Gendered and Sexualised Violence in Educational Environments

The second, revised edition
Foreword

This book has been made as a part of the Aware-project – "Increasing Awareness in educational Organisations of Sexualised and Gendered Violence -publication and web project 2001–2002". Articles are based on current and ongoing research made worldwide. The Aware-project is funded by the European Commission's Daphne-programme. The aim of the whole Daphne-programme is to develop measures to prevent violence targeted at children, youth and women.

The aims of the Aware-project were 1) to increase public and academic awareness of sexualised and gendered violence in educational organisations, 2) to develop communication between existing research networks and 3) to produce a publication, which would be suitable educational material for teacher education pedagogical studies. Our way to prevent violence is to increase administrators', educators' and public awareness about various forms of sexualised and gendered violence.

We are proud to publish this book in the Femina Borealis -publication series, which is the publication forum which concentrates especially on Northern Women and Gender Studies. The Aware-project was organised by the Women's Studies of the University of Oulu, which has been actively developing Women and Gender Studies in the northern part of Europe. The book presents some results of the projects which have roots also in Femina Borealis. Most of the writers of the book are from the northern part of Europe and the book gives some special insights into gendered and sexualised violence in educational environments from a northern perspective as well as comparative insights from other parts of the world.

The book is partly based on work done in various networks and research projects. The most important of them are the research project entitled "Gendered power relations and violence in schools and teacher education in Northern Finland", and the research network entitled "Gendered violence in schools and teacher education in the Barents region”. The network is organised between research groups from Finland, Norway, Sweden and Northwest Russia. Most of the writers come from North and Middle Europe and several of them are working as educators in institutions of higher education and as teachers and psychologists and also crisis centre workers. The project had also a public call for papers, which resulted in a few dozen interesting abstracts. Some of them developed to full grown articles, others have important subjects like trafficking, prostitution and child
abuse and may be published in future publications. The call for papers gave us a possibility to find new and future partners in different parts of Eastern Europe like Karelia, Lithuania, Tadzhikistan and Georgia.

Central theme areas of the publication are violence as a part of school culture, representations of femininity, masculinity and the body, sexual harassment and coercion, heteronormativity and sexual violence. The themes are intertwined in the articles.

The Aware-project participated in organising two seminars, the NCRB closing seminar "Crisis Centres and Violence against Women", Oulu, in which Aware-project had a special workshop "Sexism, Sexual Harassment and Anti-Sexist Pedagogy" and the theme seminar "Culture, Violence and Gender – Dialogue between Africa and the Arctic" held in Oulu together with the NCRB-project and the Gender & Violence network.

The project was presented in several international conferences, for example NERA-Congress 2002 "Education and Cultural Diversities" in Tallinn, Estonia; Gender & Violence Research Network meeting in Umeå, Sweden; Farväl heteronormativitet -conference, Göteborg, Sweden; GLEE (Gay & Lesbian Equality in Education) Leadership Training Course, Oulu; 27th ATEE Annual Conference: "Teacher Education and Educational reform" Warsaw, Poland; IV Barents Rainbow Festival & Conference, Oulu. The publication will be published in a conference "Values in Education across Boundaries" in the University of Umeå, Sweden. The seminars and conferences have provided a special possibility to build networks worldwide.

The staff of Aware-project also organised lectures "The myths, mysteries and misinterpretations of sexuality and sexuality education", which was especially aimed at the students studying education and teaching. Some writers of this book gave lectures and presented their current research.

During the Aware-project there has been a need and also a possibility for societal activism in addition to academic work. The workers and writers have attended public demonstrations against violence, have coordinated and participated in the Finnish national Women’s Line phone service in Oulu, a help line for girls and women who are facing violence or the threat of violence and urging the local newspaper Kaleva to quit publishing sexual service ads by threatening to boycott the newspaper.
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The Women's Studies Department of Umeå University gave us the possibility to have an official publication party during an international conference organised by them. We thank them for their time and efforts and look forward to further cooperation.


The referee board of the Femina Borealis -series has been very helpful, patient and supportive during the project. We want to thank the members, Gun-Marie Frånberg, Natalie Gutsol, Seija Keskitalo-Foley, Marit Stemland and Berit Woie-Berg.

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The last sentences are reserved for congratulations: five of the writers and partners of the Aware-project have become pregnant or have given birth during the project. Our warmest congratulations to Sanna Aaltonen, Merja Laitinen, Anu Tallavaara, Marina Repina-Poutiainen and Elina Penttinen!
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Introduction

Vappu Sunnari, Mervi Heikkinen and Jenny Kangasvuoto

Sexuality is currently emphasised in western thinking and identity building: the truth about self is sought through sexuality, and sexuality has become an important social and political issue. The emphasis on sexuality and sexual diversity are components of larger societal and cultural trends, namely postmodernism and globalisation.

Postmodernism has tried to get rid of the models that developed in the Age of Enlightenment: the models of positivism, societal progress and intellectual security. Globalisation, a turn, is a term used to describe the societal change processes and ideologies on a more general level (Held 1995, Held et al. 1999, Appadurai 1996, Bauman 1998). As a process, globalisation refers to contradictory and contestable transformations in the relationships between politics and economics, capital and labour, states and markets and international and national politics as well as to reconfigured conditions of time, place and space. The ideologies of globalisation do vary, but the leading ideology of the current phase of globalisation appears to be neoliberalism (Pettman 1999). According to Jan Pettman, the effect of the neoliberalistic ideology of globalisation is to naturalise the globalisation process, to impute magical qualities to the market, to depoliticise and to distract people from the myriad political and economic decisions and practices that propel it (See also Bauman 1998, Kwick 2001, Tikly 2001). The impacts of globalisation are naturally not exclusively negative, but they are unequal. (e.g. Moghadam 1999, Riddell 1996, Pearson 2000). One special feature characterising globalisation is globalised sex business, which was also promoted by other changes in the sexual culture during the 20th century.

According to the British sociologist Jeffrey Weeks (1995), the changes in sexual culture were especially drastic at some levels. One of these changes was the secularisation of sexuality and another was sexual liberation. The use of sexuality for political and commercial purposes also increased drastically.

During the 20th century the norms of sexuality became detached from religion, and sexuality also became a field for non-religious experts. Sexual liberation resulted in liberal and tolerant attitudes towards pre- and extramarital sex, abortion, divorce and sexual minorities. Women's sexuality is approved and celebrated – though the celebration often
takes place on the terms of men's sexuality. Sexuality is openly talked about and debated, and it is no longer felt to be a taboo. Also, concrete sexual behaviour has changed.

In addition to the diversification of sexuality being a sign of sexual liberation, it is in line with the emphasis on individuality in capitalistic societies, in which new markets are constantly being created for new consumers. The positive aspect of this is the freedom of choice, but the problem is that individual satisfaction has become the norm of sexual ethics. 'Freedom of choice' is a political term from the perspectives of both society and individual identity. Freedom of choice without a simultaneous emphasis on responsibility may lead to satisfaction of one's fantasies without any thought to the suffering it may cause to other people. Signs of commercialisation of sexuality include the new markets and technologies of sexual industry and porn, the commercialisation of dating and the use of sexuality in media, fashion and advertising.

The changes in sexual culture discussed above are characteristic of Western societies, but because of globalisation, they are spreading around the world through the popular culture, world economy, advertisements and fashion.

The traditional Western axioms of sexual thinking – the gender division and the differentiation of right from wrong and normal from abnormal – have changed and blurred. But what will be the new truths of sexuality? Diversity, tolerance and equality – or diversity, selfishness and inequality? Instead of trying to find an answer to the question of the future of western sexuality culture, we will concentrate in this collection of articles on the areas of life where sexuality is used to construct and maintain inequality and to threaten and oppress the other, especially women and girls. The writers of the articles have accepted the practical challenge to introduce sexualised and gendered violence to open discussion in educational contexts and, what is even more, to challenge the teachers of educational environments to develop a gender-sensitive, non-violent educational culture.

The writers of the articles define violence, in accordance with Ramazanoglu (1987), as any action or structure that diminishes another human being, and conceive of different forms of violence as means of people to seek control over the others. From that perspective, it is possible to think that violence occurs along a continuum involving physical, verbal, emotional, etc. abuse of power at individual, group and social structural levels (Kelly 1987).

But what is the special focus while discussing sexualised and gendered violence?

In its simplest usage, the term gender is used to replace the terms woman or man. That is not, however, the content of the term in more gender-sensitive discussions: the term was introduced by feminist researchers in the 1970s to refer to the social organisation of the relationship between the sexes and to the fundamentally social quality of the distinctions based on sex. Joan Scott is one of the researchers whose definition of gender is widely used.

For Scott, the use of gender refers to structural and ideological areas involving relations between the sexes. These areas may be, but are not directly, determined by sexuality, says Scott. (Scott 1996, 156.) Some other researchers, including Chrys Ingraham and Rosi Braidotti, pay more attention to sexuality while analysing the core causes of women’s special – and oppressed – position in relation to men.

Chrys Ingraham points out that the use of the term gender has, in practice, even renaturalised and depoliticised sexuality. She starts her analyses from images and introduces the term ‘heterosexual imaginary’. Quoting Althusser, Ingraham defines imaginary to be that
image or representation of reality which masks the historical and material conditions of life. She goes on to state that the images pertaining to sexuality form such imaginary; they conceal the operation of heterosexuality in structuring gender and close off any critical analyses of heterosexuality as an organising institution. (Ingraham 1997, 275.) And because of the heterosexual imaginary, heterosexuality is taken for granted as something natural, while gender is understood as socially constructed and central to the organisation of everyday life. Because of that, Chrys Ingraham says, it would be better to use the term heterogenders instead of gender. Reframing gender as heterogender foregrounds the relations between heterosexuality and gender. Heterogender confronts the equation of heterosexuality with the natural and of gender with the cultural, suggesting that both are socially constructed, open to other configurations and open to change. (Ingraham 1997, 276.)

Rosi Braidotti considers the position of sexuality even more central in the formation of female and male identity and sex-based divisions and hierarchies than Chrys Ingraham. And what is more, Braidotti emphasises the enfleshment of human beings.

Braidotti prioritises the sexual difference in the formation of female and male identities and divisions and thinks that such prioritisation places a new kind of emphasis on the idea that subjects are embodied. And further, she says, this prioritisation aims to refuse to reduce the body to either raw nature or to mere social construction. Instead, it wants to situate human beings at the interaction between nature and culture and, at the same time, in a zone of high turbulence of power. As a consequence of the prioritisation, Braidotti thinks that the use of the term gender is un-meaningful. (Braidotti 2000, VII.)

In this volume, the term gender and other, more sexuality-prioritised terms will be used while discussing sex-based divisions, hierarchies and identities. We have two reasons for this. First, we see both the terms and the phenomena behind the terms as deeply cultural constructions and think that, although sexuality is currently very much emphasised in the Western cultures, this is not necessarily so in all cultural environments. The second reason for the varied terminological choices lies in the fact that the personal starting points of the writers of this volume also vary as far as this question is concerned.

Heterosexuality is an issue that also arises in other discussions between women and gender-sensitive researchers. One of the debated topics is whether heterosexuality in the Western societies is still dominated by men’s objectification and exploitation of women’s bodies or whether women are initiators and equal partners in consensual heterosexual encounters. The violence around sexuality shows that whatever the answer to the question may be, sexuality and sex are used to dominate and oppress women. Both qualitative and quantitative investigations repeatedly show that the vast majority of violence experienced by men and women is done by men, that violence against women is largely done by men who are or have been in an intimate relation with the victim, and that the assaults often occur within the home. (Heise 1997, Khodyreva 1996, Heiskanen & Piispa 1998, Kivi- vuori 1999.)

Sexualised / sexual violence can be defined to include any physical, visual or sexual act that is experienced by a human being, at the time or later, as a threat, invasion or assault, that has the effect of hurting her or degrading her and / or that deprives her of her ability to control intimate contact. This definition includes rape, sexual assault, wife-beating, sexual harassment, incest, child sexual abuse and pornography. These acts are overwhelmingly, though not exclusively, male acts of aggression against women and girls. (Maynard & Winn 1997, 179.)
Some researchers prefer to use the term **eroticisation** of women’s oppression, aiming to make a clear distinction between the varied constructive components of sexual life and components that serve opposite tendencies. One of these researchers is Margaret Jackson. She thinks that a huge process to sexualise Western women has taken place since the 19th century, and that the core of this process should not be seen as ‘liberating’ but rather as an attempt to eroticise women’s oppression and to do it so that the real power relations between the sexes will be concealed (see e.g. Jackson 1987.)

Not all forms of violence between the sexes include a component connected with sexuality. For example, many studies show that girls and women in educational environments encounter violence whose core lies in diminishing women’s intelligence (e.g. Sunnari 1997). Such issues have challenged us to make a distinction between sexualised and gendered violence: **sexualised violence** refers to the cases where one’s sexuality is used as a tool. In this division, **gendered violence** refers to verbal or other conduct that includes stereotypical, discriminatory and disrespectful attitudes towards the other sex (Fitzgerald 1996, 51). The two terms will be used in the articles of this volume in the sense mentioned above.

In this publication, sexualised and gendered violence is approached from three different angles, which are entitled 1) Representations of Femininity, Masculinity and Violence at School, 2) Gender and Sexualised Harassment and Coercion in Various Environments and 3) Heteronormativities and Sexual Violence.

**Representations of femininity, masculinity and violence at school**

The official curricular objectives of compulsory education include the special task to educate capable citizens and to do this in a way that promotes equity. Both of these tasks can be found in, for example, the documents of the UN. These ideas are largely accepted at the abstract level, but not at the practical level. Such things as one’s social positioning, cultural and institutional values and practices and also a sense of belonging influence the content of citizenship (Yuval-Davis & Werbner 1999, 3–5). Social positioning is a special component of gendered and sexualised violence in schools and educational institutions. It is also the focus of the following six articles.

Gendered and sexualised violence have been excluded from Russian school violence discussions and the major part of the mainstream school violence discussion in the Western countries, too. The mainstream school violence research has focused on the amount and forms of school violence, and scholars have also tried to answer the question as to why a person is violent. The results obtained indicate that school violence is common and that the perpetrators and victims of violence are both boys and girls, although more usually boys. The results further indicate that boys more than girls resort to physical vio-

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1. The common term used in the mainstream school violence discussions in the Nordic countries, and also more generally, is **bullying**. To say the least, the Finnish language term is used to signal acts that are considered less dangerous than “proper violence”. That is not, however, the original meaning of the term. The Norwegian school violence researcher Dan Olweus (1999) introduced the term and defined it as a form of aggressive behaviour which is not occasional but systematic and is repeatedly targeted at the same individual child in a context of imbalance of power. (Olweus 1999.)
lence and that girls’ violence is more typically indirect. Indirect aggression is regarded as noxious behaviour of attacking the target person in a roundabout way. This allows the perpetrator to go unidentified and not to be accused of aggression. Social manipulation, such as spreading malicious rumours about the target person, is a form of indirect violence. (See Salmivalli 1998.) The division between direct and indirect violence and the consequent interpretation that the former is typical of boys and the latter of girls have led to the assumption that girls’ violence is morally more problematic than boys’.

The most typical reasons for violence identified in mainstream school violence research have been socio-economic, marital and other family problems and problems connected with a particular individual’s special aggressiveness. The ways in which schools produce or maintain – and maybe even foster violent behaviour – have hardly been considered at all, nor the question of whether issues connected with gender contribute to school violence. The same can be said about the question of whether sexuality is used as a tool in school violence.

Feminist and other gender-sensitive researchers explore school as a specific social and cultural arena for the production and reproduction of sexual and gendered identities, divisions and hierarchies (Wolpe 1988, Kenway 1998, Lesko 2000). As part of these discussions, the question has arisen as to whether the processes produce and maintain certain types of violence. These studies have, however, predominantly focused on secondary schools (e.g. Mandel & Shakeshaft 2000, Epstein D & Johnson R 1998, Duncan 1999, Saarikoski 2001).

Emma Renold is one of the researchers who have studied sexualised school culture, and violence as a component of it, in primary schools. She studied how sexuality, and especially heterosexuality, is part of the everyday experience in the worlds of primary school children, and furthermore, how heterosexuality underpins most interaction and identity work as they live out the gendered categories “boy” and “girl”. Drawing on data derived from an ethnographic exploration into children’s gender and sexual identities during their final year of primary school, Renold states that the dominant notions of heterosexuality underscore much of children’s identity work and peer relationships, and that both boys and girls are subject to the violating pressures of compulsory heterosexuality. The heterosexualisation of female bodies included a demand for attractiveness, with the content of being heterosexually desirable or involved in a heterosexual relationship. Misogynistic and homophobic discourses and heterosexual fantasies were tools in heterosexual male identification. Particularly boys’ behaviour included misogyny and sexual objectification of women (Renold 2000.)

In this volume, Anu Tallavaara approaches gendered school violence through irritation. Tallavaara is doing research on gendered school violence among 11- to 12-year-old pupils in attending a village school in Northern Finland. The pupils of the school filled in a questionnaire, drew a picture and were observed and interviewed. The pupils frequently used the term ‘irritation’ in the interviews. Tallavaara therefore utilised the term as a tool through which she examined violence for this article. The term ‘irritation’ turned out to be in highly gendered use among the pupils, and its use was closely connected with perceived positions. In these perceptions, one issue that is unfrequently discussed and may be a northern countryside speciality in the landscape of globalised gendered identities.

