“I Am Burning, I Am Burning”: Affect, acid attacks and British tabloid newspapers

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Abstract
This article draws on studies that explore forms of contemporary journalism which focus on the role played by the expression of emotions and feelings. We present results from a qualitative study which examined how British tabloid newspapers covered acid attacks on women between 2010-2016. Drawing on the notion of affect, we explore the extent to which journalists try and turn painful embodied states into rational discourse. The data analysed suggest that such experiences cannot be completely captured by language. The journalists make use of particular narrative strategies focussing on the incident of the attack by highlighting how pain was experienced by the individual. This often results in the women being singled out and isolated. While there is some discussion of the contexts in which the violence occurred, the wider socio-cultural background is absent from the articles. We conclude that the focus on intense pain in the articles may enable a particular affective relationality to emerge that is felt by victims, journalists and audiences alike.

Keywords: Affect, tabloid journalism, acid attacks, burns, pain, violence

Introduction
Acid attacks are a growing problem in the United Kingdom: according to the London Metropolitan Police (MET), the number of acid attacks in London has increased significantly between 2010 and 2016 with men being twice as likely to be victims (BBC 2017).Between 2016 and 2017, the number of reported attacks in London alone was 397 (The Guardian 2017). Recent statistics show that the number of admissions to hospital as a consequence of acid attacks has risen by 50% between 2005 and 2015 (Twoon et al 2016). The actual numbers might be higher because these data do not account for unreported attacks. The most striking trends in the report released by the Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC; Kirkland 2015) are that most of the victims are over 75 and six in ten of all victims were male. The figure regarding the group age might be affected by the fact that the report refers to admissions and older people need more visits for treatment. Reports released from 37 police forces show that at a national level corrosive substance throwing has increased from 183 attacks in 2012 to 504 in 2016 (Knapton 2017). However, the Home Office does not currently hold exact statistics on acid attacks. As Home Office Minister Brandon Lewis explained:

> Acid or other corrosive attacks would be recorded though under different offence types, usually assault occasioning actual bodily harm or grievous bodily harm depending on the severity of the injuries inflicted (Lipscombe and Conway 2017, 12)

These trends might appear surprising because when it comes to the media coverage, newspapers tend to prioritise mainly stories regarding young women under 30. These disproportions not only show that male and older victims are surrounded by secrecy and their stories are underreported but they also exacerbate the position of the woman in this crime which does not appear to be exclusively gender-based. A reason for a focus on women in the media coverage may also be that with the celebrity Katie Piper a very prominent individual became a victim of an acid attack in 2008. Her story has been covered extensively in the British press and many newspaper articles on acid attacks mention her name.

This article presents results from a qualitative research project on the media coverage of acid attacks in the British press. Drawing on scholarship on affect and emotion in journalism studies, we theorise the rhetorical strategies used by journalists to cover the acid attacks as being characterised by a focus on affect and individual, painful experiences of the women. The project aimed to answer the following research question: How is pain as a result of acid attacks being

described by British tabloid newspapers? Before some results are discussed in depth, the theoretical framework and review of relevant literature are presented below.

Journalism, Affect and Mediated Suffering

Pain is usually suffered as a dynamic and subjective experience (Boluda 2016, 1098). Recounting pain implies further negotiations and challenges for both the journalist and the victim. Writing is an act of mediation where bodily states and movements are translated into text (McCosker 2013). Yet, the experience of pain not only resists language but also destroys it, leading to a reversion to a state anterior to language, for example, to the cries a human being produces before language is learned (Scarry, 1987). In order to overcome this difficulty of expression people experiencing pain often turn to figurative language. The use of metaphors brings inner sensations into a knowable, external world and helps to impose some kind of order onto the experience of pain (Bourke 2014, 55). We wish to focus on the difficulty of turning experiences of suffering into journalistic narratives by paying particular attention to affect as a theoretical framework.

