My mother lives in his shadow'. At the same time Barbara depicted her father as a very vulnerable person:

He has not got a strong mind. He is a nice man, strong and very masculine. He is a caring person and he has always helped my mum with the household. But he can be seriously depressed and then he cannot bear any kinds of conflicts or troubles.

She turned to her network for support, especially to her mother and sister, but the only response she got was rejection and denial. Her mother did not want to talk about her problems and she strongly discouraged Barbara from telling her father. Her sons appeared not to get any support either. Hence, no one tried to stop the violence.

Barbara started her network mapping with her husband Eric. She marked him with an arrow, indicating that she wanted to divorce him. She positioned her sons close to her, her brother and his wife quite close, her mother at a distance with a minus, her father a plus and a minus and her sister and her husband and daughter outside of her map.

A group of 'professionals' inhibit a special position on Barbara's map. They are marked by a connecting line and comprise the battered women's support group Barbara is part of.

Barbara's positioning of herself as a competent, but vulnerable and lonely woman

Barbara described herself as a high achiever and the 'good girl' in the family. 'I think both my mother and my sister envy me. I have always been very competent and a high achiever in school and at work. They think that such a competent person should be able to take care of her own life and her children. My mother is not really a mean person. I think she just might have some problems herself', Barbara told me. The main storyline in Barbara's narrative concerned the vulnerable and lonely woman she was and how hard she had struggled to change her situation. The overall levels of responsibility and the responsiveness in the response network were low. Barbara explained how she had repeatedly failed to reduce her vulnerability to violence and had thus ended up in an even more troubled position:

I have moved out three times. Last time I moved out as a total loser, left the house to him and our oldest boy with him and me and my youngest son moved to this small town where my family is. I thought

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they were going to help me out, but I got very disappointed. They think that I am a traitor. He thinks the same.

Each of the attempts to leave ended in chaos. Barbara had problems with organizing her everyday life and the demands of being a sole parent. She did not get support from her family she told me. Since she had difficulties coping with her sons, she reunited with Eric time after time. 'When we lived together, I could get some help with the children', Barbara told me. And Eric's violent behaviour continued.

Barbara's feelings also coloured the interview. She was very eager to talk with me. She did not really want to stop and continued talking long after I had turned off the tape recorder. She told me over and over again about her struggles with Eric. Her voice and body language were congruent with the sad words she told me. She spoke with a low, strained voice. She cried when she told me about her two boys, both in therapy to address problems, such as poor concentration, aggression, anxiety and insomnia. The boys had various, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and general anxiety disorder. 'But I don't think the violence has been really taken into account', Barbara explained.

Barbara's positioning of Eric as quite likable but 'bad tempered'

Unlike Anne, Barbara never claimed that she made 'a fool's bargain' in her choice of man, but she was never able to cope with Eric's bad temper. When it escalated into violent outbursts, he scared her 'to death':

I can give you an example of a really nasty event. We were in the car with the boys in their baby chairs and said something like 'Do you really have to work that much', something like that, I complained about something. Then he totally lost it and started to drive [the car] like crazy. The children were very frightened. I came to the conclusion that the best I could do was to just shut up. After that, the real adaptation began. It was awful. But I was in that situation all alone.

Barbara's response was usually to back off into a submissive state and when that did not stop Eric, she left him—and returned.

Who knows what about the violence?

Few knew about the violence Barbara suffered and even fewer acknowledged it. Barbara's mother and sister acted as 'gate-keepers' inside and outside of the family, keeping the violence secret. Barbara has thus to be careful who outside of the family she talks to. She turned first to a group of strangers, a support group for battered women, who keep matters strictly confidential. Barbara does not entrust her friends with experiences of Eric's violence.

Barbara lost more and more faith in her own competence. She adopted an identity as a victim of men's violence. She browsed the Internet in search of advice and she visited chat rooms where abused women meet and learned about emotional abuse. In turn, she got her victim identity confirmed. As the violence was denied in the response network, Eric was as alone as Barbara to deal with it. Unlike Dan, who was stopped, punished and forced into treatment, Eric's behaviour continued unabated. At the time of the interview, Barbara had been on sick leave for a month and her boys were still in therapy. She continued to participate in the battered women's support group, the secret of Dan's violence kept there.

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The response network of Catherine: Partly open but fractured through a fear of shame

The social setting

Catherine was in her thirties, living with Andrew and their daughter. They were both artists. They had their studios in a rural area, but then moved to the city. Andrew had alcohol and drug problems and Catherine related his violent behaviour to these problems. Catherine contrasted the relevance of the two different social worlds in terms of their impact on the intimate partner violence she faced:

Well, in the country, the working class mum's were so used to their hard drinking men, so they had ways of dealing with intoxicated violent men and help each other. So when we lived there and they saw him drunk, they responded: 'Well, he's drunk. We will take care of her so she doesn't get hurt'. They never looked down on us because of that.