2. meaning divorces or alcohol problems
arose: for boys – or some of the boys – nature and its animals seemed to be means to show one’s superiority and to construct and maintain one’s masculine identity. For girls – or for some of the girls – nature and its animals seemed rather to be something to fight for and protect and thereby to take distance from the masculine values. In her article, Tallavaara analyses these issues mainly from the perspective of girls.

The perspective of Tuija Huuki and Sari Manninen is more about boys. Tuija Huuki deals with schoolboys’ social interaction and other actions that are used in building and maintaining one’s own position. While collecting data for her study, Huuki found that popularity was an issue of great importance for children. She therefore approached her material from the perspective of popularity and the question of how children discuss the ways of pursuing popularity. Huuki examined the role of violent action in pursuing popularity and the role of violence in the construction of male and female images. The research data, which included interviews and observations, were collected in a school in the northernmost part of Finland. The data show how violence is used to control other individuals and to strengthen one’s own position as well as how violence is seen as part of the commonly accepted ways of being a boy.

Sari Manninen’s article discusses the relationships between girls and boys as well as the relations between the boys of a particular multicultural fourth grade in a Finnish primary school. The writer examines how power, violence and popularity are connected to the boys’ different ways of acting as masculine beings. On the basis of the results, some of the Finnish boys used power and violence to marginalise the immigrant boys as well as other groups subordinate to the hegemony. Activity with violent traits was used to construct and reproduce the power hierarchy within the classroom as well as to demonstrate one’s own masculine competence. The forms of violence used by boys proved to be direct and indirect in the terminology of the mainstream school-violence discussion. Similar results were reported by Huuki, too. Exclusion is one example of the indirect violence used by some boys very effectively in both of the schools studied. Huuki’s and Manninen’s studies challenge us to widen the discussion of direct and indirect violence even more generally. From the gender perspective, and from the perspective of preventing violence, it may be more important to identify the hidden and visible components of violence and the aims and messages of direct and indirect violence than to speculate whether boys or girls use one of the forms more than the other.

Connell (1999, 463–467) uses the term body-reflected practices while discussing the formation and maintenance of masculine identity. We should point out that body-reflected practices were also present in many ways in the school classes of Tuija Huuki. Body is also central to the formation and maintenance of female identity. Hannele Harjunen’s article “The Construction of an Acceptable Female Body in Finnish Schools” concentrates on this question. The article focuses on exploring how the Finnish school moulds girls’ bodies. Harjunen has gathered data on women’s experiences of being fat. One of the findings was that, most of the women who had been fat as a child named school as the place where they had learnt or been told directly or implicitly that they were too fat or their bodies were somehow deviant from the norm.

In her article, Harjunen applies Foucauldian thinking by considering fatness a discursive category that is created, produced and reproduced through social practices, including the school and its institutions, such as school health care and physical education.
Harjunen’s material is connected with her doctoral research, as are also Tallavaara’s, Huuki’s, Manninen’s and Dyachenko’s. Tatiana Dyachenko is studying violence and its gendered components among school children in Apatity in North-western Russia. We can say that gendering in educational environments is common and, in the context of violence, has been almost beyond research in Russia. Tatiana Dyachenko is one of the Russian pioneers in this field, although the pioneering position, on the other hand, has caused the theoretical discussion in Dyachenko’s article to be limited.

Neil Duncan continues the discussion on sexual violence among school-aged children and adolescents in his article “Girls, Bullying and School Transfer”. Duncan’s study examines girls’ claims of peer harassment at school. Seven girls who had a history of school refusal and school transfer due to bullying were interviewed about their experiences. Additional data from the schools and the education welfare service supplemented the case studies. The girls reported high levels of both indirect aggression and physical violence against themselves and other victims.

Gendered and sexualized harassment and coercion in various environments

Sexual harassment can be seen as one form of sexual violence in human relations. Precise definition of the term is difficult due to a number of reasons. First, there are cultural differences between countries and cultures in human behaviour, in its interpretations and in the ways people send messages. Additionally, sexual harassment is very often situated in the grey zone of socially acceptable behaviour and incorporates behaviours widely regarded as an acceptable part of everyday life. And because of the extreme subjectivity of harassing experiences, the willingness to break the wall of privacy with these issues may also be very high. Studies further indicate that people in different cultures perceive different issues as sexual harassment. Phenomena without terms are difficult to discuss; and phenomena people register as a “natural” part of every day life easily remain beyond consideration.

Feminist definitions identify sexual harassment as one of the manifestations of the larger patriarchal system in which men dominate women (Thomas & Kitzinger 1997, 1). The term patriarchy refers to historically variable systems that produce hierarchies of (hetero)gender division and privilege men as a group and exploit women as a group. Patriarchy structures social practices, representing them as natural and universal and organises differences by positioning men in hierarchical opposition to women and differentially in relation to other structures, such as race and class. (Ingraham 1997, 278.)

Sexual harassment was first studied in the working life context, and it was defined as the making of sexual demands in unequal power situations (MacKinnon 1979). This definition made one side and form of the problem visible. Recently, this form of sexual harassment has been specified as quid pro quo harassment. The discussion on sexual harassment has broadened to cover different environments, and new terms have been introduced to be used about the variable forms of the phenomenon (see e.g. Thomas & Kizinger 1997, DeBruin 1997). The components of unwantedness and one-sidedness and the connectedness to the sexual area of one’s life are typical in definitions of sexual

Some researchers make a division between sexual harassment and gender(-based) harassment, defining the former term to apply only to the cases where sexuality is properly used as a tool in harassment. The semantic domain of the terms gender harassment and gender-based harassment is larger. Both sexual harassment and gender(-based) harassment have been interpreted as forms of sex discrimination.

According to the report commissioned by the European Commission, approximately 30% to 50% of female employees in North-western Europe had experienced some form of sexual harassment or unwanted sexual behaviour at their workplace. A few surveys studied men’s experiences of the issue, showing that about 10% of male employees had experienced sexual harassment or unwanted sexual behaviour in their workplace. (Timmerman & Bajema 1999.) The report further suggested that the most common forms of sexual harassment experienced were verbal forms, such as sexual jokes and sexual remarks about one’s body, clothes and sex life, physical forms as unsolicited physical contact and nonverbal forms, such as staring and whistling. It was not possible to find any typical profile of harassers or harassed employees, although male workers were generally the perpetrators of sexual harassment. In most cases, the harassers were male colleagues (average 50%) or supervisors (average 30%). The harassed employees were usually women. Young (age between 20 and 40), single or divorced women were more likely to be harassed than other women. Women with lower education and temporary workers were also more exposed to sexual harassment. And women in male-dominated jobs experienced more sexual harassment than those in other jobs. (Ibid.)

Some of the studies reviewed indicated that organisations characterised by a sexualised work environment and tolerance of sexual harassment facilitate the occurrence of sexual harassment. Some surveys further revealed a tendency of employees to experience less sexual harassment in organisations that were characterised by a positive social climate and sensitivity to the problem that many female workers are balancing between work and personal obligations. Women working in workplaces with relative equality between the sexes reported the lowest rate of sexual harassment, although the highest rate of sexual harassment was not reported in workplaces where the balance of power was extremely unequal. Most experiences of sexual harassment were reported in workplaces where the balance of power had changed, not towards equality but towards a somewhat less uneven balance. (Ibid. 5–6.)


In the following five articles, the environments of sexual harassment vary from schools to university and a religious environment, and the focus of the articles is rather on the consequences of sexual harassment for individual persons and groups of human beings and the challenges of sexual harassment for organisations than on the amount of harassment.

Sanna Aaltonen concentrates in her article on the interpretations of young people concerning school as a scene of sex-based harassment and on pupils as targets of harassment. Aaltonen is interested in the extent to which the Finnish young people think that gender has anything to do with school conflicts. The data consisted of 40 compositions on sex-
based harassment or bullying written by boys and girls on the 9th grade of a Finnish comprehensive school.

Kerstin Hägg has initiated a pilot study about sexual harassment at Umeå University. Teachers are a special group, since equal opportunities are a guiding principle in their work and they should be able to deal with issues related to it. Sexual bullying has not been adequately dealt with in schools, which is a clear challenge to teacher education.

Sexual and gendered harassment and coercion are discussed by Mervi Heikkinen. She presents the first part of an action research project conducted in the University of Oulu, Finland. She advocates for sufficient practices to prevent sexual harassment in university settings. Her data, which consisted of voluntary stories gathered through web sites. According to her, universities fail in preventing sexual harassment in their educational and working environments and in providing decent support for people who have encountered sexual harassment.

Vappu Sunnari, Niina Kuorikoski and Anja-Leena Huotari discuss an instance of sexual harassment that happened in a religious context and its consequences for the harassed person as well as her ways to deal with it. In addition, the article takes a look at the ways in which the religious community and the other people that the victim of harassment contacted reacted to the harassment and to the demands of the victim to bring the harasser to account for his actions. The article together with Heikkinen’s article provides a possibility to compare two traditionally patriarchal and hierarchical organisations – university and church – in these issues. Through the articles, we can gain knowledge of the way gendered patterns are maintained in these organisations and the positions of women in them. Gendered divisions are maintained in religion and in the university in a particular way, with metaphors playing a central role. In Christian church, the metaphors of the Madonna and the whore are at the very core of the definition of womanhood, while science uses the metaphor of a male scientist undressing the feminine nature and exposing its secrets. Both of these metaphors are male-centered and present the woman as a feminine and passive creature defined in binary relation to the man, who is masculine and active.

An important difference between churches and universities in Finland in issues connected with sexual harassment is that universities have guidelines to support victims of harassment and to prevent harassment. The first step towards such guidelines for churches has, however, been taken: The Commission for Church Employers is taking part in a campaign against sexual harassment in the workplace, being one of the organisations that have signed guidelines connected with the campaign.

Health care work and educational environment are the arena of Pirkko Sandelin’s research. She points out that even though the whole health care organisation is mostly run by females, it is governed by the gendered pattern of male-centered behaviour and masculine values. This conclusion is astonishing as the area is female-dominated. The consequences of the authoritarian atmosphere may also result in misogynic characteristics. Sandelin’s article invites the readers to ponder whether health care carries its own implicit gendered patterns.
Heteronormativities and sexual violence

Our culture is characterised by a notion of fundamental differences between the woman and the man. These differences are assumed to be connected specifically to biological sex. The presumed difference has affected the notion of sexuality in such a way that heterosexuality is perceived as a more natural form of sexuality than the other forms. What is more, it is seen as the norm of sexuality against which the other forms are compared. As an example, when speaking about homo- or bisexuality, a person might ask "What causes homo- or bisexuality?" but the question of "What causes heterosexuality?" is not seen as relevant. Researchers of Women’s and Gender Studies have challenged the idea and studied critically the binary gender division.

In western cultures, everyone is assumed to be heterosexual, unless stated otherwise. This accounts for the relative invisibility of non-heterosexuals. The other side of the phenomenon is that if non-heterosexuals are visible, they are mostly perceived as exotic and peculiar. What is more, non-heterosexuals are characterised by their non-heterosexuality rather than any other trait. This structure can be described as heteronormativity. Heteronormativity means both privileging heterosexuality and representing it as the most preferable form of sexuality, but also neglecting and belittling non-heterosexualities. Heteronormativity is generally implicit in everyday situations. For example, when a woman speaks about her mate, people automatically assume the person to be a man.

Judith Butler (1990, 1993) has developed the term *heterosexual hegemony* to conceptualise the issue. She says that the assumption of heterosexuality as natural and normal keeps the man-woman dichotomy stable. Coherence within the categories of cultural Man and cultural Woman demands heterosexuality. Institutionalised heterosexuality, heterosexual hegemony in Butler's terms, both produces gender categories and demands their existence. The gender categories imply causality between anatomic body and gender and desire, claiming that desire describes gender and gender describes desire.

Heterosexism refers to different forms of discrimination of non-heterosexual people and can be compared to racism. Jokes about homosexuals can be seen as an example of heterosexism, whereas the most brutal forms of heterosexism result in beatings and murders of non-heterosexual people. In Finland, the law against discrimination protects people from heterosexism exercised by institutions but, in their everyday lives, non-heterosexual people may encounter heterosexism from individual people. Due to this, same-sex couples do not generally show affection towards each other in public.

Heterosexism, homophobia and sexual dichotomies are thus special forms of violence that affect clearly non-heterosexual people but also heterosexuals who do fit to the norm of heteronormative sexuality. Four of the following five articles concentrate especially on sexual violence and the oppressive structures that affect non-heterosexual people. The focus of the fifth article is sexual abuse of children. Jukka Lehtonen has interviewed non-heterosexual young people to find out what kind of school experiences they have. Lehtonen uses the concept of heteronormativity while describing the normative nature of school experiences. His article reveals that homophobic name-calling and heteronormative bullying are common in Finnish schools today. The same issues are also discussed in Jenny Kangasvuo's article. Bisexuality has not been studied much in Finland, and Kangasvuo's article concentrates on young bisexual people at school and their experiences in a sexually dichotomous culture. She provides an insight
into the history of the dichotomous sexual system in Finland and claims that the emergence of bisexual identities predicts further change in the Finnish sexual system. Kangasvuo and Lehtonen provide a special insight into the situation of non-heterosexual people at school in Finland.

Ian Rivers introduces a British perspective into the school experiences of gay, lesbian and bisexual students. His central interest focuses on victimisation and the conceptualisation of experiences during the identity formation process. Canadian John Guiney approaches the subject of gayness and school from a narrative aspect. He uses his own experiences and some interviews as data and gives an interesting and self-reflective discussion about different experiences as a gay teacher and student. Rivers and Guiney approach their subject differently, Rivers by using Grounded Theory and Guiney by using a narrative approach. Their articles reveal quite similar experiences on the both sides of Atlantic Ocean.

Merja Laitinen describes a sensitive subject: sexual abuse of children in the family. She ponders on the different consequences of incest and the cultural norms of masculinity and femininity as parts of incest. Her informants have very different backgrounds and lives, but all share the destructive experience of incest. Her article challenges the readers to recognise incest and to intervene in it despite the complexity of the phenomenon.

Concluding remarks

Sexualised and gendered violence are essential parts of organisational culture, including educational organisations. Competition for success, fight for normativity and gender-based hierarchical value systems are the central characteristics that maintain these phenomena. These issues are also apparent in the globalisation processes. They challenge teachers to work as empowered and intellectual actors who are able to analyse the varied and contradictory information and challenges inherent in educational environments and educational politics. But this is not enough. In addition to the ability to analyse what is happening, it is important that teachers are able to make decisions promoting human dignity and equity and that they are qualified to support human development in this direction. As transformational intellectuals, teachers are ready to take a critical look at social reality and make changes if necessary.

But to become a transformational intellectual in view of sexualised and gendered violence, one needs to become aware of these issues. Most of the educational material available for higher education fails to consider violence from a gender-sensitive perspective and to grasp to the current societal changes and their implications for gendered and sexualised violence. Currently, gender and sexuality remain as silenced domains in higher education and hence also silenced in other educational organisations, including schools maintaining hidden heterogender curricula.

The hidden heterogender curricula must be broken up. This book will serve that purpose. The articles of the book are based on up-to-date research results on sexualised and gendered violence in variable environments. Awareness of violence and its sexualised and gendered nature will hopefully lead to a reform of educational organisations. We invite educators to participate in discussion about ways to prevent sexualised and gendered vio-
lence. Promoting non-hierarchical human relations and gender-sensitive pedagogies that enhance dignity, equity and intellectuality can serve in this.

References


Chapter 1: Representations of Feminity, Masculinity and Violence at School
Irritation – A Glimpse of Gendered Violence

Anu Tallavaara

Abstract

In this article the author studies gendered violence and irritation among 11–12 year old pupils. The prevailing gendered violence is seen to be connected with the positions the pupils have in the class. The word irritation is language pupils used in the interviews and it is utilised here as a tool through which the phenomenon of gendered violence is examined. The research was conducted in a combined 5th and 6th grade class in Northern Finland. The pupils answered a questionnaire, drew a picture, were observed and interviewed. This study is based on the data from the questionnaire, observations and the interviews. Pupils’ attempts of maintaining and improving their own positions are gendered and violent in the data presented here.

Introduction

AT: You have chosen here “to irritate”.
Kerttu: Yes.
AT: What do they (boys) do to irritate you?
Kaisa: They can’t do anything but irritate.

Irritation seems to be a familiar concept to the pupils. Various things can be described to irritate or be irritating; from a pair of new trousers to killing a cat or from talking about friends make up to calling something yuck. What on earth could irritating have to do with gendered violence or positions pupils have? A lot!1

1. This article has been written within the project “Gendered power relations and violence in schools and teacher education in Northern Finland”. The project was funded by Finnish Academy.
Collecting the data

I belong to the research group “Gendered violence and the representations of femininity and masculinity in primary schools and teacher education” and our research group has made a questionnaire concerning gendered violence. Lintuvaara’s 5–6th grade is one of many classes to participate in the questionnaire. In my research, the answers collected at Lintuvaara were used as background information for both observation and interviews.