While there exist different conceptualisations of the notion of affect, it is commonly understood as a sensation, a force marked by intensity and energy which moves across bodies and objects (Deleuze 1978; Massumi 2002; Thrift 2008). Affect most generally refers to a bodily capacity to affect and be affected by someone or something. Seigworth and Gregg (2010) provide one definition of affect

> Affect arises in the midst of *inbetween-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon. Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation as well as the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities. That is, affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, *and* in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves. Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension […]. Affect is in many ways synonymous with *force* or *forces of encounter*. Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 1-2, italics in original

Affect, then, is often situated as something excessive and bodily that can be perceived but not quite pinpointed by language alone (Massumi 2002). This article places a focus on affect as a state of embodied experience that is in tension with language and is always rendered discursive in a deferred manner. In other words, affect is understood as something that is felt by the individual person and cannot be adequately described in a moment of feeling a particular pain for example. Rather, the individual tries to describe what they have undergone retrospectively through the use of language. Solomon has defined affect as something which is "difficult to articulate but nevertheless has effects within discourse" (Solomon 2012, 908). As affect theories often place a focus on bodies and embodied experiences, many scholars discuss affect's relationship to emotion (e.g. Ngai 2009). Affect is understood by us as an excessive, subjective experience that is in tension with language and signification (Yell 2010; Wetherell 2012; Johanssen 2016). It is not meant to denote the same as "emotion", nor regarded as a necessary precursor or step before being narrativised as a particular emotion, neither as a *discursive expression* of an emotion (as Pounds, 2012 has defined it for example). There is some debate within affect scholarship over the status of "emotion" and "affect" and if the terms denote different meanings, or may be used interchangeably (Massumi 2002; Wetherell 2012; Ahmed 2014).

A focus on emotion and affectivity has been identified by many as a broader cultural shift towards “therapy culture” that places an emphasis on emotional disclosures, self-healing and narratives of suffering in the public realm (Aldridge 2001; Furedi 2004; Richards 2007; Illouz 2008; Nayar 2009; Yates 2011; Bainbridge and Yates 2014). Journalism studies have also focused on emotion as well as affect both in relation to the journalistic coverage as well as the involvement of journalists and sources in the recent years (Santos 2009; Pantti 2010; Peters 2011; Richards and Rees 2011; Pounds 2012; Wahl-Jorgensen 2013a, b, 2016; Papacharissi 2015; Beckett and Deuze 2016). Karin Wahl-Jorgensen (2016) has argued that thanks to the growth of digital journalism and especially social media, journalism has often moved towards an emphasis on subjectivity and emotion in its coverage of stories. Peters (2011) on the other hand has maintained that journalistic coverage itself has not become more emotional but that the emotional repertoire has diversified: “hard, self-styled objective, ‘just the facts’ journalism is not *un*emotional, just as soft, so-called tabloid news is not *ir*rational” (Peters 2011, 303, italics in original). He broadly defines emotional styles in journalism as narrative constructions of an “experience of involvement” (ibid, 304) that engages audiences in a particular way.

Recently, some studies have specifically discussed affect in relation to journalistic styles and narratives of reporting (Yell 2010; Pounds 2012; Papacharissi 2015; Wahl-Jorgensen 2016) Journalistic coverage that conveys “narratives of witnessing and personal experience” (Wahl-Jorgensen 2016, 129) of both journalists and individuals covered in stories has become more important. To Wahl-Jorgensen, such accounts specifically include an act of rendering affect into emotion, of translating affect into something discursive. A focus on emotion in journalism may thus constitute “an interpretation and narrativization of affect” (Wahl-Jorgensen 2016, 129). In her study of Pulitzer Prize-winning articles, Wahl-Jorgensen has examined how words such as “happy”, “afraid”, “elated” are used by journalists to express affective moments experienced by their sources as specific emotions in the texts (Wahl-Jorgensen 2016, 135). In the context of this article, affect is understood to denote experiences of suffering and pain which are mediated and written about by journalists in newspaper articles. As such, an affective experience of pain is made sense of and reflected on both by the subjects who had been inflicted with pain and by the journalists who place a particular focus on (grappling with descriptions of) pain. As became evident as the researchers read through the sample of articles of the British newspapers selected for this research project, the “sensationalist excesses of tabloid journalism” (Wahl-Jorgensen 2016, 130) placed a far greater emphasis on descriptions of pain in relation to acid attacks than did so-called quality newspapers. This is often the case when it comes to “fatal illnesses, disfiguring ailments and accidents” (Shapiro 2006, n.p.) that are covered by the tabloid press. A focus on affect may thus be useful in exploring what may be at stake in the coverage of violence against women. This article, then, makes a contribution to the growing literature in media and communication studies that explores affect and more specifically to works on journalism, emotion and affect such as the ones identified above. In conceptualising affect as we have done in this section, we are able to shed further light on the limits of discursive practices by journalists and sources when it comes to covering traumatic or painful experiences.

