Embodied violence: Intimate relationships, human suffering and sedimented subjectivity

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The Paper will deal with the embodiment of violence. It will point out how violence distorts one’s self conception as well as her/his relationships to others and her contact with reality, and breaks down the crucial boundaries of one’s humanity. The empirical data consists of narratives of Finnish women who have been abused by their partners. We often ask why do women stay and why do women let the violence take place. However, this way to put the question is misleading because it directs our attention solely to the behaviour of the abused party and thus ignores the effects of violence and the whole social situation that makes repeated violence possible. The crucial questions are: what ties women to their homes and violent relationships, what makes it difficult to talk about intimate violence, and why is victimisation of violence interpreted as a sign of weakness and failure.

The paper concerns the significance of the viewpoint of embodiment in the study of violence and the interplay between ideology, institutionalisation, and microlevel construction of subjectivity. The analysis is linked to the phenomenology of the body, Michel Foucault’s view’s of discourse and Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection. According to the phenomenological approach, the sedimented past is constructed in relation to both cultural expectations and personal hopes and frustrations. Thus, we can understand women’s narratives of violence in relation to discursive practices, and individual and societal abjection of violence. In the case of violence, these embodied sedimentations seem to be culturally destructive and explicitly violent.