The observation period lasted a month, during which I had a desk behind the pupils where I could observe the lessons and indoor activities in the course of the breaks. I made field notes and in the evenings rewrote everything and recorded my reflections about the day on the computer. The two theme interviews (Hirsjärvi et al. 1985, Syrjälä et al. 1988, 100, Eskola et al. 1998, 87) focused on the discussion between the pupils rather than towards a question-answer format. Before every interview I told the pupils that they need not answer the questions and that they may leave at any point. The right to not answer was used. The first interview concentrated on what makes a boy or a girl popular. I had cards with different topics, mainly coming from the answers these pupils gave in the questionnaire. The pupils discussed and commented on the impacts of these topics on a pupil’s popularity. In the second interview I again had cards with topics, mostly from the questionnaire answers. In this case the pupils chose and discussed the topics relevant to what girls/boys do to girls/boys that the target does not like. In both interviews pupils were able to come alone or in small groups, with the person/s they wanted. The analysis in this article is based mainly on the interviews.

This work is qualitative feminist research (see Ribbens & Rosalind 1998), which to me means e.g. striving towards ethically justified research, sensitivity to gender and power issues. The data was collected according to methods that are typical of ethnographic work, even though the analysis does not follow the descriptive traditions of ethnography (see Syrjäläinen 1994, Creswell 1998). I see the data to include discourses that are both born in and shaping the reality the children live in. In the analysis I try to follow gender sensitive research traditions (see Sunnari 1997).

The Research school

The Lintuvaara school is located in Northern Finland. It is a village school with some 70 pupils and four teachers. My research class was a compound 5–6th, with roughly 20 pupils: a few girls less than boys, slightly more 6th graders than 5th graders. In the region a religious minority culture is vital, and just about half of the pupils had this kind of

2. appearance, success at school, clothes, leisure and hobbies, doesn’t take everything seriously, dares to complain, religion, doesn’t use foul language, parents, make up, boys (for girls)/ girls (for boys)
3. telling secrets, spreading rumours, unwanted touching, name-calling, leaving somebody alone, fighting about girls/boys, bully about boy/girlfriend, boasts, name-calling related to religion, irritating, laughing at e.g. answers, belittling
4. I find it important to study these issues expressly in Northern Finland, since most of the Finnish school violence research has been conducted in Southern Finland
5. The exact numbers are not here to protect the anonymity of the school and the pupils.
background. The differences – meaningful in this work – between the two cultures are the attitudes toward popular culture and dating. The religious minority tends not to actively follow popular culture or encourage dating at this age, whereas the other families are more favourable towards popular culture and dating. The pupils’ names are changed, the first letter tells about the family background and the grade; vowels refer to the minority culture and consonants to majority culture, the 6th graders’ names start with either K or I; Kaisa, Into etc. A is the interviewer, she belongs to the majority culture.

From bullying to gendered violence and to positions

In this kind of study bullying is a widely used concept. The discussion on bullying at schools was opened by a Swede Peter-Paul Heineman, who was the first to study bullying (Heineman 1972). He introduced the concept “mobbing” in Sweden, and the discussion spread rapidly into the other Nordic countries. Heinemann did not use the term bullying, but he defined mobbing as group violence against one individual. The discussion was then continued by a Norwegian Dan Olweus, who introduced the concept bullying and has studied bullying widely since the 1970’s.

Olweus defines bullying as regular, long-term negative actions against one person with asymmetrical power relations between the parties. Olweus does not see bullying as a collective aggression towards one victim, as Heinemann did. Instead, he sees the bully or the reinforcer of the bullying being one person or a group. (Olweus 1999.) This research tradition has often emphasised the individual psychology approach. Olweus divides bullying into violent and non-violent bullying, violent being physical violence and non-violent e.g. name-calling. (Olweus 1999.) According to that division mental or verbal violence is not violence at all!

A Finnish sociologist Christina Salmivalli, grounding her work on aggression based research and Olweus’s ideas of bullying, defines bullying as systematic aggression: purposefully harmful actions repeatedly targeted at one child. She also finds the imbalance of power as a feature of bullying and has studied bullying from the perspective of group dynamics. In her work bullying does not occur only between the bully and the bullied, rather bullying takes place in the context of a group of peers. Salmivalli identifies several different participant roles in bullying situations. (Salmivalli 1998.)

Our research group sees violence as any action or structure that diminishes another human being and as a brutal means through which people seek control over one another (Sunnari 2000, 91). Arto Jokinen carries our ideas a bit further by saying that the goal of violence is to dominate, control and exploit another person or a group (Jokinen 2000, 14). Based on our definition of violence, Olweus’s thoughts on bullying cannot be supported; bullying being repeated negative actions, violent and non-violent. Instead we consider bullying to be repeated violence against those who are being bullied. From our point of view, all kinds of bullying are violent and must therefore be called violence. The negative actions in Olweus’s definition have been criticised for being too vague and all-catching

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6. Mobbing is usually translated as bullying in English.
thus becoming useless; as Duncan (Duncan 1999, 144) points out, the negative actions could include acts like passive smoking.

The traditional school bullying research as well as the aggression based research have had the tendency to look for the reasons for bullying from within the individuals e.g. reasons like external deviations, impulsivity, physical strength etc. Salmivalli has widened that perspective by studying bullying as a part of group dynamics. In her words “Bullying is like an institutionalised habit which is largely motivated by the bully’s need to dominate others or to acquire status in the peer group” (Salmivalli 1998, 11). The words dominate and status refer to the direction of power relations and pupils’ positions in the class, which can prove to be a more fruitful for direction finding reasons for bullying and violence. Additionally, the prevailing power imbalance in bullying situations was already identified by Olweus. We find power relations to have crucial importance in school violence. Neil Duncan also has the same kind of thoughts, and has included power into the definition of bullying. After studying sexual bullying in some British secondary schools, and analysing it in the light of gender, power relations and pupils’ culture, he claims bullying to be an abuse of interpersonal power. (Duncan 1999.)

In the more traditional school violence research, gender has been a mere category and the boys have gained far more attention. There seems to be little meaningful analysis of school violence from both the gender sensitive and the girls' point of view in the Finnish school context. The influence of gender and power relations in bullying and violence has been marginal in school research.

When the problem field is viewed from the perspective of gendered power relations, it is not justified to study only bullying, but to concentrate on violence as a whole. A single act of violence can form or indicate the existing power relations and pupils’ positions as well. On the other hand an observable, not repeated act of violence can be a part of some hidden forms of bullying.

Salmivalli speculates that the attacking and harassing of others could be a bully's way of maintaining his or her unstable self-esteem (Salmivalli 1998, 24). The unstable self-esteem cannot be the whole picture, suggests Anja-Riitta Lehtinen’s (Lehtinen 2000) study. She has studied preschool pupils, their use of power, negotiation skills and ways of acting. According to Lehtinen, situational statuses are built in face to face interaction either actively or reactively (Lehtinen 2000, 84). Typically, the children, who used negative means of power, built their statuses actively and have weak social skills. The pupils, not applying negative means, were often socially skillful. But most interestingly against Salmivalli’s speculations, some pupils using the negative means of power were socially skillful and furthermore popular among the other pupils. (Salmivalli 2000, 97–149)

This is the basis on which I want to look at gendered violence, through the positions pupils have at school. Could it be, that a bully or anybody using and abusing power can use bullying and violence as a way to keep up, build and improve her/his position in the peer group?

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Irritation, gendered violence and position

My tool for studying gendered violence and positions is irritation, which was one of the topics that I introduced in the interviews. For various reasons, I chose the concept of irritating as the main tool. Irritation originally came up in the questionnaire answers and later several times in the interviews. Pupils discussed it a lot – both girls and boys as well as minority and majority pupils. Therefore I have valuable material on this issue and it allows me to handle areas important to visible and even more invisible pupils, girls and boys, minority and majority pupils. In addition, since the concept has risen from the questionnaire answers, it is in the pupils’ everyday language and they all understand the term beyond any doubts. Furthermore it allows me to bring forward and identify non-physical violence as violence. Later I will conclude with the meaning of irritation the pupils had.

The term gendered violence refers here to my commitment of looking at violence knowingly from the perspective of both girls and boys – even when emphasising girls, and in that way aiming at making visible the multifaceted links between gender and violence. The incidents I describe might not be characterised as violent if presented one by one. In this article, violence is the whole picture – the culture where people improve and maintain their own position by bringing others down.

The themes

After reading and handling the interviews, I took under more careful scrutiny all the parts that dealt with irritation. Again for various reasons, I chose five themes – voices and noises in the class, activists and animal murderers, boasting, heterovexism and boys irritate all the time. These themes were widely discussed and illuminated gendered violence and its links with positions in this data. Furthermore, I found it important to include issues that were significant for girls and boys as well as for minority and majority pupils. I do not present here the whole picture of either gendered violence or irritation. I simply try to put forward a way to show how these phenomena were present in this class and how gendered violence partly forms the reality of these pupils.

Voices and noises in the classroom

This chapter analyses the contents of speech acts or voices that are present here. The voice is looked at mainly as sounds. In this class voice and visibility characterises the pupils of the majority culture. The children with a minority background are more invisible and silent. Voice can be seen as a way to demonstrate and negotiate one's position – at least for the majority pupils. The girls have divided themselves into two equal sized friendship groups according to their cultural background. All the majority culture girls talk more in the classroom and are much louder than the other girls. These loud girls tell, how voices and noises irritate them and how they use their voices to irritate. In fact, voices are the
very first thing they all bring up, when talking about how boys irritate girls, as well as

AT: You sometimes irritate boys. Tell a bit how.
Kaisa: Like Janika can think of all those commercial tunes and sing them. Then we

sing too something like Bob the Builder and stuff like that.
AT: Yes.
Kaisa: Then boys tell us to shut up. But then we sing it anyway.

Irritating voices are shouting, singing, gabbling, clicking a pen, talking... These voices are

made by majority boys, minority girls or girls of their own group. The loud girls do not
talk about isolated voices, an irritating voice is somehow continuous, does not stop even
when asked to stop.

AT: Well, tell an example of somebody irritating somebody else.
Virpi: Oh mine. Kaisa irritates lot. She gabbles irritatingly.

For Kaisa visibility and loudness seem to be ways to demonstrate and maintain her posi-
tion as the "leader" of her girl group, sometimes of the whole class. She talks fast and a
lot in the classroom. Every now and then she even demonstrates her ability to fill the spa-
ce with her own voice. In several single gendered handicraft lessons, Kaisa’s friend takes
time (one, two or three minutes) as Kaisa tries to talk non-stop the whole time.

The handicraft lessons have their own routines. Kaisa’s group often sits in a central
position, talking loudly. The minority girls have less central places, where they mostly
communicate with each other silently. The subjects majority girls loudly discuss often
include areas that the others girls, coming from the religious minority, cannot participate
in, like pop-music, movies and TV programmes.

The other pupils do not mention voice as a means of irritation.

Activists and animal murderers

AT: [what could you] do something the boys won’t like?
Janika: Call them animal killers. They don’t like that.
Virpi: ...animal torturers...
Janika: Precisely, they throw stones at squirrels then they XXX 8 into head
AT: When you call boys animal torturers or animal killers, have they really done
something or are you just irritating?
Janika: They have.
Virpi: Once in the drawing lesson they [told] they had beaten a cat’s head off with
a baseball bat.
Janika: ugh
...
Virpi: They told all that stuff in the drawing lesson.
AT: What they had done? Do they tell because they want to irritate you?

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8. XXX: one is not able to make out the words
Virpi: Yes, they boast. We have killed now something.

... 
AT: They boast. The boys think it is cool, is that it?
Janika: Yes.
Virpi: They think it is fun to kill animals. Their own dogs and cats.
Janika: Take an eye off, yuck, with some spoon.

In many ways the example enlightens how violence comes into the picture in this type of irritation. Although, only the previous interview refers to actual violence against animals or boasting about it, owing to discussions with the teachers I know that boasting about such deeds happens. It is difficult to tell what kind of part it has in the position game among the boys. At least, the boys that Janika and Virpi are referring to in this case are not popular and have rather weak positions in the class. This is in line with Duncan’s finding that through violent acts boys do not necessarily gain popularity (1999, 18, 86). But as the girls tell, those acts can be used to irritate at least some girls.

The school is in a rural area, nature is typically part of the pupils life; it is not unheard of to see an elk on the way to school. Many boys spend their time in nature and hobbies like hunting 9 and fishing are typical. In fact, it would be difficult to be a popular boy without going fishing or hunting. One interviewee feels hunting to be a sign of or a part of becoming an adult. Hunting and fishing could be considered to be part of the local or at least this group’s dominant understanding of masculinity and the idea of a proper man. All of the boys did not fit into this kind of masculinity, but the majority did.

The relationship above is not the only kind of relationship pupils have towards nature. Kaisa’s group strongly supports the idea that a popular pupil must be fond of animals. To be fond of animals means that one must protect animals, not to kill them and declare this feeling publicly. Unsurprisingly the definition suits only the definers themselves. The minority girls are aware of Kaisa’s group’s opinions and the importance the opinions have for the majority girls. They do not share those opinions or bring the relationship with nature into the discussions.

Kai: I blew my top, she tries to command other peoples lives.
AT: Kaisa.
Kai: What you may and may not do.
AT: Is she trying to command boys’ lives or girls’ lives?
Kai: Boys. One shouldn’t hunt or go fishing.

To be fond of animals is a handy tool to Kaisa’s group, when they want to irritate boys. At the same time they call into question the boys’ positions and the dominant idea of proper masculinity. The girls’ definition makes the boys who hunt and fish torturers and murderers of animals – a label which many boys feel is unjustified. Some popular majority boys make efforts to clear their name despite their hobbies. In my field notes there are two references of an occasion, where a boy brings a photograph – a pet and a capercaillie – to school and is eager to show it to Kaisa. A another boy gives a lecture on one breed of dogs during a Finnish lesson and brings his dog to school as an example. The same boy

9. The translation hunting is not the whole picture of the Finnish expressions “käydä metällä” the boys use in the interviews. It includes many kind of activities in the forest like wandering, sitting by the fire, hunting itself being only a part of it.
asks Kaisa, if he should interview her for the school paper about protecting animals. Kaisa seems to give very little attention to these attempts. These efforts do not stop the majority girls from judging boys – including popular boys – according to their own standards in the situation in which they obviously have the upper hand.

It is not only the dominant understanding of masculinity that is criticised. In the interviews the boys, who try to influence Kaisa’s groups’ opinions, express their points of view. The girls and especially Kaisa are called activists and their ideas of protecting nature – releasing minks\(^{10}\) from the minkeries – are criticised. In these cases the loudest and the most visible understanding of femininity is called into question by the boys.

**AT:** How can boys irritate girls?

**Kai:** During last week, well Kaisa is an activist...

**AT:** An activist.

**Kai:** You may not do anything. It gets to me, so I started to talk about killing a cat on purpose. She just lost it.

…

**AT:** So it is a way to irritate.

**Kai:** Yes.

On the other hand, the situation has developed into a sort of irritation game between majority girls and some of the majority boys. When these boys want to irritate the girls, they deliberately bring up issues like intending to kill a cat or shoot small birds. The remarks get immediate, strong and obviously desired responses from the girls. As Janika and Virpi stated earlier the girls in their part use the murder and torturer labels knowingly for irritation.

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**Boasting\(^{11}\)**

There are two cases here, both to cause irritation by boasting and to irritate by accusing somebody of boasting. Boys talk much more about boasting than girls. In one interview a boy says that every boy boasts with something. Boys are told to boast mainly with material goods like mobile phones, new trousers, even guns, but also with achievements in sports, girlfriends and dyed hair.

**AT:** Can you boast of a girlfriend [to other boys]?

**Valto:** Of course. …in principle it is not like “look I have a girlfriend” [with a boasting voice]. That could give in principle an idea that, if the girlfriend hears it, she thinks you see her only as a toy.\(^{12}\)

Boasting seems to be strongly related to position and power. It is one way in which a pupil can bring forward the cards she/he thinks could be useful in the classroom’s position game. The others can also judge somebody’s behaviour as boasful as it relates to

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\(^{10}\) Minks do not naturally live in the Finnish nature, but have spread in some areas due to minkeries. And as one interviewee brought up minks can supplant the natural European mink.

\(^{11}\) boasting: lesottaa

\(^{12}\) Every time at this point the researcher cannot help smiling at Valto’s (11) earnest comment…
issues or things presumably linked with position. So, things or issues which pupils boast and can boast about are those which they value or those that could build positions.

When talking about boasting Veikko and his trousers come up in roughly every interview. Veikko is a 5th grader, who does not have the same areas of interest – fishing, hunting, sports – which most of the dominant boys have and value. Veikko builds his position by e.g. bringing up his latest mobile phone, family travels and similar things the other pupils have no access to due to economical reasons. In the eyes of the other pupils, Veikko boasts with his expensive belongings. Everybody seems to know about his new trousers; if not the brand, then at least the costly price. Veikko’s strategy does not make him popular but gives him a rather high position. During the observation period he dates Kaisa, the girl with the strongest position, and breaks up the relationship.