Here, in the city, it is different. He is sober at the moment, but I have thought 'if he starts, shall I tell my daughter's pre-school teachers or the parents of her friends?' In the rural place we lived before, that had been most helpful, but here in the city I don't think there will come anything good out of that. That's the difference between the social classes. People in the working class drink a hell of a lot to much but learn to handle it. People in the upper classes drink too much too, but they are very shameful to have alcohol problems, so they never learn to deal with it. Well, I know, it is my own homemade theory, but it has been proved to be right many times.

The positioning of response network members

Before the interview commenced, Catherine rushed in and opened by complimenting me on my way of researching intimate partner violence:

This network approach, it's so important. Networks are the key to recovery. Because even if you can get help, you never get any help with your social network. That's why violence can be stigmatizing. When I really needed help I realized that I had no support network and the social services couldn't help me with childcare …. I was lucky enough to be able to help myself, but not everyone has that ability (starts to cry).

Catherine's network comprised over 40 people. She liked to socialize and appreciated the company of friends. She still lived with Andrew, the man who had abused her almost during the entire relationship. She told me 'we are in the process of breaking-up … eh …', indicating that there was no clear-cut process, or not much sense of and ending in sight. Catherine positioned Andrew at the fringe of her network map. She described her family of origin as 'troubled and dysfunctional'. She was participating in a therapy group for adults that had grown up in dysfunctional families. Her father left the family when Catherine was an infant and her mother raised her alone. According to Catherine, her mother never gave up on her father and hoped that they would reunite one day, which never happened.Catherine positioned the women at the nursery in the rural area as 'authorities' within her network. These women all got plusses. She told me a story about how they had intervened to prevent an impending violent situation:

Our daughter went to this rural nursery. It wasn't too great, but they were very good at dealing with parents with alcohol and drug problems. They were very observant, and if they saw Andrew under the influence, they called me and told me that he could not be entrusted with picking her up. Then they called the police. And sometimes the police responded by arranging a checkpoint at the little

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dust road he was driving. And he got caught, of course. It happened more than once. He never found out about what happened! He kept saying, 'I cannot understand this, checkpoints in the middle of nowhere. I must be the most check-pointed rural guy in the country' (laughter).

The nursery workers aside, however, Catherine found her response network's responses to Andrew's violence very mixed. Her mother was 'in denial when it comes to problems' and Catherine had not had much contact with her sister. In the rural area, Catherine had a circle of close friends and neighbours upon whom she could rely. They gave her emotional support, as well as providing physical intervention and rescue when needed:

There was one violent incident when he had a stranglehold on me so I couldn't breathe and then he dragged me down to the floor so I hardly get any breath…. This group of people [the circle of close friends and neighbours], I know, I can just call them whenever I need to, and they will come immediately (starts to cry).

When Catherine's friends arrived, Andrew left and they stayed to support and watch over her in case of his return. The police were never called. After Catherine had moved, her friends were there for her—she could still telephone them—but they were at some distance, so she was more vulnerable. In the rural area, she had the impression that 'everybody knew' what had happened and would reach out to help her if necessary. But in the city, Catherine was very careful about whom she disclosed her problems to, limiting the network locally accessible to her.

Catherine' positioning of herself as a woman in need of a better self-esteem
Catherine's self-confidence as an artist was pronounced, but when it came to her relations with men it was a different story. She had worked hard to develop her artistry. Lately, she had been publically commended for her work. But in her personal life, Catherine thought she has made the 'low self-esteem woman's bargain' through her choice of partner. She knew about Andrew's drug problems when she met him and never had much hope that they would disappear. However, they were very attracted to each other, so she decided to give their relationship a try, live for the good days and try to deal with the bad days. Since then, Andrew seemed to have lost some of his interest in her, but Catherine remained attracted to him. Moreover, she was afraid of being left by Andrew, just as her father deserted her mother. Catherine blamed her problematic upbringing for her low self-worth in relation to men. In the beginning of their relationship, Catherine was attracted to Andrew because of his (recklessly masculine) alcohol and drug use. However, when she found out about how much alcohol and drugs were connected to his violence, she started to think of him as two people, separating 'Andrew the problem' from 'the charming Andrew'. Thereafter, she had lost hope that he would change. Now she hopes only that one day she will have enough self-esteem to leave him and find an attractive man to share a good life with, the former perhaps contingent on the latter.

Who knows about the violence?
Catherine's response network was divided into six spheres: family, relatives, working life, authorities, friends and neighbours. Within each of these spheres, there was openness about the violence. At the beginning of the interview, Catherine confirmed the

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importance of social network's responses and felt sad while recalling the lack of action in response to the violence Andrew exposed her to. These feeling were very much related to the lack of either responsible or responsive responses from her close family. No one offered to intervene and no one explored what her needs might be. Then, as Catherine started to tell her friends and made a disclosure to her daughter's nursery, her feelings changed. Her friends intervened in a very violent situation, stopping Andrew from assaulting her and were responsive to Catherine's need for consolation. The staff at the nursery intervened in order to prevent the violence by reporting to the police that Andrew was driving under the influence of alcohol. Because each sphere in Catherine's response network was disconnected—no information was passed between friends, family and the nursery—Catherine remained in a position to control whether further help was offered. She decided against this, choosing to seek reconciliation with Andrew. Thereafter, she cut herself off from the support she could have accessed after her move to the city through fear of being looked down upon in her new life among the metropolitan upper classes.