While there has been scholarship on mediated suffering, as discussed above, domestic violence and violence against women (both of which were discussed in many newspaper articles that were part of our sample) have also been widely covered by scholars (e.g. Meyers 1997; Carll 2003; McManus and Dorfman 2005; Berns 2004; Hensman Kettrey and Emery 2010; Noh, Lee and Feltey 2010; Nettleton 2011). Many have found that most media coverage focuses on women as the victims of domestic violence but does little to explore underlying social problems and belief systems that may lead to, or ultimately prevent, domestic violence. The dominant representation of domestic violence in popular media focuses on the victim who is either celebrated for showing the courage to leave the abusive partner or on the contrary, blamed for staying in the relationship (Berns 2004, 3).These patterns, Nancy Berns observes,

do not contribute to understanding the social context of violence and therefore promote social change to prevent it. Reframing abuse as a collective problem could assist victims more effectively and begin to dismantle the culture it stems from (Finley 2016, 143).

Methodology

Originally, the sample for the research project included the nine most read national UK print broadsheets and tabloid newspapers including their supplements.[1] Data were retrieved by performing key-word based searches for the exact phrase "acid attack" within the digital newspaper repository Factiva. A date range from 01.01.2010-31.12.2016 was set in order to explore the increases of acid attacks reported in the last decade in the UK, as outlined in the introduction. The total results amounted to 1223 articles on acid attacks, of which 326 appeared under the label of "assaults". Of these assaults, 250 referred to acid attacks in the United Kingdom. Between 2010 and 2016 the coverage increased from 48 total mentions of "acid attack" in 2010 to 164 hits in 2016. This reflects the general statistics detailed in the introduction recording a rise in acid attacks in the UK. Eventually the newspaper sample was limited to the six most read tabloid newspapers in the UK, the first three of which are also the most read newspapers in general: *The Daily Mail*; *The Sun*; *The Daily Mirror*; *The Daily Express* and the *Daily Star* (Ponsford 2017). This reduced the results to a searchable sample of 709 articles. We focused on those that included direct quotes from the person trying to explain the physical and psychological effects of the attack. As discussed in the previous section, tabloid newspapers, to some degree, place a great emphasis on emotion and affect, often conveyed by making an extensive use of figurative language The popular features of journalism tabloids draw upon include sensationalism, emotive language, the bizarre, the lewd, sex and "any form of prurience which can be included under the general heading of human interest" (Conboy 2006, 12). Furthermore, Conboy (2006) added "An essential part of tabloid news values is the exaggerated foregrounding of sensation and 'human interest' […].This concentration on sensation and human interest means that the tabloids tend to feature people at the extremes of human experience and behaviour" (Conboy 2006, 15).

The articles obtained were selected and analysed by conducting a textual analysis based on the rhetorical strategies used to express pain. A sample of sixteen articles was devised which consisted of articles in which the individual explicitly mentioned pain or being in pain as a result of an acid attack. Articles were selected that featured narratives in the form of quotes of the individual who suffered the attack as well as narratives written by the journalist. This was chosen in order to explore the relationship between first-person and third-person narratives. Specifically, articles were included in the sample that featured detailed descriptions of pain. We dismissed those articles which only reported the attacks as a brief news feature lacking the voice of the person assaulted or lacking extra details regarding the impact and consequences of the acid attack on the person's body. For the qualitative data analysis, articles were coded thematically (Mayring 2000; Saldaña 2009) summarising themes that occurred across the newspapers which are discussed below. A relatively small number of newspaper articles forms the basis of this article (sixteen in total). This was done as some attention is paid to theorising the particular narratives of the articles by drawing on works on affect and pain in particular. Further research could feature a larger amount of articles in order to explore any other themes but the purpose of this article is to qualitatively analyse some articles in depth.

Discussion

Intense Pain

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[1] These included: *Sunday Telegraph Magazine 'Stella'; Telegraph Magazine*; *The Daily Express*; *The Daily Mail*; *The Daily Mirror*; *Daily Star*; *The Daily Telegraph; The Guardian*; *The Independent*; *The Mail on Sunday*; *The Observer*; *The Sun*, *The Sunday Telegraph*; *The Sunday Times*; *The Times*.

The descriptions of pain in articles related to acid attacks mainly revolve round two responses: on the one hand is the inability of not being fully able to explain the pain experienced and, on the other, the recourse to metaphoric language to give pain a shape.