A boy describes an incident, in which after he had won a gold medal in an inter-school sports competition, he needs only to enter the school to be accused of boasting. The accusation might seem a bit too hasty but some interviewees and the class teacher have described the boy as someone who boasts with his sports achievements. In his interview the boy himself is aware of such opinions and does not deny boasting. The other pupils may know what to expect after this kind of victory and react to their expectations. Evidently, the gold medal has some potential considering the winners position, since it is acknowledged by the other pupils even before the actual boasting occurs.

Boasting comes up far less with the girls in the research group. It does exists, but is obviously not as an important way to build one’s position as it is with boys.

\[ \text{Heterovexism}^{13} \]

AT: With what one can irritate the other boys?
Into: Teasing about something like, you like this or that girl.
AT: I see. Girls, girlfriends and likings are good way to irritate. Do they tease about liking or having a girlfriend?
Into: Both.

A handy way to irritate anybody is to use the coexistent gender, real or speculated heterosexual relationships. This phenomenon in multifaceted, varying from irritating with true or invented and unfavourable crushes to irritating with having or not having a courtship. In principle, nobody is safe from this kind of irritation, although on individual’s popularity and position influences the amount and the nature of irritation one faces. In a good many interviews this kind of irritation is brought up, both by girls and boys as well as by minority and majority pupils.

It may be so sweet to like somebody but it also makes one vulnerable. Namely, that piece of information in the wrong hands offers a neat way to tease and in that way to irritate both parties involved. Then again, the crushes need not be real. Just about anybody can irritate by simply linking the target’s name with the most unwanted person or with an

\[ ^{13} \text{Heterohärnä. This term has been created by the author and means irritating and bullying with real or speculated heterosexual relationships.} \]
individual with the lowest position in the class. Unfortunately, the threat of irritation linked with liking\(^{14}\) is a most effective way to prohibit or at least decrease cross gendered friendships at school (cf. Thorne 1993, 50, 53–54). Additionally, it forces pupils to watch their behaviour where the coexistent gender is concerned, although that does not protect from this kind of irritation.

In this context courtship carries different kinds of meanings. Courtship at this age is not encouraged in the minority culture, the other families tend to be more permissive in this matter. During the time of the observation and interviews at least five majority pupils date with somebody; some relationships end, some start, and restart\(^ {15}\). The pupils seem to be aware of these relationships, which appear to open a fruitful source for both the minority and majority pupils to irritate the parties involved. In this playing field a girlfriend’s friends have a juicy position to irritate the boy, since he has no choice but to swallow the irritation. A fifth grader dating with a fourth grade girl says that the other majority boys could be called “screw-ups”\(^{16}\) since they have not been able to get a girl friend.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{The boys irritate all the time} \\
\text{AT: How do boys irritate each other?} \\
\text{Kai: Guess there is always complaining in the group.} \\
\text{AT: With what one irritates others?} \\
\text{Kai: Well, with everything possible.} \\
\text{Kuisma: There are so many things.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

The boys discuss about irritation as a normal part of their peer group – there is irritating and name calling all the time among the friends. Somewhat surprisingly, irritating does not occur only between “enemies” but also friends and inside the peer groups. Irritating one’s friends seems to be a way to find out just how good and worthy the friends really are. Boys talk about irritating their friends, but not really of being irritated by them. In their descriptions they are far more irritated by those boys that are not their friends or perhaps belong to the other culture.

The constant irritating can be seen as a part of the position game, determining and testing the pecking order without physical violence. In this game, there is one crucial element: one must not get upset. The boys stress that the irritating and name calling is playful and it is just a game. Still, this playfulness can turn into uglier tunes and can even lead into a fight. Calling a boy "gay" is an example of a situation, where boys are allowed to and expected to get upset and avenge themselves (cf. Duncan 1999, 38). The majority of

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14. liking: tykkääminen
15. Neither teachers nor the observer were able to notice the couples at school. I did suspect there were two dating couples, but it was not until the interview that the real situation was revealed to me. By that time the other suspected relationship was already over.
16. screw up: tunari
the boys say that a popular boy “doesn’t take everything seriously”\textsuperscript{17}, that means does not get upset when irritated or the target of “a play fight”\textsuperscript{18}.

The way the boys talk about irritation and name-calling in relation to the girls and boys seems to differ. The boys say they call girls names if they are irritated by them first but that other boys are called names clearly in order to irritate them.

**Discussing irritation, gendered violence and position**

What kind of features can be found in the pupils’ use of the word irritating? The themes or issues that irritate are not plentiful in this data. The same issues are used again and again for a longer time. Then again, if a handy way to irritate is found, why give it up as long as it works. What is used for irritation and what irritates varies partly according to the gender and the cultural background. The majority girls use their voices to irritate and are irritated by voices. The minority girls do not take part in the irritation game “activists – animal murders”. The minority boys are rather silent in the interviews, but strongly bring up heterovexism. The boys use irritation to find out how good their friends are, the girls do not use irritation for that purpose.

The pupils do not talk about any form of irritation that would be repeatedly targeted against one and the same pupil. Heterovexism and boys do it all the time do work at the individual level as the target of irritation is an individual pupil, but the pupil is not the same every time. Irritation can be targeted at not only one but several persons. When the boys bring up shooting little birds, they manage to irritate Kaisa’s whole group. Even when the audience of a “shooting little birds” remark could be an individual pupil, the incident and the irritation is later shared with the others. In those cases actually, a certain group of pupils irritates another group of pupils. When Veikko boasts with his famous trousers, he manages to irritate every pupil in the class.

I think it is safe to say, that models for some of the forms of irritation – like heterovexism – clearly come from outside the school. Heterovexism seems to be quite a common way to irritate or tease people, who do not have a steady heterosexual relationship. There are some context specific issues too, like the possibility to use TV programmes or singing hymns as a tool of irritation.

The asymmetrical power relations or formation and maintenance of group position are strongly related to irritation. A pupil’s position in the class has an influence on the amount and quality of the irritation she/he faces (see Tuija Huuki’s article in this book). Even a high position does not protect from irritation, as the boys related, they irritate each other all the time. Irritating is clearly used for forming and defining positions in the peer group. It can be used as a way to demonstrate one’s own position or the target’s position, as Kaisa did with her voice in the handicraft lessons.

Irritation is connected with the position game pupils have in this class and the irritating issues are mostly bound to the school as the setting and to this very group of children. If

\textsuperscript{17} doesn’t take everything seriously: ei ota kaikkea heti todesta

\textsuperscript{18} play fight: leikkitappelu
two pupils meet in a different context, the same issues are most likely not relevant anymore. The game is different, values as well as positions are different too.

How do I see irritation reflecting gendered violence and positions? Let me go through some examples to further enlighten my thoughts. Kaisa in the voices and noises speaks loudly and fills the space with her own voice, leaving very little room for the other girls. The minority girls are kept out of the loud discussions of the majority girls by the choice of the subjects (television, pop music etc.). In that way both Kaisa and the other majority girls can make themselves more visible while making the other girls invisible. So, the pattern of gaining visibility and thus a good position seems to be violent in this kind of cases.

It is easy to say that killing and torturing animals is violent. It might not be as easy to see the violence when something that a pupil values is denigrated. In this case hunting and fishing are important issues for the boys, a part of their conception of being a proper man. A powerful group of girls attacks that point by turning the boys' hobbies into something undesirable and that way questions the validity of the boys' conception of a proper man. I could very easily picture in another setting a group of e.g. boys doing the same thing to girls who like horses. With this theme it is further relevant to ask, what kind of effect does the irritation have on the forming of gender identities. Here again one's own position and perhaps gender identity is built up violently by pushing the others down.

Boasting relates with positions. It is a showy way to bring up one's own possibilities or contributions in the position game. I do not see boasting to be violent as such, but what is violent is the culture behind it. The culture that necessitates bringing oneself forward at the expense of the others in order to be popular. Veikko does not have the same kind of areas of interests as the rest of the boys and he is a 5th grader, in a compound class where 6th graders have stronger positions due to their age (cf. Duncan 1999, 76–91). So, he stresses issues he has and the rest of the pupils do not have. Even when the phenomenon of boasting seems to be common among the boys, only some boys are identified as boasters. These boys are not the most popular boys nor do they have the strongest positions in the class. In this case the boasters could be interpreted as those who have strong aspirations to be one of the “top dogs”.

The likings and courtships are vulnerable spots. To be linked in speech with an unfavourable pupil happens far easier to those, whose position is already weak. This is a handy way to embarrass both parties and make clear, who is not popular in the class. By doing this the irritator can support her/his own position, stand out from the unpopular pupil and keep in or push the unpopular pupil towards an even lower position.

Kuisma's comment that "Boys do it (irritate) all the time" tells about the internal testing and determining of the positions inside the group of boys in this class. This appears to be a practice, in which weak points are looked for and attacked. In this practice one must always take care of keeping oneself above the water and attack the others. The contribution of the individual boys in this game is not equal. Some boys seem to be clearly more active, some closer to opting out. Still none of them is outside of its influence.

A reader can ponder over, what makes the violence here gendered violence. It is a good question. If compared with traditional school bullying research, this article tries to make visible the gender of the pupils. There are not just genderless, neutral pupils, but the experiences they have can differ according to their gender. In this article I have shown some aspects, in which this has really been the case. Since, in many classes girls have
weaker positions than boys, the violence they use is more difficult to see and the researchers can fail to perceive it. Here I have purposely looked at the ways the girls use and are the targets of irritation and through that violence. In this class there are girls, who have strong positions. In addition this article also brings up issues that more invisible often minority girls and boys introduced.

As I suspected in the beginning the pupils’ positions in the classroom have a lot to do with both irritation and gendered violence. The position game seems to be violent and irritation is only one of its methods. The position of an individual pupil affects her/his possibilities to use power and violence. There seems to be a need to further study gendered violence and gendered power from the perspective of positions.

References

Popularity, Real Lads and Violence on the Social Field of School

Tuija Huuki

Abstract

The article deals with school boys’ social interaction and other actions that are used in building and maintaining their own position and in pursuing popularity. Furthermore, the writer examines how violent action is involved in pursuing popularity and the way in which violence plays a part in the construction of male and female images. The research data, which includes interviews and observations, was collected in a school in northern Finland. The data shows how violence is used to control other individuals and to strengthen one’s own position, as well as how violence is seen as a part of commonly accepted ways of being a boy.

Introduction

The problem of violence in school is an acute topic in Finnish schools. Many surveys have been carried out to map the visible forms of violence, and the aim is to intervene in these forms. (Roland 1984, Pikas 1991, Olweus 1992, 1999, Ahmad & Smith 1994, Salminvali 1998, Björkqvist & Österman 1999, Salomäki 2001). However, discussion of the problem almost completely ignores those factors of violence and bullying that are dependent on gender. Even less attention has been drawn into the fact that violence is also used to build and maintain gender identity.¹

Connell (1995, 81) illustrates how gender as a social pattern is both a product and a producer of history. Human capacities are historically seen as opposite or bipolar (Connell 1999, 449). Characteristics considered masculine, such as physical strength, independency, emotional neutrality, logical thinking, and toughness distance themselves from

¹. This article has been written within the project “Gendered power relations and violence in schools and teacher education in Northern Finland”. The project was funded by Finnish Academy.
such contrasts as physical weakness, dependency, emotionality, intuition, compassion, etc. that are regarded as feminine and considered less worthy. These dichotomies play a part in building power relations between genders, and they oppress women. (Näre 1994, 135, French 1994, 29, Liljeström 1996, Nicholson 1996, 13, 16, Kenway & Fitzclarence 1997, 120, Jokinen 2000, 210, 222.)

In our culture, individuals are expected to adopt the characteristics typical of their gender automatically, and even if this would not be true of every individual, these characteristics are actively encouraged in the process of socialisation. This is how culture defines the constituents of normative masculinity. Boys are expected to act by the acceptable norms and to adopt the ideals of those norms. In this way the cultural conventions of what it is to be a masculine being and what is normal and ordinary male behaviour are produced and maintained. (Värtö 2000.) Thus, it can be assumed that the culture-based, commonly accepted ideas of what it is to be a boy and of the power connected to it form the background for boys’ behaviour.

Connell (1995, 77) uses the concept of hegemony to refer to cultural practices, in which certain masculine styles have a leading and dominating position in relation to the majority of men and women. According to him, hegemonic masculinity is not a static compound of different characteristics, but it is a social and historical process, in which certain masculinity is given the dominating position in relations between genders. Hegemony has the power to define what it means to be a real man or boy and what is “normal” masculine behaviour (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill 1996, 52).

Research on violence and bullying in school conducted in Scandinavia (for instance, Heinemann 1972, Pikas 1991, Olwaeus 1992, 1999, Salmivalli 1998, Björkqvist & Österman 1999) leaves open those factors of the studied phenomenon that are connected with gender and use of power. In this study, the starting point in defining violence is the idea that different persons have different possibilities for using power, based for instance on their gender, age, race, or socio-economical background. Since the basis for using power differs, there are also different possibilities to abuse power. In this study, violence is seen as an action or a structure linked with power; it oppresses or diminishes another person and is used as a means to dominate and control the person in question (Sunnari 2000, 91). What is more, the linking up of violence, gender and sexuality either through culture, gender-dependent structures, or ways of behaviour plays a central role (Ronkainen 1998, 53).

I also use the concept of secondaryisation as a part of pupils’ violent action. Secondaryisation is a part of violent behaviour, and it refers to actions in which certain individuals are positioned in the periphery of hierarchy by the abuse of power. Thus, the superficial explanation for violence or the means of conducting violent actions can be almost anything. The crucial thing in being bullied is the way in which others see an individual as a gendered being and his or her position in the pupils’ social system. According to Gordon (2000, 155), boundaries of acceptable femininities and masculinities are policed and maintained by violence. Thus, popularity, violence and building of gender are intertwined in a complex skein.
Focus of the research and research methods

The main focus of the article is to examine the pursuing and maintaining of popularity, and the relation of these two to violent behaviour and the construction of masculinity. The research data consists of material collected by interviewing the pupils, and of the researcher’s notes on the school under study. The article is a part of a larger study which deals with the ways in which gender is involved in violence in school, what kind of representations of femininity and masculinity the girls and boys in the school under study have, and how power and violence are manifested in those representations.

The article deals with a feminist, qualitative study, in which the methodology is based on the object of the research. The research data was collected during a six-week field period among 46 sixth graders in a medium-sized school in northern Finland. The data was gathered through theme interviews and observation. Observation was carried out by taking notes, and it included approximately 100 hours of observations on pupils’ activities and work, both in controlled and free situations, during a school day in different premises of the school. There were two rounds of interviews and they were conducted either with an individual, a pair or a group. The interviews were tape-recorded, and the type used was a theme interview (Syrjälä et al. 1994, 81, Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 87, Glesne 1999, 9–13). 43 interviewees participated in the first round of interviews, and 26 in the second round. The interviews lasted from 15 minutes to just over one hour.

Thematising of the interviews was originally very loose in order to reveal the richness of the studied phenomenon as thoroughly as possible (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 1982, 42). The discussed themes did not only cover the pursuing of popularity, but the themes of the first interview dealt with issues connected to popularity, reputation, personal relationships and the atmosphere in the class. In the second round the themes were the defending of others, the teacher’s attitude towards pupils and unwanted treatment of other pupils. At that point, I also picked out some topics that had occurred earlier and which I wanted to specify or deepen. In addition, I brought out situations that had occurred during the period that I spent at the studied school, and which I regarded as meaningful with reference to the topic of the research. During the interviews, the pupils themselves introduced new themes that became more or less meaningful in the discussion. These themes included humour, the connection between success at school and popularity, and an activity that the boys themselves called playfighting. We discussed those themes in order to test how common these phenomena were in the studied group. Some of the themes turned out to be so common that they could be interpreted in certain ways. However, other themes or topics were separate events, which did not arouse discussion among the interviewees. The things that the pupils regarded as the constituents of boys’ popularity, were used to pursue valued masculinity. Plenty of violent action was also connected to those themes.

2. The pupils were selected to the second interview on the basis of the first one. There were a few pupils with whom the discussion was that superficial that it would not have been sensible to take these pupils to the second round of interviews. It might have been that a tape-recorded interview with a stranger caused tension in some pupils. In this study, it is necessary that when discussing the themes, the subject of study trusts the researcher, and thus it was understandable that some pupils were acting a bit shy. In each interview, there was a large bowl of peanuts set out for the pupils, and I noticed that it released the tension in several situations. I selected to the second interview primarily those pupils, whose names occurred most frequently in the other pupils’ stories. By interviewing them, I thought that I could get more information of the themes.
The interviews are analysed as narratives, examining the informant’s story and analysing the way in which it is put together, the linguistic and cultural resources it draws on and the way it persuades a listener of authenticity (Riessman 1993, 2). The narratological approach also affected the collection of the data through the interviews: after conducting the analysis of the first interview material, I took the themes still further with the pupils to specify and deepen them for possible further interpretations. The idea behind the second reading, second interviews and reinterpretations was to go deeper into the research data and to increase the reliability of the study. To interpret the studied phenomenon, I describe my data through separate events, and through those events that turned out to be common in the research group.

Since, on the basis of observations and the interviews, the general atmosphere in the classes under study was dominated by the boys and their actions, I chose the observations and utterances which were connected to the boys’ pursuit for popularity, and which included either implicitly or explicitly the themes of violence linked to the idea of what it means to be a boy as the data for further analysis.