Conclusion

This article took the claim that domestic violence is best deemed a 'hidden' crime as a point of departure. Such claims tend to equate being hidden with non-disclosure to social services, the police or other criminal justice professionals. But the social worlds of domestic violence victims are much more intricate than this. Family, relatives, work colleagues, friends and neighbours usually form the immediate social world of domestic violence victims. Those closest to the victim can be regarded as a 'response network' that may be mobilized in the aftermath of domestic violence. Focussing on this response network, I used three case studies to ask: Who knows what in women's social networks when incidents of violence have happened? Do some people act as 'gate-keepers' who control which pieces of information are shared? Who do networks respond most to? And do such responses change the way in which women who have been exposed to domestic violence (re)define themselves and their relationships?

In all three cases, the *culturally based* understanding of how to deal with unacceptable behaviour in the social network constituted a framework for the response actions. In Anne's and part of Catherine's cases, the understanding was linked to the centrality of alcohol to violence in communities that assume some collective responsibility for managing the fall out of social drinking. Their social networks were quite experienced in this matter. Conversely, in Barbara's case the violence was not alcohol related and it did not seem as if her social network had much experience in dealing with interpersonal problems, including violence against women. Her family were invested in being high achievers, who spared each other from personal problems. In one sense, Barbara's network consisted of gatekeepers'—mother and sister—and one person positioned outside of the gate—her father. Collectively, they hindered Barbara from sharing knowledge of the violence she was suffering with others.

Anne and Catherine's rural based response networks were open to dealing with alcohol-related problems. When alcoholism led to violence some members of their networks—men and women—took it upon themselves to intervene to prevent the violence and to watch out for those vulnerable to its recurrence. Anne's response network benefited a lot from its openness and connectedness. Within it, it was fairly easy to pass

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information and form groups of people for core tasks, such as trying to stop the violence, taking care of Anne and the children and trying to convince Dan that he needed help. When the violence could not be prevented, it seemed also fairly easy to take the decision to call the police for assistance. Catherine's rural network was similar, while her metropolitan network was kept at some distance. Barbara's network, by contrast, was closed and disconnected. She and Catherine both acted as gate-keepers in that they decided who to invite and who to pass information to in their social networks in the aftermath of domestic violence. In this way, response networks police the *borders* between sources of support, some of which are more open, connected and reciprocal than others.

Closely linked to network borders were the women's own needs for *control*. Since being exposed to violence is an extreme experience of powerlessness, regaining control of how others know one is a key element of overcoming violence for many victims of abuse. For some women, however, telling members of their social network or the authorities risks losing this control in ways that are reminiscent of submitting to the original violence. To report to the authorities means to abdicate from almost all possibilities of control of the further process and to enter a power relation with its own roles and logic. The police may decide to prosecute. The offender may choose to contest the victim's account or make accusations against them. Child protection investigations may commence. The victim may be required to take steps to reduce the risk of revictimization.

The analysis also revealed the close connection between *response network interaction* in the aftermath of violence *and the redevelopment of women's perceptions of selfhood*. Of the three interviewed women, it was only Barbara that developed a victim's identity. She described herself as a competent but vulnerable woman who had been exposed to violence by her husband. She felt rejected and did not dare to tell about what happened for fear of being socially degraded. Catherine suffered from the same fear in her metropolitan environment and refrained from telling anyone outside her rural network. She did not define herself a victim of violence but as a struggling woman in need of better self-esteem. She struggles alone but is thankful she can help herself. By way of contrast, Anne who had been exposed to the most severe violence had come to define herself as a woman who had made a 'fool's bargain' in her choice of man. Because her network was both responsible enough to intervene in the violence and responsive enough to recognize how it had affected her, in the aftermath Anne became hopeful of making a better deal with a male partner next time.

In sum, the conceptualization of domestic violence as a 'hidden crime' conceals more than it reveals. By referring only to the relationship between the victims, perpetrators and the criminal justice system, it disregards the many actions taken in the abused woman's immediate social world in response to the violence. The conceptualization of domestic violence as an act taking place within a wider social context formed by family, relatives, friends and neighbours that constitute a potential 'response network' opens a different field of academic enquiry. What potential for intervention do these larger networks of people hold? Might interventions that mobilize the capacities of networks hold out better prospects than those that simply encourage victims to tell the police? Future research in this area must surely explore how communities manage knowledge of violence, what kinds of knowledge makes some people act—responsibly and responsively—and the implications of the engagement of response networks in the aftermath of violence in terms of how and when the resources of the police and social services are harnessed.

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