One woman, who had acid thrown at her face while on a night out, is described as being in “agony” and “tremendous pain” as her face was “melting” from the acid (*The Sun*, September 20, 2015). A man who was attacked with acid is quoted as: “My life will now be about pain, overwhelming sadness and uncertainty.” (*The Sun*, October 10, 2015). A man who had acid thrown at him as part of a road rage attack is quoted: “I was thinking I'm in pain here and now he's punching me. I could feel it on my skin, burning. I've never felt anything like it. All I could think was, ‘Why would someone do this to me?’. It stopped when I screamed.” (*The Mirror*, March 16, 2016). “I've never felt pain like it. My eyes, my face, were on fire.” (*The Mirror*, 12 Oct 15). One person affected told the *Daily Express* (August 10, 2013): “The acid was so powerful it was burning my hands and feet. I'd touched my mouth at one point and my lips were burning.” An article in *The Daily Mail* quotes a woman attacked with bleach: “I am in excruciating pain in my eyes” (March 3, 2015). Carla, who had her sight seriously damaged by an attack said: "It just feels like someone is stabbing me in the eyeball all the time“ (*The Sun*, September 25, 2015). Another woman is quoted at length in *The Sun*:

> Recalling the attack she said: "I felt this liquid shoot all over me and the burning started immediately.
> "I started screaming at people, 'I'm burning, I'm burning'.
> "I can't really remember the pain, I was just in such shock. I could feel the acid dripping down my face, down my back." (*The Sun*, September 6, 2015)

Naomi Oni, who was attacked with acid by a friend, and received much media attention during the subsequent trial, could be read in *The Daily Mail* as trying to articulate the specific sensation she felt: “I felt, it wasn’t burning, it was a dissolving type of sensation. It was on my face and I remember, as I had my mouth open screaming, it burnt my tongue.” (January 8, 2014).
A specific temporality of pain is evoked in the accounts above whereby the incident is re-experienced by the person and accounted for through a deferred, belated description of it. Pain “emerges and vanishes in the form of intensity” (McCosker 2013, 1) that is rendered into a discursive narrative by the ones affected by it through talking to journalists. The experience of pain and its afterward reflection on it is sequential. It involves having felt the pain and returning to that experience in one’s mind in order to give words to it that may serve as a description of what it felt like. The above narratives involve recollections of the specific moments of the acid attacks. The affective experiences of feeling the acid on the skin may have been difficult to put into words for the individuals. Expressions such as “I was thinking I am in pain here”, “I’ve never felt pain like it”, “I can’t really remember the pain” or “it wasn’t burning” signify a difficulty on describing the pain and shock that came as a result of the attacks.

An article in *The Mirror* is especially detailed in describing an incident that led to disfigurement and the pain involved.

> "In a second he'd tipped it [petrol] over my head. The fumes made me gasp as the petrol ran down my face. It was burning my eyes and stinging my mouth. I screamed for him to stop. I ran into the bathroom to get a towel.
>
> "My skin was drenched in petrol. I started mopping my face but Ed appeared and emptied the rest of the can over me. Then he just walked out of the flat."
>
> Becky, 32, goes on: "I heard the click of a lock, and liquid being splashed around outside. I was shaking as I walked into the living room, not sure what I would find.

> "The smell of the fumes was making my head foggy. Then there was a whooshing sound and a flash as a ball of flame came towards me and set fire to everything I could see. My skin, my hair, my clothes... even the air was on fire.
>
> "For a few seconds I just stood still. I was almost calm as I thought, 'I'm going to die'. But somehow I found the strength to fight. I picked up a coffee table hurled it through the window then leapt through it myself."
>
> Speaking this week at her home in York, Becky says the agony she felt is indescribable. As well as severe burns to 40% of her body, her plunge from the window, first to a roof below, then to the pavement, caused a brain injury which has affected her memory. (*The Mirror*, June 5, 2015).

These paragraphs tries to convey the pain experienced by Becky to the reader and there are some clear descriptions of actions that lead to the pain (petrol being poured over her body, the room being set alight, jumping out of the window). It is written about how pain was experienced as burning and stinging sensations and how the room smelt of fumes. There is also some discussion of the embodied reactions to the violent act: gasping, screaming, running, mopping, the body shaking, picking up a coffee table, and leaping out of the window to safety. Those descriptions emphasise an agentic body that is both acted upon by someone and something else and inflicted with agonising pain but also reacts and has "found the strength to fight". Such narratives show a body being affected by pain and simultaneously affecting the environment through gasping, screaming, running, jumping. Rather than attempting to describe the pain as such, Becky (or the journalist) seems to have narrated the sequences that led to the experience of pain and what followed from then. Pain is situated in relation to and as a relational environment around which subjects and objects are assembled. The narrative moves from a description of actions and feelings associated with the affective experience of pain towards a mentioning of the pain itself towards the end of the above quote. Towards the end of the paragraph, there is also another dimension in the newspaper article that represents a discursive attempt both by Becky and the journalist to give voice to pain as an affective experience that is difficult to turn into language. If affect is understood as something at "the edge of the unsayable" (Anderson 2009, 79) this becomes evident here through an attempt to render it from something experienced into something discursive. Pain as such is something highly subjective that in many cases can neither be intersubjectively, or empathically understood by others, nor confirmed by medical professionals. Many of the articles on violence in the tabloid press can be seen as an attempt to express pain and suffering. Towards the end of the paragraph, Becky is alleged to have said that the pain she felt "is indescribable". The pain was felt as an affective impression on the body that no words can completely describe. A victim of an acid attack is similarly quoted in *The Mirror*: "I find it difficult to put into words the pain I've suffered and continue to suffer. I have very few tears left." (September 3, 2015).