On the basis of my analysis of the observations, the central themes were: proofs of competence, secondarisation, humour, abuse of power connected to the use of voice, body and space, romantic relations between boys and girls, misogyny, and homophobia. In this article, I will discuss these themes and topics. Proofs of competence and secondarisation are discussed in the section on pursuing popularity, since it is sensible to discuss popularity through those themes. Other themes are discussed in regard to the way in which pupils’ violent behaviour is connected to the ways of being a boy. The different components listed above are not separate, but are actually entangled in a skein, of which it is impossible to separate different dimensions. Here I have discussed them partly as separate dimensions in order to maintain clarity. Thus, those themes of violence that I have described here in connection to conventional masculinity can just as well be connected to the pursuing of popularity. Moreover, proofs of competence can involve violent behaviour, which is considered a normal way to be a boy.

Pursuing popularity

Proofs of competence

Mikael: …we’re having a swing with Timo and Timo did this little thing that we call a thump. And I was like ok, it’s my turn to jump now and I flew a long way off, three and half metres. So I’ve jumped as far as it’s possible in the small swing.

TH: So?

Mikael: After that I wasn’t bullied during a whole week and they began to say hi and so. And that week was a good week for me. Felt like I’d been a bit more cheerful. And I didn’t forget anything at school and I wasn’t that tired at all.

TH: What do you think could have caused that?
Mikael: Well, it was just that during that week they thought I was tough too and they were like “shouldn’t bully him really”.

Mikael, who participated in the study, had managed to jump a magic distance from the swing. It had made him look more respectable in the other boys’ eyes, and it had also helped him to temporarily increase his popularity, as well as avoid being bullied for a while. Jokinen (2000, 68–69, 210–211) uses the concept of tests of manhood to refer to concrete merit, performances by which the cultural masculinity is deserved. On the basis of the research data and my own experiences as a teacher, I will claim that the initiation rites of boys at school age often take place only on the level of pompous talk. Therefore, I will here observe this phenomenon in a wider perspective as a proof of competence. Tests of manhood are used in trying to prove one’s ability and suitability for certain things. The proof of competence occur at a certain point on the continuum of talk and deeds.

In his study on gendered bullying among British children in secondary school, Duncan (1999) states that bullying is linked with gender and achieving or maintaining status. Or, as Jokinen (2000, 29) suggests, the violence conducted by boys and men is ‘a part of growing into a man and being a man’. In my own data, pursuing popularity was clearly connected with boys’ socio-cultural every-day life, in which boys organised themselves in a hierarchical structure. Boys tried to prove their competence and suitability to ensure their place among a peer group. Therefore, gaining popularity or maintaining it became a goal, which was striving at by giving proof, and violence was one means of giving it.

As McGuffey & Rich (1999, 612) state, the most popular boys decide what is acceptable and esteemed and what is not. In this study those boys also gave different values to different things to control other pupils. Mikael said in an interview, that when Pete – a boy in his class – began to gain popularity, his favourite sport also changed from a despised hobby to an acceptable one. Another boy stated that only two popular boys in his class had the courage to use certain kinds of fashionable caps. The others did not dare to use them, since they were afraid of being bullied.

In the boys’ power struggle, unpopular boys and girls often function as mere pieces in pursuing popularity, as well as subjects of control. When pursuing popularity a boy had to show his competence to maintain reputation, and the pursuit involved violent action, as Mikael explains in the following:

Mikael: Some really desperate bullies are looking for someone to bully. Looking for some stupid things someone might do. And if no-one does anything stupid, they make up some excuse to bully. It can start with just a common thing and that’s the worst way to bully. You’ve done nothing and still they put you down.

TH: Why is that?

Mikael: Well, there’s a really simple explanation for that, really simple. You’ve got to be tough to be popular, and then they won’t bully you. School marks, certain

3. All the names are pseudonyms. The interviews have been transcribed word by word, but to save space and to improve readability, some meaningless words typical for spoken language have been removed from the extracts that occur in the article. I have also removed certain bits in which the interviewee is repeating something without bringing any further point to the issue. The chosen extracts are such parts of discussion in which the interviewees have managed to crystallise the events and express themselves clearly. To secure anonymity, some details that refer to certain persons have been changed both in the extracts and the descriptions of the data.
tricks and the sort of neat things that we like to do make you popular. Those things make you popular and if you’re very popular, then you’re not bullied. If the others think that the popular one starts to get too lax, starts to soften, they begin to bully him and then he must find someone to bully, for any reason. Anything that seems even a bit stupid and they’re going like ha-ha-ha, what an idiot. But sometimes even the bullying might not go right. Once when someone came to bully me, he started to make fun of something that he himself had been doing all the time. Then he realised that he does that too and got embarrassed and stopped. He wasn’t considered tough anymore, not until he found someone to bully and in that case it was little Jasmin.

TH: And how did he go on, what has he done to little Jasmin?

Mikael: Well, little Jasmin likes cats terribly much. So they have decided to bully her for that, cause they had to make up some excuse. And then she’s shorter than everyone else. Probably every possible thing has been used against her during these six years.

Mikael speaks about the connection between popularity and bullying. Real reasons are not necessary, bullying another pupil can be a way of convincing the others of one’s own ability to act. Ability brings with it popularity. Thus, violence is a way to prove one’s competence and to structure the hierarchy. It can function as a side effect in pushing an individual, who is in a marginal position even lower in the group’s hierarchical system. Those who behave violently do not necessarily have any personal grudge against the victim. Since the pupil’s hierarchical power struggle needs both winners and losers, there will always be individuals, who get subjected to violent action.

In my research group, boys tried to achieve esteemed masculinity, and also show as well as possible their ability to function in a group of pupils. This came up generally through the following things that the pupils used to estimate the boys’ abilities: such sports as ball games, skateboarding, and break dance; wearing certain kinds of design clothes: sweatshirts, extra-large jeans and skateboard sneakers; wild tricks such as jumping down from high places, long and dangerous jumps from the swing, driving motor vehicles (the faster the better)\(^4\), fooling around on thin ice\(^5\); breaking rules; distancing oneself from things regarded as girlish; humour; owning certain things that have status value such as computer games, motor vehicles, brand products. Know-how, skills and accessibility linked to the listed things were connected with a boy’s popularity in the class. Introvert, non-athletic boys who were not that enthusiastic about doing tricks and were considered girlish, the ones who were called “swots” or “geeks” were not that popular. Similar results have occurred in studies by Connell (1995, 79), Kenway & Fitzclarence 1997), Tolonen (2001, 121) and Swain (2002), for instance. The characteristics listed above are a summary of those things that the studied pupils considered valuable, and they might be diffe-

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4. Driving motor vehicles at the age of 12 or 13 is against the Finnish law. For example, according to the law, to drive a snowmobile or a moped, 15 years of age and a driving licence are required.

5. In the northern Finland there are two annual seasons of frost damaged roads: in the autumn when waterways are freezing over and in the spring when they are melting. During those periods ice is very thin and it is fatally dangerous to move on it. During a season of frost damaged roads there are reports on the thickness of ice in both national and local media, and those schools that are located near waterways give their pupils clear directions about when it is not safe to go on ice.
rent in another culture. It is also worth mentioning that in the group that I studied there was no unified culture of valued things, but there were also differences between classes.

Sakari is an example of a case where the connection between popularity and bullying comes up very clearly. He was previously secondarised, but his popularity began to rise, when he changed his appearance. He got into very good physical shape, and took an interest in hiphop culture and ice hockey, which was an appreciated sport among boys. He had also begun to boast about the toughness of ice hockey training and the violence that took place in the skate ring. This aroused admiration among the other boys.

Another boy had proved his competence in other ways:

Leevi: I once drove our snowmobile to the (library) yard. That really shut them up. And then they believed. That was the end of it and now they always go on talking about me driving the snowmobile and me doing this and that. Cause they know that I’m not allowed to drive that thing (since he is under-aged). And when I come to school in the morning I don’t need to start to explain my trips by snowmobile to Saajovaara.

TH: Have you now gained popularity for good or only temporarily?
Leevi: Well, it can easily be forgotten, but still, it’s always on their mind.

TH: Or does it depend on the person in question?
Leevi: Yes. If a certain person from my class would drive to the library by snowmobile, people would probably start to mock his parents for letting him do that. They’d think that he can’t even drive and they’d curse him.

TH: Why is it then that it works for some people and for others it is not that simple at all?
Leevi: It’s the whole appearance or the way the person is. If the two most popular boys in the class buy expensive clothes which are really in at the moment, all the others are just amazed. Then if the mocked one, the one who’s always lousy at everything, if he buys them, it won’t even be noticed. The popular ones can’t go and say anything to him, because then they’d have to say to the lousy or stupid one … to say that you’ve got really nice pants. That wouldn’t happen, they haven’t got enough sense to say that.

TH: They could not admit it?
Leevi: No. Although they know it anyway.

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TH: …at least I haven’t seen you wearing large jeans at school.
Leevi: Well that’s because they’re no good! You can’t even drive a bike with those on! Get stuck in the chains and ripped into pieces. And then you have to keep your hands in the pockets to ensure that they won’t drop off. I always buy clothes in which you can do different things. I don’t have any special clothes for school. Our class smells totally of snowmobile if I have been driving it really fast the day before and there’s some petrol on my pants. And straight to school on the following day. I don’t notice it myself, but everyone else keeps complaining about it.
TH: Apparently not that much that it would really disturb you?
Leevi: No. In a way I feel like, well, look at me everyone, this is what I’m really good at! I drive snowmobiles!
TH: But apparently it is not that simple for everyone, perhaps their popularity is based on just the fact that they haven’t got snowmobiles?
Leevi: Well, they’re looking for those things that increase their popularity.
Leevi used to go on long drives by snowmobile on his own – at least that was what the other pupils believed. He had proved his competence for example by driving the snowmobile in public places and by other challenging deeds that required reckless courage. He had reached a position where only the fact that he smelled of petrol was enough to create an image of a competent boy. Although he claimed that he did not wear fashionable clothes because he thought they were unpractical and expensive, the real reason might be that he did not need them to secure his popularity. It should be noticed that Leevi was not connected with bullying, but he was regarded as a boy who could get along with “everybody”. However, Leevi said that if necessary, he would ”teach any boy a lesson” if they stepped on his toes.

**Secondarisation**

Pursuing popularity and maintaining it was generally connected to secondarisation, which was often very subtle and hidden. Unpopular Jukka is an example of a boy, whose place was at the bottom of the hierarchy.

Leea: Normally Jukka gets good grades. If the other boy…
Susanna: …who’s IN. I mean somebody like Tuomas…
Leea: …gets a better grade than Jukka, then why isn’t he called a swot, but Jukka is, even if he got a worse grade than Tuomas?
Susanna: Yes, the point is that Tuomas is the king of our class. The king can do just anything, he could even take ballet lessons! – But (speaking more quiet) I’m not quite sure about that. Jukka has always been a kind and gullible boy, anyway, so.
Leea: He doesn’t want to hurt anyone or anything like that.
TH: So if you are a real king, you are allowed to do such things?
Susanna: Yeah! But not too many things – as far as I know.
Leea: But you’re allowed to get good grades. If Jukka got a good grade, he’d get picked on and called a swot and what not.

The weakness of Jukka’s competence was mainly summed up in the following deviations from the ideal of his gender: he was not athletic nor did he do any wild tricks to prove his competence. He also reflected non-esteemed masculinity by taking part in hobbies considered girlish, wearing unfashionable clothes and being friendly towards other pupils. In addition, he would openly show his knowledge of things. He was labelled as a swot. Jukka was picked out as the subject of violent action for reasons like being late or getting
good grades, while for the same reasons the popular boys were left alone or were even more respected among their friends. Popularity was not a sum of its parts, nor were the subject’s certain actions or characteristics the real reasons for bullying, but parts of a larger social code of action. The other pupils made a difference between the masculinity that Jukka represented and the ideal masculinity by bringing the former constantly up in a negative light. Secondarisation of Jukka reflected both defining the ideal and the control of an individual by positioning him at the periphery of the hierarchy. (See Swain 2002, 58, 63.)

Another kind of secondarised boy among my data was Matias. He had friends, but he was still avoided and he was clearly not liked. His style was rude: he would grab the others, knock them down, act fiercely. He came from a poor family, did not have any hobbies and was doing badly at school. He was abusing intoxicants and was therefore regarded as a “tough one”. No girl nor a popular boy was eager to be his friend, but they allowed him to be with them. Although Matias was choosing his clothes according to the dress code and was exaggerating his masculine behaviour, the boy culture connected with working class, i.e. exaggerated roughness and fierceness, and economical inaccessibility to status goods did not make him popular in the group. This case seemed to prove Connell’s (1995, 93–116), Haywood & Mac an Ghaill's (1996, 51) and Mac an Ghaill's (2000, 181) claim that gendered power hierarchy is class-specific also in a school environment. For Matias, there were not many chances to prove his competence, which made him try to turn his weakness into strength. Rudeness, aggressive and fierce behaviour and fooling around were the means left for him to try to defend his position in the hierarchy – with little success.

A remarkable number of girls unwillingly subscribe to the idea that a boy has to fit in certain frames of masculinity. One popular girl said: "Sometimes girls get the power over boys too… If we manage to find their weak spots…” Her comment shows that some girls can on certain conditions use power over boys. Especially those boys, who did not meet the norms of the accepted masculinity in society and were not able to prove their competence in a group, seemed to have more weaknesses than others. A boy who drove a girls’ bike, took ballet lessons, was taking active part in the activities organised by the local parish and openly showing his feelings towards other masculinities was thought to be in danger of being bullied by the popular girls. Thus, girls were also defining the ideal masculinity, according to which a boy has to meet certain requirements to be accepted. And, since a different kind of boy’s image is not "of the right kind", his personality deserves to be diminished.

Violent action that took place between popular girls and unpopular boys went both ways and had similar characteristics among boys and girls. On the other hand, many unpopular boys, such as Matias, tried to subjugate the girls for example by physical attacks, calling them names and diminishing them. The girls acted in a similar way towards these boys and also towards Jukka, for instance. They said that they aim violent behaviour towards boys by using openly violent actions such as judging their appearance or clothes, taking their things or calling them names.
Violence and conventional masculinity

In the group of pupils that I studied there did not seem to be girls who would have tried to dominate all the other pupils in their class. On the basis of the interviews and observation, many things indicated that the boys in general were acting according to the cultural conventions of masculinity and were behaving as if they had the right to ignore girls’ rights. These included the boys’ use of space and voice as compared to the girls; ways in which teachers were dealing with possibilities to act between genders; generality of the violence boys aimed at girls as compared to the violence girls aimed at boys; acceptance that many girls were seeking from boys; unquestionable, unwritten norms according to which a boy is allowed to use power over a girl; the sort of submissive reactions that the girls showed when facing unpleasant things which the boys did or said to them. The interviews showed differences between genders in discussing the co-existent gender’s culture. The girls were analysing and describing the boys’ activities in detail, whereas the boys’ answers to questions concerning the girls’ culture were often something like “I dunno,” “Couldn’t care less.” In addition, the boys did not seem to seek for the girls’ acceptance. In their study of young people’s sexuality and power, Holland et al. (1998, 11, 24) stated that culture is constructed from a boy’s set of values. They speak of a ‘male-in-the-head’ to describe the surveillance power of male dominated and institutionalised heterosexuality in young people’s sexual relationships. According to them, femininity is constructed from within heterosexuality and on male territory, and a ‘female-in-the-head’ to correspond the male model could not be found in their study. Even though the focus of this study is not on sexuality, the phenomenon here is quite similar.

Humour and cheating – the subtlety of violence

The boys were organising the hierarchy also by manipulative and subtle means. Kehily & Nayak (1997) have studied the humour used by young men, and they see it as a technique utilised for the regulation of masculinities and the negotiation of gender-sexual hierarchies within pupil cultures. In this study plenty of violent action was covered by humour: some victims were cheated on and thus subjected to ridicule, while other victims were occasionally treated in a friendly way, if they were thought to be of some use, but at other times they were secondarised. Several boys said that no-one was supposed to take humour seriously, and those who were offended or got angry were mocked. There seemed to be several levels of humour and it was constantly used, but on the basis of the interviews it can be assumed that a person’s position in the hierarchy affects the content of humour, and the question of who has the chance to fill in which acting position. I will discuss this further in the latter phase of my study. On the basis of the interviews, the targets of cheating, abuse and jokes were mostly the unpopular boys and girls.

In recent studies on bullying, direct and indirect forms of bullying have been separated from each other. Direct bullying includes relatively open attacks on the victim. Indirect bullying takes advantage of social relationships, for example isolating and keeping someone apart from a group, sending mean messages, and refusing to talk to someone. (Olweus 1992, 15, Salmivalli 1998, 37, Lagerspetz 1998.) Indirect bullying has been con-
nected with girls’ behaviour, and direct bullying with that of boys. (Salmivalli 1998, 12, 40–43, Olweus 1999, 31, 35.) However, the definition of indirect bullying does not include such forms of it as telling disturbing and degrading jokes and stories of the victim, cheating, and abuse, which the boys among my data used as means of bullying. On the basis of this study, it seems that the so-called indirect forms of bullying are not that closely connected to a person’s gender, but rather to the amount of power the person has. As an example, some unpopular boys criticised popular boys and their actions when interviewed by the researcher, but did not do that in public. Also girls would laugh at popular boys or criticise them behind their backs with other girls, hoping that the criticism would not actually reach the boys. At the same time, popular girls could be very direct in their speech or actions towards other girls or unpopular boys. Criticising others is not yet violent action, but it shows clearly what kind of arenas of action are open for popular and unpopular persons. The girls’ non-public ways of violent action can be the result of the girls not having generally as much power as the boys, which leaves non-public action for their part. If a person does not have power, it is not possible to act or use one’s voice in public. One factor is the conventional concepts about what it means to be a girl, i.e. the images that girls adopt through socialisation and ideas of how a girl should act.

I witnessed an episode in which Kimi, a non-popular boy with behavioural problems, was standing second to last in a queue, while the last person was Jami, who held a higher position in the hierarchy. A popular boy, Arto, who was standing at the head of the queue, let Jami move behind him, and thus Kimi was left at the end of the queue. Kimi attacked Jami by punching and kicking. As the case was discussed, it was revealed that in the group of pupils in question Kimi was often left out of the group in one way or another, or he was shown that his company is not wanted. The episode mentioned embodies a subtle way of violence by positioning an individual at the bottom of the hierarchy, and quite similar things happen in every day life at school, among both boys and girls. When examining violent phenomena, we should go beyond visible action and see the subtlety involved with it. In other words, it is just as essential to ask why Kimi is bypassed again and again, as it is to ask why Kimi hit Jami.

On the basis of the interviews and observation, the boys’ violent behaviour was mainly verbal, although physical contact was more common in the boys’ culture than in the girls’ culture. There was more talk about fights than there seemed to be actual fighting. However, activity, which the pupils called playfighting could be seen on a daily basis. When I asked what its purpose was, one boy told me that it was the boys’ way of testing each other. This is in line with Boulton (1996, 37), whose study indicates that there is a link between playful fighting and dominance relations. In my study, the playfighting was a way to show off and define both one’s own and other people’s position in the hierarchy in a playful way and by following rules. Therefore, even if a boy had never been in a real fight, he can become popular by playfighting. The threat of violence can be just enough to maintain the power structure. Jokinen (2000, 203) states that potential violence is the most typical form of violence among men.

Niko: We’ve (among friends) always been shouting to each other that now we’re not playing adults’ ice hockey, don’t kill him, nor him. It sounds so funny when I point my finger at somebody and say that “don’t kill him even though you’d like
And they (others) are looking at us amazed and wonder about “killing”. We have so much fun there.

Niko explains how Sakari and his friends, who play ice hockey in a team, joke about violence, while the whole class is playing ice hockey at school when everyone can hear them in order to show their ability, power and might. Thus, potential violence is always present, maintaining and reinforcing the power structure. Niko, who had been bullied during all his years at school also said that others had stopped bullying him and his position had become stronger after his friend Sakari had gained more popularity. However, many boys said at the interviews that when a non-popular boy tries to gain popularity through individual efforts, he might be bullied for that. Pursuing personal position is a complex process which can either be self-reinforcing or alternatively turn against itself and lead an individual into a situation that is even worse. The price of gaining popularity might be that an individual’s identity is reformed and forced into an accepted mould.

**Voice, body and space**

The way in which the use of voice, body, and space is dependent on gender has been widely studied in the 1980s and the 1990s (Saarnivaara 1985, Lindroos 1997, Nespor 2000, 29, Tolonen 2001). Also, in the light of my data, the way in which the boys used voice, body and space was different from the girls’ behaviour. Whereas the girls’ way to move and touch was more restrained and careful, the boys’ way of using their body was more comprehensive and powerful. I witnessed episodes in which a boy passed another pupil and while passing by he casually prodded the other with a paper, slapped or made some other sudden move towards the other. The girls and boys reacted in different ways to this: whereas the boys returned the action or did away with the disturbance without giving up any space, girls reacted by moving aside, out of the boy’s way. Whatever the subject’s reaction might be, the attacks in question can be unpleasant, whether the subject is a girl or a boy. Moreover, the fact that girls were giving space to boys and kept out of the way when they were running wild during lessons shows that girls are giving up space for boys.

More than once I witnessed a situation where a girl fetched some piece of classroom equipment that a boy had decided to get himself at the same moment. If the girl got the piece of equipment first and sat back in her place to continue her work, the boy came to her and stayed there using a loud voice and aggressive body language, sometimes even grasping the piece trying to claim it for himself. In every case, the boy got the piece by using force, voice and his body. I did not notice any situation where a girl would have acted in a similar way to get what she wanted. The behaviour in question might fulfil the definition of bullying either wholly or partially, but in any case the boy is using power in a way that violates the girl’s rights.
The boy does not necessarily realise that he is acting violently, and the reason for the behaviour is not so much in the boy himself as in the (school) culture, which creates and maintains the possibility for boys to act in this way.6

A special threat to the use of voice, body and space were so called socially maladjusted boys7 who needed special support, and who also appeared in my data. The girls clearly expressed that they were scared and without means in front of these boys, who could act very violently under aggression. To ensure the safety of other pupils, it would be necessary to put this kind of boy under constant control, which is impossible for a teacher in a normal class because of the prevailing resources. The subject of an attack could be either a girl or a boy. My data has some indications of a certain model for action in regard to who an aggressive boy prefers as a subject of his violent action: a person in a dominating position or a person in a marginal one; but this question must be analysed further. It can be asked, whether the fact that someone enjoys violence, or an uncontrollable state of aggression, can function as a reason for violent behaviour and on what conditions. When analysing human beings as intentional, goal-directed creatures, there is the question whether they enjoy the sense of control and the position gained by violence, and/or the advantages of that position, which brings us back to the questions about power.

The disturbances in class were almost completely caused by the boys during the time that I spent in classes. If a teacher gave sanctions, the case was often discussed in front of the whole class. Thus, the innocents – including the girls – had to participate in the situation, which decreased their studying time in the first place. Secondly, many girls, unlike the boys, included themselves in the category of pupils who were causing the disturbance, even though they had not actually taken part in it. It is also possible that the girls, who are socialised to be hard-working and conscientious, feel uncomfortable because of the teacher’s anger, and think that by being kinder and more hard-working still they can make amends for the disturbance caused by the boys, and thereby appease the teacher. The common idea that “boys will be boys” supports the idea that boys are allowed to break the rules in many different ways. Our culture has a kind of unwritten, unquestioned norm, according to which manhood is constructed by playing tricks on others and breaking the

6. It seemed also to be quite normal that the boys habitually neglected pieces of classroom equipment. If they did not have their own equipment with them, it was assumed that the girls would lend them their equipment, according to an unwritten rule. This happened either at a boy’s or at the teacher’s request, to please the boys or the teacher, or to avoid bullying. Even the teacher could take pens from a girl’s pencil case without asking permission and give them to the boys, or reproach the girls for refusing to lend their things. Similar cases, in which a boy should have given up his things at a girl’s request, did not occur. Allowing this kind of behaviour subjects a girl under the power of boys, and thus reinforces and maintains a power structure in which a boy’s needs are prior to a girl’s rights. This includes a hidden message, according to which a boy has the right to demand as a representative of his gender, and a girl has to fulfil the demand. The idea of what it means to be a boy had also other unquestioned manifestations, such as taking girls’ personal things: rummaging around in girls’ pencil cases and bags, and reading and commenting aloud girls’ letters, diaries, and messages in mobile phones without permission.

7. By socially maladjusted pupils I refer to pupils with behavioural problems. At the moment the Finnish inclusion politics is mainly based on the so called saving-integration principle. The financial cuts that took place after the depression period at the beginning of 1990s reflect even now on the basic schooling. For example, pupils that require special help are taught in normal teaching groups without the needed resources, which is not an advantage to any pupil working in those classes.
rules. The way in which rule-breaking is dependent on gender, as are the sanctions linked to it, is one of the visible ways of forcing girls to obey stricter norms than boys.

**Bullying or playing?**

In the interviews and observation situations, events occurred between girls and boys, in which the question seemed to be about teasing or a game started by mutual agreement, such as taking someone’s cap, pushing, rubbing snow on someone’s face, placing flies under someone’s shirt and so on. Girls did not react to these situations as strongly as boys, and were often put on the defensive.

TH: Joni took your mobile phone on Thursday. How did you feel then?
Lisa: There were no secret messages, but it annoyed me. I’d never take Joni’s phone. I’d ask if I could look at it. But I’d never take it. And then he showed everybody my phone.
TH: But there could have been private things, couldn’t there.
Lisa: Exactly. And then I felt like I could have really kicked him, told him to give my phone back to me. But he gave it back before that.
TH: Why didn’t you do it?
Lisa: I didn’t want to, because, well this sounds a bit stupid, but I think that violence should not be a solution to any problem.
TH: Yes. What would have happened, if you had taken Joni’s phone instead?
Lisa: If I had taken Joni’s phone, he’d probably have done something, maybe grasped my hair or kicked me or something, but I can’t even imagine that…”

Situations such as in the previous example are often interpreted as a game connected to romantic interests. Boulton (1996, 35), for example, makes that sort of interpretation in his study concerning playful and aggressive fighting. However, it is questionable to allow violent features connected to romantic interests and regard those features as normal, while the subject finds them unpleasant but is obliged to interpret the violent behaviour as an indication of romantic interests.

**Misogyny and homophobia**

Jokinen (2000, 222) defines homosociality as male friendship that emphasises heterosexuality and differentiates itself from femininity. In school culture it is often taken for granted, and deviations from it lead to punishment (Mac an Ghaill 2000). Epstein (1997, 105) suggests that ‘the explicit homophobia and implicit heterosexism found within schools derives from and feeds macho and misogynistic versions of masculinity’. The cases in my study showed that connecting certain features to a boy himself raised strong, negative feelings and expressions in him. These features were things or characteristics that were
thought to pertain to girls in the school culture I studied. They were labelled feminine – they involved a connotation of insignificance, and individuals who were connected to those things or characteristics were secondarised. These things included hobbies that had something to do with horses, nature, ballet or arts, wearing tight trousers with bell-bottoms, tight shirts, hairpins or -grips, and textile handicraft.

In their study of adolescent’s conceptions of femininity and masculinity, Mandel & Shakeshaft (2000) name three definitional factors of masculinity: antifemininity, machismo, athletic and (hetero)sexual statuses. This is in line with my study, in which boys were in danger of secondarisation or were actually secondarised for things such as a sensible discussion about intimate issues, having a girlish appearance or sitting next to a girl. Whereas a girl was, on certain conditions, allowed to dress or act in a way which was considered masculine in the society under study, a boy was secondarised if he acted in a way that was considered feminine. One boy was regarded as girlish, because he had girls as friends, whereas a romantic relationship with a girl, or interaction which included playing tricks on girls was considered perfectly acceptable among the boys. A boy’s action in the company of girls could not resemble girls’ models of action, it was necessary to differentiate it from girls, from what it means to be a girl, and anything regarded as feminine. To succeed in this, a boy had to choose a certain kind of machomasculine role; have voice, space – and even the girl – under control.

It appeared that those boys in particular who represented a masculinity that deviated from the accepted norm had been placed under pressure by the school culture regime. Or at least, in order to survive in the school world, it restricted their choices of which variant of masculinity to adopt. Jesse, for example, was ashamed of admitting that he had driven a motor vehicle only once. Many boys had begun to adopt conventional manly models of behaviour, as Matti, who had started to boast to other boys about playing floorball or taking karate lessons. Samuel, for his part, had to prove that he had been driving a snowmobile at top speed. For example, a physically weak or sensitive boy’s inability to defend himself in front of an aggressive boy can become a threat to his masculine identity, since masculinity involves the ability to defend oneself and be aggressive if necessary. In connection to this issue, Jesse said that a boy in the sixth grade would be in real trouble, if he were beaten by a younger pupil. If an individual is not capable of following the rules of the game, he does not represent the culturally accepted conception of masculinity and is in danger of being secondarised. If the rules involve aggressive, competitive relations to other individuals, a distorted relationship with the co-existent gender, and rule-breaking, it is difficult to survive in the school society without either changing one’s own personality or losing one’s reputation and human dignity as a masculine being.

According to Epstein (1997, 113) homophobia and misogyny are so closely intertwined that they are inseparable: misogyny is homophobic and homophobia is misogynist. The Others to normative masculinity in schools are girls and non-macho boys, and it is against these that many boys seek to define their identities. Furthermore, the psychological and social defences which they build up against contamination are damaging to the Others, who have to put up with more or less constant harassment.

In the group of pupils that I studied, girls were subjected to sexual harassment by the boys, who were judging the girls, making unpleasant comments concerning their bodies, and telling sexist stories about women and girls. The names that the girls were called by were almost always expressions that diminished a girl’s femininity or appearance. The
words that the girls were using of boys included not only ‘faggot’ but also ‘childish’ and ‘annoying’.

Pete: If you and Ari have babies, they’ll be bowed-legged Samis.\(^8\)
Anni: Fuck you!
Pete: Well, at least that’s possible in theory.
Anni: (Grins at Pete)
Pete: (After a while) Not really, you know.

Some boys were secondarising Sami girls in the studied group. Conversely, there was no similar action against the boys. The majority of the girls had at some point studied Sami language, but some girls said that they had since stopped, because of the boys’ unpleasant actions. For the same reason, there were many persons who were afraid of admitting in public that they were Sami or studying Sami at school. Girls were also called Skolt\(^9\) whores or Sami witches. Those words involve two dimensions, one diminishing girl’s femininity and the other her ethnicity, which doubles the secondarisation.

To be left in peace or to please the boys, several girls felt that they had to also change their behaviour in many other ways, including their speech, clothes and sometimes even their hobbies. In addition, they felt that they had to be silent about the disturbance or rule-breaking by the boys. Many girls were clearly pursuing popularity among the boys, since it was believed that it would raise a girl’s position both among the boys and the girls. To become unpopular among the boys was a horror to some girls. Some of them said that they avoided the harassment by not interfering with boys’ business and keeping their mouth shut in certain situations. Some others seemed to seek for the boys’ acceptance by serving them. Relationships to boys seemed to be an essential part of constructing femininity, whereas masculinity was constructed rather in relation to other boys and by differentiating from anything regarded as feminine. On the other hand, the data included some girls, who seemed to be left aside or kept themselves apart from the gender game. I will discuss them later in my studies.

**Conclusion**

In my study, pursuing popularity was clearly connected to boys’ socio-cultural everyday life, in which they organised themselves in a hierarchical structure. To secure their position in a peer group, the boys tried to prove their ability and suitability for something by proving their competence. Gaining popularity or maintaining it was a goal that was strived at by proving oneself, and violence was one way of doing it. There was not necessarily any reason in the victim for bullying, but instead bullying was a way to convince

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8. Sami population (50 000–100 000) lives in the northern part of Europe. The Sami area is divided by four nations: Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia. The present-day dwelling area of the Sami extends from the northern parts of the Kola Peninsula in Russia to the north of Finland, Norway and Sweden. In Finland, there are about 7 000 Sami people. (Source: Maritta Stoor, Multicultural Finland – seminar in Helsinki 14.–17.1.2002.)

9. Skolt Sami is one of the three Sami languages that are spoken in Finland.
others of one’s own ability to act. Ability leads to popularity. Thus, violence was a device to prove competence and organise the hierarchy.

In the group of pupils, the boys tried to present themselves as having the ability to act, and pursue the masculinity esteemed in the group. Being at the top of the hierarchy, the hegemonic model of masculinity determined what was acceptable and valued and what was not, and it was characterised by athletic ability, dressing according to code, wild and courageous tricks; breaking the rules; humour, status articles, and differentiating itself from anything regarded as feminine.

The things that were esteemed were connected to violence as a part of a complex process, which organised, maintained and rearranged the hierarchy and controlled its members. An unpopular individual was constantly exposed to the sacrifices in the power struggle as a pawn in the game, and was thus subjected to violence as a result of other people’s struggle for power. The esteemed things gave competence to a member of a group, which again gave power and a good position. This position defined different-sized fields of control: the more popular one was, the more one had power; the more power one had, the better the possibilities to control people in weaker positions and to further define the ideal masculinity.

The sort of male and female images maintained and constructed in this game had an important role in it. Different ways of acting as a masculine being opened individuals different possibilities to settle on different positions in the hierarchy and to use power. Those who deviated from the model of masculinity esteemed in the society, those who were not “real lads”, were less popular and thus in a greater danger to be subjected to violent action. The individuals positioned in the periphery of the hierarchy were more or less running in a vicious circle, out of which it was difficult to break out. A way to express one's own gender that deviated from the accepted norm offered an individual weaker chances to pursue popularity and maintain it: the less competence one had, the worse one’s position, and if one does not have a strong position, the chances to control, diminish or subject others are weaker. This gives an individual even weaker possibilities to leave his/her position in the periphery.

The violence that the boys used was partly very subtle and it played a part in actions regarded as normally belonging to the idea of what it means to be a boy. Most of it took place behind the teachers’ backs. Humour that subjected others, the activity called play-fighting, the threat of violence, cheating, misogyny, and homophobic behaviour were general among the boys. The game between boys and girls that involved romantic interests, the boys’ relations to pieces of classroom equipment, the behaviour of socially maladjusted boys, and the boys’ use of voice, body, and space in relation to other pupils often included violence and violated the subject’s rights. The dominating position gave security to the popular boys in the listed situations. The losers in the everyday life of the school were primarily the secondarised boys and girls.