Anthony McCosker (2013) has recently explored the link between media, pain and affect. Any mediated depictions of pain, he argues, are primarily felt by audiences as affective experiences in the form of intensities, forces, sensations, or hunches. The same applies to journalists who may witness a particular account of pain given by an individual and who then try and turn it into a written narrative. As embodied responses that traverse individual subjects' abilities to codify or turn the affect into neat discourse. In covering acid attacks, journalists may find themselves confronted with particular excessive forms of violence that are difficult to adequately cover because the individuals who were subjected to violence may find it difficult to put such occurrences into words.

It is particular the focus on *intensity*, on intense pain, and not any mild form of pain, brought about by aggressive violence through acid that is emphasised again and again in the newspaper coverage. Such a focus on intense pain is established through words which were used in the quotes at the beginning of this section such as “burning”, “melting”, or “on fire”. This focus lends itself to the prism of affect and pain specifically as affective intensity. Another quote may illustrate this further:

> Suddenly the woman's face swooped down and her teeth closed on Kylie's ear. “I heard this awful sound, like someone biting into a cucumber or a carrot,” she recalls with a shudder. “I realised she was ripping at my ear. Then the pain came. It was agony. I'd never felt anything like it in my life. I was shaking uncontrollably”. (*The Mirror*, July 8, 2015).

As with most articles that were part of the sample, the focus in the above article is on the incident that led to disfigurement in the form of an ear bitten off. Both the journalist and readers did not witness the incident first-hand, so great emphasis is placed on detailing what it must have been like for Kylie. Rather than only attempting to describe the sensations of pain, its surrounding qualities are also accounted for: the sound of being bitten, which is metaphorically equated to someone biting into raw vegetables. The pain is described as unprecedented in comparison to any previous experiences of pain. If we regard both the individual’s narratives and the journalists’ narratives of pain as attempts to make sense of a particular experience, such an experience is difficult to put into words because it is primarily affective. The discursive narratives circle around the pain and describe in detail how bodies reacted for everyone to see: jumping out of a window and landing on the pavement with severe injuries; hearing teeth sinking into an ear and shaking uncontrollably; a woman, quoted at the beginning of this section, recalls screaming at others “I am burning, I am burning.” Pain as such cannot be adequately described but the articles try very hard to engage readers through vivid and highly detailed descriptions of the attacks that led to the pain and ultimately to facial disfigurements. This may be an (unconscious) strategy on the part of the journalists who opt to construct a kind of discursive fence, or nodal points *around* the intensive-affective experience of pain which itself is difficult to adequately capture in discourse. Such colourful language may additionally be evoked in order to create a lively and dynamic narrative which can compete with more audio-visual-based media. Television or cinema would arguably be more suited outputs to re-enact and depict the observable facial disfigurements and the violence that led to them. Both Becky’s and Kylie’s accounts are also structured in a stimulus-response logic which may have allowed the journalists to hold on to a sequential pattern that attempts to follow the events that made up the experience of violence and pain. Becky is to have said, for instance, that she felt the petrol being emptied on her and then the aggressor walked out of the flat; she then heard the click of a lock which was followed by the sound of liquid being splashed around; she smelt the fumes and subsequently realised she was feeling foggy. The narrative details a discursive pattern which traces the experience through a chronological sequence of events that followed each other. Similarly, Kylie told the journalist that she heard a sound, realised someone had bitten her ear and then felt a sense of pain. Such narratives may be regarded as sense-making processes (by journalists and the individuals involved) which, in a deferred manner, structure the events in a logical way so that they make sense to the individual who experienced them and to audiences alike. The events themselves probably happened so quickly that they were not processed in such logical manners as detailed in the newspaper articles.

The act of causing another person pain is an act situated in a universe of micropolitics of objects, individuals, cultures, power relations and experiences. There is thus always a “worldly context” (McCosker 2013: 11) to pain and to pain caused by violence in particular. Pain does not occur in a vacuum but exists in specific moments, cultures and hierarchies. When someone is attacked with acid for example, the individual is situated in a specific lifeworld that consists of

contexts, customs and relationships. Pain is relational. Many of the articles in the sample are not mere (attempts of) descriptions of intense pain but they feature the contexts and relationships in which the pain occurred.

The Contexts of Violence

This section discusses how bodies which have been inflicted with violence are described and constructed in the British tabloid press in relation to their social environments. An article in *The Sun* (September 6, 2015) is entitled “He didn't get the one thing he wanted — my face.”. Referring to her former partner, a woman is quoted: “He couldn't beat me then and I won't let him beat me now.” The majority of the article is however devoted to describing the abusive partner, what he did to the woman and how he paid someone else to attack her with acid. The article quoted from earlier describes Becky coming to terms with her changing body and face:

> The burns covered 40% of her body, with the worst and thickest on her arms, back and left side. She had deep cuts on her thighs, a fractured skull and broken chest bone and that brain injury. Fluid under the skin made her body blow up to three times its natural size.
> "I couldn't bear the way I looked," she says. "I knew they would never fade. I thought, 'Who will want me now?"'
> […]
> For Becky, currently unemployed, the sentence brought justice. But it will not help her move on. She knows only she can find the inner strength to do that. She says: "My arms need to be creamed every three hours and I wear bandages under my clothes. I itch constantly and my skin is so withered and tight that I shuffle rather than walk. I have regular skin grafts. (*The Mirror*, June 5, 2015)

Another article similarly discusses the aftermath and the consequences of the violence:

> She left her drenched in blood with three teeth knocked out and a broken jaw after battering her repeatedly in the face. Jasmine was rushed to Dumfries Royal Infirmary and transferred to Glasgow's Southern General. She needs bone from her hip grafted into her upper jaw so she can have permanent implants and her gum rebuilt. And her terrible injuries from last July's unprovoked battering have left her mentally scarred.
> She said: "My whole face was left hanging off. I was covered in blood and in hysterics with the pain. "I'm paranoid about how I look in photos, really self-conscious. *The Sun*, July 16, 2015

Both quotations give voice to individuals who express anxiety and stress over their injured faces. They can be read comparing their “new” selves to their old ones and express a sense of feeling unwanted and undesired by others. Both accounts create a scenario of loneliness brought about by the violent attacks. The sentences, written by the journalist, “But it will not help her move on. She knows only she can find the inner strength to do that”’ are particularly significant here. It is the journalist who has created a scenario in which Becky as the individual subject is now solely responsible for moving on and letting go of the past. Nancy Berns has argued in her study on women’s magazines and domestic violence that: “One reason for these ‘life after abuse’ stories is to offer hope to women in abusive relationships. The stories encourage other women to take similar actions to end the abuse and choose a new life” (Berns 2004, 67). However, several scholars have also found that coverages of domestic violence against women such as the ones above isolate and subjectify domestic violence rather than relating a particular incident to wider social and cultural dimensions that surround it (Nettleton 2011). This resonates with wider developments in neoliberalism that advocate an individual who should be responsible for themselves (Walkerdine 2003; Gilbert 2013).

Whereas the journalists may have placed an emphasis on the individuals, the wider contexts of the attacks remain mostly invisible in their coverage. While many articles that mention acid attacks detail pathological jealousy, aggressive and abusive behaviour, they do not probe into wider social reasons which enable a culture of domestic violence to emerge (such as notions of masculinity, patriarchy or power dynamics). Many articles detail acid attacks carried out by men on women and an author expresses in a column:

> Acid is the weapon of loser men who believe that a disfigured woman is a lonely woman. In this country Anthony Riley was convicted of brutally torturing his ex Adele Bellis, left, with acid so no other man would want her. (*The Sun*, September 6, 2015).

There is some analysis of potential underlying motives of domestic violence (to markedly disfigure a woman in order for her not to be considered beautiful any longer), but in the quote above there is no discussion or critical reflection on beauty standards and norms that may underlie domestic violence in the first place. Another article discusses acid attacks as the final incident in abusive relationships and quotes a victim of an acid attack.