The research on bullying in school conducted in Scandinavia examines the different ways of bullying as a question that concerns gender, thus the direct forms of bullying have been connected with boys, and the indirect forms with girls (e.g. Salmivalli 1998, Olweus 1992, 1999). However, pushing a pupil’s head in a toilet bowl, for example, can include both direct and indirect dimensions of bullying. The physical attack is a direct form, but its context might include a connotation of wrongly expressed masculinity. In other words, the actor finds the victim’s way to represent masculinity as something for
which he/she deserves to be punished. This study challenges us to reconsider the division mentioned above, since examining the phenomenon in a direct/indirect scale might lead to the fact that the gender-dependent components of violence are not covered.

The research data offered plenty of interesting information that calls for further analysis. For example, the violent behaviour that is conducted in the name of humour, violence between girls, and violence that is based on ethnic factors offer a valuable extension to my research.

The school – with its curriculum, personnel, pupils – is creating the gender in interaction with other cultural and social forums (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill 1996, 59). If the school does not question the conventional and hidden forms of violence in school, it legitimates violent behaviour as a part of the process of growing up. With this study, I challenge the different actors in school to take the gender perspective into account in all teaching in school in such a way that it could support the development of boys’ and girls’ personalities into balanced men and women who respect each other.

References


Masculinities, Power Hierarchy, Violence and Social Position in Classroom Community – A Case Study on the Social Relations of a Multicultural Classroom

Sari Manninen

Abstract

The article discusses the relationships between the girls and the boys, as well as the relations between the boys of a particular multicultural fourth grade. The writer examines, from a gender sensitive perspective, how power, violence and popularity are connected to the boys’ different ways of acting as masculine beings. On the basis of the results, some of the Finnish boys used power and violence to marginalise the immigrant boys, as well as other groups subordinated to the hegemony. The activity that had violent traits was used to construct and reproduce the power hierarchy within the classroom, as well as to demonstrate one's own masculine competence.

Violence, power and hierarchy

I discuss power, like Foucault, as interactive social relations between individuals and groups. In these relations, power is not, strictly speaking, owned by one nor can it be located in a certain place. Power is seen as a network that covers the whole social field in which every individual both practices power and is the object of power usage. Power is not understood as an absolute qualifier which some people have and some people lack since it exists everywhere at the same time. However, power is not automatically and evenly distributed among the different sides of the network because power relations can be more dense in some parts than in others. Social practices are seen as produced and moulded by power relations. In addition, the possibility of resistance is always included in a real power relation. (Foucault 1980, 98, 1984, 92–101, Väliverronen 1993, 26, Kusch 1993, 102–104, 114.)
In this study, violence is examined from the perspective of how it is connected to the solving and maintenance of power relations between pupils (Stanko 1996, 44). What is more, there is a possibility of resistance connected with violence. Following the ideas of Arto Jokinen, violence is also a method with which power is reproduced and with the help of which, to some extent, the hierarchical relations between pupils are solved. At the same time the patriarchal order is legitimised. This kind of gendered violence comes into existence and obtains its distinctive characteristics from the power relations of genders. Moreover, such gendered violence can exist also between boys. In these cases, violence has a central role in demonstrating the masculine abilities of agents participating in a certain incident. Similarly, the violence in which the agents defend their position in the hierarchy of boys is considered to be gendered. (Jokinen 1999, 134, 2000, 26.)

R.W. Connell (1987, 1995) associates the concept of hegemonic masculinity with the examination of power and violence. The central idea of hegemonic masculinity is how certain groups of men or boys embrace power and the advantages it brings, and how they justify and reproduce the social relations that create and maintain their supremacy. Connell uses the term of complicity to describe such boys who do not achieve but reach out for the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity and follow and support it. Marginalised masculinities either object to or support hegemony but, nevertheless, they lack the power typical for hegemony. (Connell 1995, 93–142). The different ethnic groups that are distinguishable from dominant cultures are often marginalised in the same manner as homosexuals. Furthermore, persuasion, universality, invisibility and naturality are features of hegemony (Carrigan, Connell & Lee 1985, 592, Jokinen 2000, 216). Tuija Huuki has discussed these subjects in her article in this book.

Huuki uses a term of secondarisation as a part of the pupil's violent action (see Huuki in this book). In this data, the inequality connected with secondarisation becomes connected to not only gender but especially ethnicity. Billig (1995) talks about citizenship as a self-evident, banal citizenship. Being Finnish presents itself as banal in this article so that the pupils with a different ethnic backgrounds are seen as the others, as different. In this data, also the masculinity that is represented by a certain group of boys and that pursues hegemonic position, presents itself as banal, self-evident as well as invisible so that only the characteristics of masculinities that differ from banal masculinity can be analysed by the boys themselves. Banal masculinity is normative masculinity, being an “ordinary” or a “normal” boy, and is connected to the popularity of a boy within his classroom community. What is more, gender can also be seen as banal (see Gordon, Holland & Lahelma 2000, 36).

The study

The class of 4B has 30 pupils in the school Kivikumpu which is situated in a suburb of a Southern Finnish city. I acted there as the teacher of an immigrant class during the school year of 2000–2001. The school is medium-sized and 23% of its pupils are immigrants.

1. All the names are pseudonyms to ensure the protection of privacy of the schools and pupils participating in the study
The majority of the parents of this class represents working class, the so-called lower middle class. Nine of the pupils are immigrants and five of these are boys. All in all, the majority of the class are boys: there are 21 boys and nine girls. In the beginning of the third grade, the class had received more pupils from another school in the same area, as well as some immigrant pupils. During the period of data collection in March 2002 a new girl from India had just joined the class.

While I was working as a teacher in the school in question, I became interested in the social relations of the class and in how the immigrant pupils integrate into a class in which the majority of pupils are Finnish. According to the teacher and my own observations, boys sometimes fought violently over their mutual power hierarchy during the third grade. There had been many fights. Two of the boys of the class had been aggressive and had had sudden tantrums during the earlier school years, which had a lasting effect on the social relations and climate of the class.

The collection of data was directed by the questions in relation to the wider research project. These questions dealt with how power and violence entangle with the representations of masculinities and femininities, as well as how gender is present in school violence. My aim was to find out, based on a questionnaire and related interviews dealing with friendships and bullying, what kind of school violence exists during the first and fourth grades and which part of it is gendered. With the help of interviews and participating observation, I aimed at finding out how the pupils see themselves and others as gendered agents, how power has been distributed between different agents and groups and how power and violence are connected to the representations of masculinities, in particular. In order to find answers to these questions, I interviewed all the pupils (including the preliminary study 59 interviews) and observed them in different kinds of social situations such as during lunch, recess, the beginnings of lessons as well as lessons themselves – particularly the lessons of gymnastics and arts and crafts. In this article, I discuss only the fourth class and material which includes 30 pieces of recorded interviews of the length of 15–45 minutes, approximately 20 hours of observation, as well as four focus group interviews. The meaning of all these was to get more information on the dynamics connected to power among and between groups of pupils.

In addition to prepared themes, I took up issues, as well as interpretations of, among others, violent situations. Some of the issues and interpretations were raised by the pupils during the interviews. In this manner, I aimed at diving deeper into the central themes of this study, as well as finding consistencies and differences in the stories of the pupils.

There are elements of discourse analysis in the analysis. The similarly recurring ways of conceptualising the themes of the study are expected to be identified from the speech of the pupils. These ways exceed individual comments and are the ways the pupils share the conceptualising of the studied phenomena. Incidentally, the aim is to find hegemonic discourses from the data. (Jokinen, Juhila & Suoninen 1999.) According to Fairclough (1992, 15), in studying power, the risk is to easily construct a static picture of situations and events. In this case, concentrating on solely hegemonic discourses and their reproduction may, in the worst case, naturalise the events. Fairclough suggests the concept of transformation be used along with the concept of reproduction. In this case, it would be possible to get a hold of the problematics of change and struggle.

Along with the issues of power, violence and masculinities, the observation of popularity and the issues connected to it surfaced from the data as the central themes. The rela-
tion of popularity to power in the class community did not automatically mean that the higher the pupil was situated in the power hierarchy, the more popular he or she was. Instead, popularity was in connection to banal masculinity that pursues hegemonic position, whereas the tough guys who hold the positions of hegemonic power were not popular as friends.

The school system is connected to the gender system that prevails in society. According to Gordon, Holland and Lahelma (2000, 36), gender is seen as such a self-evident dichotomy which prefers boys that we do not even see it. As Barrie Thorne (1993, 109) claims, in deconstructing dualistic dichotomies, gender in its context needs to be examined instead of clarifying binary abstractions. This very deconstructing is also the aim of this study. Instead of noting that only boys emphasise status or girls’ intimacy, the questions that need to be asked are: which boys or girls, where, when and in what circumstances. Furthermore, gender is formed in complicated interaction with other social groups, and is based also on unequal positions according to age, class, race, ethnicity, and religion.

By following the thinking of Joan Scott, we will have to treat the juxtaposition of girls and boys as well as Finns and immigrants as problematic rather than as natural and regenerating. The emphasising of social context changes the analysis from the one that attaches to abstract and binary differences towards the examination of those social relations, in which various differences are constructed and given a meaning. (Thorne 1993.)

Results: The connection of the classroom's masculinities to power hierarchy and popularity

The boys of the class formed two clearly separate groups; Finns and immigrants. Based on masculinities, it was possible to distinguish three smaller groups from the group of the Finnish boys: the tough guys, the popular ones and the quieter ones. These groups are the basis for the examination of my results. These groups were not clearly visible in boys’ activities but the boys might gather into groups which compositions vary according to the activity. Only the quieter boys enjoyed each other’s company as a tight group more often than others. The things that connected most of the Finnish boys were, among others, playing soccer at recess, smack down playing, or in other words, the kind of freestyle wrestling, as well as the interest towards sports, computer games and videos. Particularly the first two were important forums of hegemonic struggle, in which the boys had the possibility of demonstrating their own masculine ability, as well as reproducing and testing power relations. The participators in hegemonic struggle were the tough guys, most of the popular ones and one of the quieter boys, Olli, who moved between the groups of the popular and quieter ones2.

The demonstration of masculine competence was in connection with the position of the boys in the hierarchy of the class. Proof of competence, discussed by Tuija Huuki (see

2. According to Adler & Adler (1998, 62–63), a member with a lower status in a certain group may seek respect and admiration from children outside the group. The status of Olli was not particularly high in the group of the popular boys but he was admired in the group of the quieter boys.
her article in this book), such as participating in hegemonic struggle, competence in sports and in computer or PlayStation games, raised the status of the boys. However, the most central place in the construction of power hierarchy was occupied by “fighting power”, which had been gained through hegemonic struggle and violence directed towards others. On the basis of the interviews and the observations, the order in power hierarchy from top to bottom was mainly as follows: the tough guys, the popular ones, the quieter ones, and the immigrant boys. In addition, being Finnish was an important factor in power relations; even though Haytar, the leader of the immigrant group, had previously gained “fighting power”, it did not guarantee him power outside of his own group because he was given secondary status due to his immigrant background. On the other hand, the quieter boys hardly pursued the power based on violence but, for example, in the focus group interviews it became evident that they were, in the power hierarchy, situated above the immigrant group who lacked the status connected with being Finnish, as well as the status gained through the proof of competence from computer games.

Summing up, the tough guys were situated at the top of the power hierarchy but their actions were perceived to be too aggressive, which diminished their popularity among other pupils. The meanness of the tough guys and their underestimation of others might cause hatred or fear towards them in other groups, like Adler & Adler have argued in their study (1998, 62–63). The popularity of the quieter boys was diminished by their kindness and their withdrawal from hegemonic struggle. To gain popularity in his class community, a boy had to represent as banal a masculinity as possible, or in other words, he had to be as ordinary as possible; not too tough or too soft. Thus, he had to balance between the forms that represent the two extreme forms of masculinity. The boys were expected to be loyal towards their group of friends, as well as to be able to defend both themselves and their friends. A popular boy did not act aggressively, unless he felt that his position was threatened; self-defence was allowed but starting a fight was not appropriate.

**The tough guys**

It became evident from the interviews and the observations that power based on violence was used by far the most by one of the tough guys, Janne, whose position was based on fighting power gained during earlier school years and maintained in the fourth grade. The tough boys also included Pasi who had acted aggressively and unpredictably during the earlier school years, but his violent behaviour had diminished noticeably. In addition, some of the pupils said in the interviews that Santeri also belonged to this group because he was often supporting Janne in fights. The status gained by acting violently seemed to have a connection to the high position of a boy in the power hierarchy also later on. On the basis of the interviews, the tough guys swore and used more violence than others, as well as a certain kind of system of codes in connection to dressing and behaving as Mikko says in the following:

> SM: Tell me who is a popular boy. Who is in your opinion popular and why?

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3. The term ‘tough guy’ refers here to reputation and attitude rather than to physical strength.
Mikko: Well… Ari because he is so friendly.
SM: Yeah. So a boy has to get along with others to be popular. So what is the difference between a tough guy and a popular boy?
Mikko: The tough guys have jeans that are too big for them and they spit on the ground.
SM: What kind of language do they use?
Mikko: They swear and so forth.
SM: Mmm… Are the tough guys the ones that bully?
Mikko: Yeah.
SM: So what do you think about yourself? What kind of a boy are you?
Mikko: Perhaps I’m somewhere in the middle.
SM: Which one would you rather be more?
Mikko: Ordinary.

The popular boys

Mikko said in the interview that he preferred being in the role of an ordinary boy rather than a tough guy. In this chapter, Mikko represents the group of popular, ordinary boys. The uncrowned king of the group was Ari who was admired and respected by all of the boys except Janne. Ari was often named as the most popular boy because he was so good at sports and at school, did not swear or emphasise his masculine competence by participating in such hegemonic struggle that included violent elements. Ari was, according to his teacher’s as well as my observations, mentally exceptionally mature for his age. What is more, he did not participate in the power struggle by fighting, even though Janne would have been eager to accept the challenge. Ari did not have to demonstrate his masculine ability to either himself or to others by fighting. He proved his masculine competence by other means; he demonstrated his competence in sports, as well as doing well at school and being a nice guy. In addition, many boys, also immigrants, said that Ari did not interfere in other people’s lives. On the basis of the interviews and the observations, Ari’s status rose so high with merely these virtues that he could afford to withdraw from the visible power struggle without losing his high status in the hierarchy. The masculinity represented by Ari differs from the banal masculinity of other popular boys in the respect that it was typical for the other members of this group to take part in smack down playing and pretended fights.

The quieter boys

The group formed by the quieter boys included Juhani, Olli, Lauri, Eero and Vesa. Along with the boys, two girls, Ida and Julia. also belonged to the group as some kind of addi-
tional members. Most of the members of this group opted out of the hegemonic struggle that was connected to violence. Especially Vesa, Eero and Lauri were not particularly interested in smack down, violent games or videos connected with violence, unlike the popular boys. What was characteristic of the group of the quieter boys was empathy and balance, as well as the desire to form close friendships. The forming of close friendships was a trait that was mainly absent from the “masculinity kit” of the tough guys as well as the popular boys. When asked, most of the Finnish boys named their best friends of whom they often had more than one. However, in the social situations at the school, larger bunches of friends were formed, and it was hard for an outsider to distinguish the best friends. In the group of quieter boys this is visible also in different kinds of practical situations.

The members of the group of the quieter boys were interested in either sports or science, dressed and talked according to the masculine code etc., but did not show special interest in visible violence or “scuffling”. The leader of the group, Olli, was identified as also belonging to the group of the popular boys, but his role as a funny guy produced the largest sympathetic response and most admiration in the group of the quieter boys. Consequently, Olli often sought the company of these boys with whom he also had the position of leader and the power connected to it.

The most popular boy of the class, Ari, could very well have belonged to this group thanks to his appearance and behaviour. He participated in the social life and activities of the class and got along with everyone and did not take part in the smack down playing. However, Ari did not form a particularly close friendship with anyone. In contrast, the closeness of friendships was a central characteristic that defined the group of quieter boys. The quieter boys rarely participated in smack down playing, but they can be perceived as the supporters of hegemony, in Connell’s terms as “accomplices”. Juhani had taken up the part of acting as the commentator or referee of the freestyle wrestling match, which helped him to avoid joining the match himself. However, this way he was able to prove that he was a supporter of hegemonic struggle. With the help of this role, Juhani got a visible position in activities and at the same time his status rose in the eyes of the other boys.