> I didn't realise I was in an abusive relationship until the acid attack. Suddenly I realised just how much I'd been abused and controlled through violence, fear and intimidation. […] He hated me going out without him and I think he thought if I was scarred no one else would want me. (*The Sun*, September 6, 2015).

Those quotes implicitly relate domestic violence to relational dynamics between men and women only. Particularly the second quote, renders the woman partly responsible for her own pain because she is read expressing that she was unable to see what the relationship really was until the acid attack occurred. Pamela Nettleton (2011) has similarly argued that the coverage of domestic violence on women often alleges that: “Women are guilty of choosing the wrong men, men are not guilty of hitting women” (Nettleton 2011, 139). Women’s magazines in particular often promote the notion that women are responsible for being in, or not leaving an, abusive relationship because they made the wrong choice. It is the woman’s job alone to spot any potential aggressor and to avoid him. If a woman is in an abusive relationship, articles often “imply that victims who fall prey to attack are at fault for not employing proper techniques to prevent their victimization.” (Nettleton 2011, 148).

A piece in the *Mirror* similarly points to many articles in the sample that are about domestic violence by men: “he wanted to wreck her looks so she'd be terrified to leave him” (June 5, 2015). Often “the most pervasive source of suffering in our lives is our relationship with other human beings […]” (Thompson 2004, 138). Human suffering which results from abusive relationships is thus very often relational or put into relation(s) when facing another subject. Steven M. Parish (2008) stresses that “suffering provokes, and the response to suffering makes use of, this human capacity of inward reflection and self-imagining” (Parish 2008, 154). Suffering is about reflexivity and self-perception. This inward reflection is also observable in the newspaper articles in the sample where human beings reflect on the acts of violence that were inflicted on them, how they feel after the attacks and the possible reasons for them. In asking the individuals to reflect on their disfigurements and the situations they are in following the attacks, the newspaper narratives put the responsibility of dealing with the consequences on individuals (who are most often women), rather than on communities, governments, or healthcare sectors. The women quoted in the articles are shown embodying a neoliberal reflexivity that echoes self-reflection and self-responsibilization rather than a relationality with others who can offer support and solidarity.

While many of the articles discussed here do mention that the aggressors have been arrested and received prison sentences, the focus is still on the victims alone who need to

create a new life. What is more, this may also be done for stylistic reasons on the part of the journalists. By placing a major focus on the witnesses of the violence, the individuals themselves, they are able to construct a narrative that centres on the individual. This, as Van Krieken, Hoeken and Sanders (2015) point out, produces engaging stories that can lead to readers identifying with the individuals. The stories told from the viewpoint of the victims of a crime enable audiences to experience, or at least *imagine* an experience. Such "experience[s] of involvement" (Peters 2011, 304) - amplified by the affective tone of the articles - enable a sense of audience witnessing from up close to a fuller degree than if the stories were told from the perspective of innocent bystanders or from no specific perspective (see also Peelo, 2006; Oliver et al. 2012). The affective experience of a painful acid attack, then, not only has tenacity in the readers' minds but also lingers on in the individuals' bodies. While the individualising narratives of the tabloid articles identified here find wider resonance in the literature on domestic violence against women referenced above, the dynamics between individuality and relationality both need to be accounted for. Experiences of acid attacks in particular are perhaps qualitatively different to other forms of domestic violence. In many cases, the acid attacks result in visible bodily differences. The attacks themselves may not only be traumatising for the victims, but the re-adjustments that follow may be difficult to manage. It is clear that the individuals who suffered the attacks are the ones who primarily have to live with the consequences, even if they were not responsible for them. It is them who need to come to terms with the experiences of being attacked with acid. There may thus be a difficult relationship between an individual trauma that is covered by the tabloid press and the need to move beyond individuality towards collectivity, shared resources and help from various agencies. The individual dimension in both the journalistic coverage and the attacks themselves cannot be completely dismissed as being influenced by a neoliberal ideology of individualism.

Tabloid journalism needs to find a balance between individualising narratives (without rendering the women responsible and appeals to collectivity by discussing the socio-cultural bias that leads to consider human beings as objects that can be possessed and controlled.

Conclusion

This article examined newspaper narratives on acid attack violence against women. Two main themes were discussed: pain as an intense embodied experience, and the descriptions of the aftermath and contexts of the disfiguring violence. Drawing on affect theories and the argument that there is an increasing focus on emotionality and affect in tabloid journalism (Wahl-Jorgensen 2013a, b, 2016), we identified exemplary passages that detail how journalists and the individuals affected by violence tried to make sense of their pain. Such sense making processes remained in tension with discourse and the quoted passages constitute attempts to render them into narratives. In her work on journalism and emotion, Karin Wahl-Jorgensen has argued that "it is challenging to identify exactly how emotion operates in narrative" (Wahl-Jorgensen 2013a, 134-135) and we would push this argument even further through a focus on affect. It becomes even more challenging to identify how affectivity and affective experiences operate in narrative - because they are always already within *and* without, interior and exterior to discourse. This was exemplified by the descriptions that tried to give words to the pain experienced. Becky, for instance, described the pain as "indescribable". Others used words like "burning" or "melting" to denote the pain. Such terms show how particular experiences are, to a certain degree, turned into language. Both affect and discourse are "mutually infusing" (Solomon 2012, 912) each other. In that sense, and this may be a limitation of our approach, discourse analysis or textual analysis alone cannot adequately capture affectivity within written texts. This may be much easier to conduct through the analyses of audio-visual media texts (Pounds 2012) as the body is often shown. There is thus scope to continue work in this field. Related studies could explore what role body language plays for example when pain is being articulated by individuals. Future research could look at what other elements besides language

are used in the description of pain (e.g. facial expressions, bodily movements, gestures) and how these complement discursive narratives.

Further research may also develop frameworks that can explore audiences' responses to the incidents of suffering and pain and whether audiences always respond empathically. To some degree, tabloid journalism has always been more sensationalist, voyeuristic, emotional and affective in order to differentiate itself from broadsheet journalism. Bob Franklin has argued that tabloid journalism's key motive is to elicit empathy in audiences (Franklin 1997, 8, cited in Wahl-Jorgensen 2013a, 131). Empathy, as Wahl-Jorgensen maintains, is both an emotional reaction itself as well as an act of identification on the part of audiences with e.g. a woman who may have suffered violence. This act of identification is primarily established through the affective-discursive narratives of pain and disfigured bodies. Journalism can thus create a "consensual basis for emotional resonance" (Wahl-Jorgensen 2013a, 140) in audiences because readers may react with empathy and compassion to the narratives of violence they read about. This is in line with the wider work on suffering and politics by authors such as Chouliaraki (2006) and Butler (2004, 2009) who have argued that suffering may enable global, cosmopolitan reactions of compassion or activism. However, there is no universal rule that such narratives are always met with compassion (Moeller, 1999) and it may be questionable if the individualising narratives of domestic violence in tabloid newspapers, which primarily need to make money rather than root for a particular cause, are always responded to with empathy or compassion by audiences. Interest in these stories may also be triggered by a curiosity and desire to learn how pain shapes the human body and personalities. Further research could inquire into audiences' responses to such articles and examine questions in relation to why audiences engage with such material. Are audiences both repelled and attracted by stories about intense pain, as McCosker (2013) has put it? What other motives are there for engaging with articles on acid attacks?

A focus on the collectivity of violence through acid attacks and the wider socio-cultural factors around them may be fruitful in raising awareness and attracting readers' attention. Very few articles in the sample made references to wider socio-cultural aspects that surround violence against women. We have put forward in this article that the narratives around pain may enable a particular affective relationality to come to the fore. There is a lingering affectivity at stake in both the newspaper coverage of acid attacks and the wider consequences for women of living with bodies that were attacked with acid. The painful experiences may stay with the women, as well as the journalists, for some time. Likewise, audiences may be particularly affected through the raw and detailed narratives of pain they have read about. It is because of a human's ability to imagine how a particular painful experience must have felt like for the other in an empathic manner that media coverage of pain enables a sense of shared meaning in audiences to emerge. A shared meaning that is not predominantly understood through discourse or language but through affective relationalities:

This is where seeing, understanding and sensing the actions and states of others (including their suffering) happens in-excess of thought, as pre-individual, prior to its cultural coding as emotion and always as relational, in the emergence of sensation before becoming conscious thought, meaning, language or any other form of "frame" or semantic network. McCosker 2013, 14

While the newspaper articles examined may constitute an opening up towards an emerging space in which violence, pain and affect may be articulated, the ways how they are articulated remain problematic and in need of change. Journalists may negotiate a difficult relationship between the demand to produce shocking stories that zoom in on an individual's pain and the potential of opening up spaces for public articulations of suffering. The theoretical focus on affectivity within the articles has enabled us to show how pain is situated between bodies, language and contexts of the victims' experiences, as well as being a force that affects

journalists and audiences. Given that acid attacks have been on the rise in the UK in recent years, such stories may stay with us for some time.

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