The division into groups was not static, only guiding, since there was constant movement in the social relations of the class, as well as seeking or checking one’s own spaces and the mirroring of one’s position to other pupils. Finnish boys hung out in larger groups and gathered around some unifying factor such as soccer and freestyle wrestling. This sort of group activity, in which boys gather around some unifying object, is named as solidarity among friends by Hoikkala (1996, 365–366). According to Siltala, a hierarchical grouping that is based on competitiveness, inequality and aggressive behaviour does not advance the development of close and lasting relationships. Also ethnic minority or girls can be objects that unify the group of boys but can, additionally, stir up negative or violent behaviour (Siltala 1994, 330).
Hegemonic struggle as a method of constructing power hierarchy

Scuffling, pretend fights and freestyle wrestling matches were means by which some boys struggled for a position in the hegemonic power hierarchy. The five ideals of western male ideal were crystallised in hegemonic masculinity also in this data. These ideals are, according to Jokinen, power, strength, success, controlling of feelings and heterosexuality. Even though hegemonic masculinity can be seen as blending into all masculinities, boys have the possibility to use power depending on their position in the hierarchy. By participating in hegemonic struggle, boys construct a reputation as masculine agents. The maintaining of the achieved reputation acquires constant work. According to Tolonen, the using of other boys as a tool in maintaining a certain kind of reputation reveals its own dynamics in the mutual competition of the boys. Janne says:

SM: Do you have this sort of freestyle wrestling thing?
Janne: You mean smack down?
SM: Yeah.
Janne: It is always in our class... we go. Go a lot.
SM: Mmm. Who is good at it?
Janne: Otto.
SM: He’s quite large, perhaps because of that he is good at it. Who else is good?
Janne: I’m quite good.
SM: Mmm. Does it ever change into a real fight? Does anyone lose their cool?
Janne: No way. I always lose my breath when Otto does a spinebuster to me, draws a some kind of a rib smash or... I lose my breath but always start laughing.
SM: Mmm.
Janne: But we don’t take those who always start to cry like Eero. Or we don’t go like yeah and I jump a gigantic jump on someone and break his back and...
SM: So you have some sense in it all...
Janne: Walk-over and fall victory.
SM: Mmm. You know what moves are dangerous so you don’t do them with a lot of strength?
Janne: We know all the rules. It is not allowed to pull anyone’s hair... We have taken that. Then it is not allowed to bite and then you can’t kick anyone’s balls...ha...kick and what else do we have...

Thus, the popular boys, except Ari, some of the quieter boys, as well as the tough guys took part in the hegemonic smack down playing. This smack down playing had clear rules to prevent injuries. In order to take part in the struggle, a boy had to show sufficient courage and tolerance of pain. Crying was not desirable. The function of this kind of activity, which includes elements of controlled violence, was to demonstrate and test one’s own masculine competence, strengthen one’s status and, through that, obtain and maintain reputation and respect as a masculine agent, as well as one’s position in the hierarchy.
Because of this, the boys did not have to prove their toughness by fighting for real. Some of the quieter boys, as well as the immigrant boys, were groups that were left out of the struggle or that opted out themselves. According to Janne, this was partly due to the fact that the immigrant boys did not watch freestyle wrestling on television, and secondly, they were not allowed to join in anyhow. On the other hand, the quieter boys were not allowed to join in if “they start to cry”, as Janne noted in the previous example.

SM: Are any of the immigrant boys in (freestyle wrestling)?
Janne: No.
SM: Do they even do it within their own group?
Janne: I don’t know, I guess they do..No. They probably don’t even watch it.
SM: Mmm. Why don’t you take them along? Or do they even want to?
Janne: I don’t know why we don’t want them.

Hegemonic masculinity is often experienced as self-evident and problem-free; there is no need to ponder over it in the same manner as being a woman (Olander et al. 1994, 82). Adults might see the aggressive masculinity demonstrated by some boys, such as Janne, as normal masculinity. Vulnerability has to be hidden behind an armour as can be deduced from Janne’s following example. The showing of all feelings at school was not possible, particularly among the boys, and the aim was to control feelings. According to the interviews, most of the boys felt that fear and shame were feelings that cannot be shown. Hatred and rage were seen as more acceptable feelings when it came to showing them publicly. They were perceived as the territory of the tough guys in particular, whereas these were, along others, the feelings that the popular and quieter boys strove to control. Happiness, joy and compassion were feelings that the popular, quieter and immigrant boys might occasionally show. The showing of feeling was connected with the fear of losing one’s reputation and position.

SM: Can boys show all their feelings at school?
Janne: No way!
SM: What can’t you show?
Janne: Something like you are like that…you’d like to show it sometimes, but you can’t.
SM: Why not?
Janne: I don’t know, it’s insane.
SM: Yeah, you said it.
Janne: But it’s...even my dad has said that it’s normal in boys, that some boy...many boys don’t want to show what they’re really like. It has been like that already when my dad was small..it has always been like that, like boys are something like that..
SM: Yeah, from little on boys are told that they can’t cry and boys can’t do this and that. So that boys are sort of like raised into it. And that is quite insane. It must be pretty depressing that you cannot show...
Janne: Yes they can...I think it it’s nicer when you’re like, you tolerate pain, if you like hit your finger with a hammer, you just like “phew, doesn't hurt ” and like that.

SM: Is it like a boy has to be manly or like that?

Janne: Yeah, I think it’s like that from the beginning, but not of course when you’re baby or such. But no...a boy can be what he wants to be, but probably no one is like that when they’re big, when he is really big, an adult. I really don’t think, that any boy is like that so...they don’t try to be anything, the boys just aren’t like that...sometimes...that they bawl all the time...and they’re not like that. They don’t pretend but they’re somehow like that.

In Janne’s speech, there are many traits that are typical of hegemonic masculinities, such as hiding feelings and taking the pursuing of the hegemonic forms of masculinities as given, natural. In this data, most of the boys had to constantly demonstrate their masculinity competence to themselves and others in their actions and words. In order to be popular, they had to balance between excessive toughness and softness. The masculinity portrayed by Janne had been, at least during the previous school years, too tough, which continued to negatively affect his popularity. On the other hand, this guaranteed him power that was based on his reputation as a tough guy.

The immigrant boys on the margins

The ones who belonged to the immigrant group were Haytar, Talib and Jafar from Afghanistan, Bao from Vietnam and Araz from Iraq. There were also two girls named Zohra (Iraq) and Mei-Mei (Vietnam) who belonged to the immigrant group and were accepted also by the Finnish girls. Indian-born Surinder and Greek-Finnish Sanni spent most of their time with the Finnish girls. In the group of girls, there was no similar kind of division into immigrants and Finnish as among boys.

The group of immigrant boys was left in the margins in relation to hegemony in the power hierarchy. However, these boys had a clear hierarchy within their own group. On the basis of the interviews and the observations, the unquestionable leader of the group was Haytar whose power was based on his age and size; he was older and bigger than others were. Haytar’s fighting power, which was achieved during the previous school years and which was based on self-defence and resistance, strengthened his position as the leader of the group. The masculinity represented by Araz is mostly the kind of masculinity which representatives Duncan (1999, 18–19) calls nutters. In this data, this kind of masculinity is connected with aggressive behaviour and little respect from the direction of dominant masculinities. Araz was not perceived as mean but his violence connected to resistance was seen as somehow justified. Talib and Jafar could belong to the group of popular boys as Haytar did, and they did that in their own reference group. Because they are not Finnish, it was self-evident, banal, that they were not, from any point of view, seen as belonging to the group of popular Finnish boys. Bao was a quiet, withdrawn and calm boy, about whom not even the Finnish boys said anything negative. However, he was not accepted into the group of Finnish boys. Bao enjoyed the company of other immigrant boys. Haytar took the role of a kind of big brother in the group and was ready to defend
others in conflict situations. Particularly Talib and Jafar admired Haytar and generally did what he said.

SM: Is there anyone who would defend a bullied person? If one of the immigrants is bullied do you defend each other?
Haytar: Yeah.
SM: All of you, even Araz?
Haytar: Yes we do ‘cause he’s our mate... That Araz cries a lot. Because Janne beats him up completely. When I’m in some other classroom like my mother tongue or English because I do English with the fifth grade, if I’m there he beats him then.

The representatives of dominant masculinities, such as the groups of the tough guys and the popular Finnish boys, had a generally negative attitude towards immigrants. There was constant tension between Araz and Janne, in particular. However, the attitude of the Finnish boys was not the only factor that led to the separation of the immigrants into their own group, but the immigrants themselves wanted to form their own group. This was possible given the number of immigrants in this class. Moreover, shared language, religion, ethnic background or being in the same group of remedial instruction affected the fact that they enjoyed each other’s company.

SM: Does it matter, what someone looks like (as to how popular someone is)?
Toni: No.
SM: Does it matter if a person is a foreigner4 or Finnish?
Toni: It does.
SM: Which one do you have to be to be popular?
Toni: Finnish.
SM: Can you say why that is?
Toni: Finns don’t like foreigners.
SM: In general, too?
Toni: mmm

The marginal position of the immigrant boys was in part connected to the hegemonic group’s negative attitudes towards them, which led to their secondarisation. The immigrants were thought of as “outsiders”, as others and as different. Being Finnish was seen as self-evidently better and the Finns were perceived as having more power compared to the foreigners. Being Finnish presents itself as banal citizenship (Billig 1995). Janne especially had rather racist opinions about immigrants, which he also made known by calling them rice or slanty-eyes. Furthermore, degradation directed at someone else’s family was used as a tool of violence.

SM: In what way does Janne bully Talib and Jafar?

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4. Earlier in the interview, Toni used the term foreigner when talking about immigrants. That is the reason why this term is repeated in the speech of the interviewer.
Haytar: They even sing in Talib’s name, but with Jafar they… With Jafar they bully his family and his pictures. If he draws something, so they say, that that he has drawn like this. That’s why.

SM: Oh yeah. So like even in family matters...

Haytar: Once he [Janne (SM)] swore at my dad. My dad has already died, he swore for like half an hour, when the teacher was somewhere else and then I got pissed off and I started beating him. He ran away from me at school then.

Janne had called Haytar’s dad names, which Haytar took as a severe insult, especially since his dad had died at war some time before. Janne presented himself as a leader who used power by manipulating the relationships within the class by, for example, making the atmosphere more negative towards immigrants.

The groups of Finns and immigrants were easily distinguishable in the everyday activities of the class. What was distinctive was that the immigrant boys and Finnish boys did not usually even play soccer together, but rather spent their time strictly within their own groups. Furthermore, the immigrant boys had chosen textile handicrafts instead of technical handicrafts because they did not want to be in the same group with Janne and the other boys. Araz was the only immigrant boy who did not settle for spending all his time with other immigrants, but rather also tried to gain the acceptance of also the Finnish boys. Sometimes Araz tried to join the soccer games of the Finnish boys and was the only immigrant in technical handicrafts. Lauri, a member of the group of quieter boys, was the only Finnish boy who accepted Araz as his friend.

SM: Well, is there…do you think that Araz is best friends with any Finnish boy?

Toni: Perhaps he is Lauri’s.

SM: They play with Lauri also during their spare-time, perhaps. Do other Finnish boys like Araz?

Toni: No.

SM: Why not?

Toni: Because they fight with Janne.

SM: Mmm. They have fights. Does Araz call you names?

Toni: Sometimes. He doesn’t call me names but he does call some other people names. Sometimes Mikko and that Janne and Santeri. They provoke him.

SM: They provoke him, so he starts calling them names.

Toni: Yeah.

The boys in hegemonic position used violence the meaning of which seemed to be the maintenance of the hierarchy. The violence Araz used appears as resistance to this violence. Moreover, the immigrants told me about Janne’s usage of violence on Araz in relation to Lauri and other immigrants:

Haytar: When Araz sometimes does some work with Lauri, Janne says to Lauri; Don’t do that, don’t do anything like that, like that. Sometimes he doesn’t let us join the game.

SM: Janne doesn’t let Araz?
Haytar: Yeah. We are never allowed to join the game.
SM: So Janne doesn’t like foreigners?
Haytar: No, once those other mates of them said that you can join but he said that you can’t. The ball was his. It was his decision.

Once in a while Araz was allowed to play soccer with the Finnish boys. If the ball was Janne’s, the chances to be allowed to play were slim. However, if the ball belonged to the whole class, the other boys might use that on Janne so that Araz or some other immigrants were accepted to join the game. The ball and its ownership had a central function in the power game. What is more, the example shows what sort of power Janne had in some situations compared to others. The others did not have the courage to take a stand against Janne if the situation was not severely in conflict with the idea of justice of the other boys.

Araz’s attempt to gain acceptance from the Finnish boys was prevented by the marginalisation of the immigrant group, practised by the hegemonic group – mainly Janne – as well as by Araz’s own approach. Araz did not accept his position in the margins but resisted it by, for example, using bad language and by getting irritated: he interpreted even the smallest hints as being directed at him. Despite his aggressive behaviour, the other pupils did not perceive Araz as a bully but rather the one being bullied. It seemed that the immigrants had two alternatives in dealing with the supremacy of hegemony; either settle with their position or rise in resistance, the latter being a consuming alternative. In the third grade, the immigrants had put up more resistance; as an example Haytar and Janne had constantly clashed with each other. Apparently, they had come to an understanding concerning their positions because, on the basis of the interviews and the observations, Araz was the only one who still made repeated and visible resistance. Other immigrants realised the instability of the power relations, but hardly put up any visible resistance.

 Violence and social relations

In this data, violence is examined, in the case of boys, as the means by which the boys try to gain status, respect and power in the hierarchical system of their class. Whether pupils ended up as a victims of violence or not, depended on what kind of gendered agents they appeared as or how they saw their positions in the hierarchy. The resistance towards hegemony rising from the margins – coming from either a girl or an immigrant – was silenced effectively and even violently as in the case of Araz and one girl. This will be further discussed in the following chapter.

The Finnish boys' talk was often connected to sports, computer games and videos. A boy could raise his masculine competence by being good not only at sports, but also at computer and PlayStation games, or by telling stories of his own achievements. The players of either ice hockey or soccer were often the popular boys’ idols; and these were the kind of heroes the boys wanted to become. Certain kinds of clothes, game consoles, mobile phones and having ice hockey as a hobby raised the status of the boys – at least according to Janne who was one of the tough guys. If one did not have these things, the status was lower and the risk to end up as an object of violence grew.
SM: What kinds of boys are bullied in general?
Janne: The kinds of boys that can’t afford to buy anything, even though in my opinion, it is senseless to bully that kind of person.
SM: What are the things that a boy should have?
Janne: Clothes, game consoles, all the best.
SM: Does one have to have a mobile?
Janne: Yeah. Almost everyone has one already. Not all.
SM: Does one have to have a PlayStation 2 console?
Janne: I dunno, not all have that, I guess. We have it like that at home that we have it but it has not kind of arrived yet. It has already been ordered.

I did not notice this kind of appreciation of material things in the immigrant boys' talk. When I asked about it in the interviews, the boys said that only a person’s character and attitude towards others had any effect on the popularity of a pupil. However, these traits surfaced as important issues also in the interviews of most of the Finnish boys, but on the basis of the observations the boys' talk was often connected to, for example, the comparison of their own computers and computer games. Outspoken Janne was the only one who said in the interview that material things had any significance in relation to social position.

The comment of Haytar’s next example of “clean or dirty” heart crystallises, on the basis of the interviews, the attitude of the majority of the pupils to what is the key to popularity. On the other hand, on the basis of the observations, the popularity of a boy – except Ari – was easiest to predict if he was situated somewhere in the middle also in this matter.

SM: So, does it matter how popular some kid is that… other things than how he or she behaves? Does it matter how someone does at school or what he or she looks like? What kind of clothes? Do they matter?
Haytar: No.
SM: Only how you behave?
Haytar: Yeah, that heart, whether it is clean or dirty.

Certain kind of talking was also a means by which the boys demonstrated their competence as masculine agents. Swearing and homophobic name-calling were the forms of language usage used by the tough guys in particular. In addition, some of the popular boys, as well as the immigrants, used these occasionally in their speech. Araz was the only immigrant who used a great deal of swearing and homophobic name-calling as the means of resistance. Julia acted in the same manner, but not as often as Araz. Even though school is often presented as a gender neutral and sex-free place, it has been shown in many studies that sexuality is present in many connections. For example, by directing insults towards issues dealing with sexuality of the other boys, one normalises one’s own masculine identity. It is no accident that sexuality is chosen as the object of bullying because sexuality is an important factor in the formation of masculinity. (Brittan 1989, Gordon & Lahelma 1996, Lehtonen 1999, Mac An Ghill 1994, Nayak & Kehily 1997.)
According to G.A. Fine, “the homophobic name-calling” of boys has hardly anything to do with homosexual behaviour. He claims that the point of homophobic name-calling is that the boy who is the object of it does not and cannot recognise heterosexist speech and has not shown that he admires hegemonic masculinity. “To be a homosexual is the same as to be a baby or a girl.” By labelling the other homosexual one declares his own heterosexuality. (Fine 1989, 175; Duncan 1999, 19, Jokinen 2000, 227, Lehtonen 1999, 124–129.) The boys control each other’s heterosexual behaviour very carefully: Kasperi had his hair cut very short. Mikko goes and strokes Kasperi’s head. Immediately there is a comment from Otto: “Yuck Kasperi, you are not that kind of a boy, are you?” In most of the interviews, the “tough guys”, in other words, Janne, Pasi and Santeri, were seen as those who did most of the homophobic name-calling and swearing.

SM: Is the word faggot used a lot?
Toni: Yeah.
SM: Who uses them?
Toni: Janne.
SM: What about Pasi?
Toni: He too, sometimes. Santeri too.
SM: Who swears?

Toni does not even remember the existence of the immigrant boys or girls, but rather ponders his own group’s relation to homophobic name-calling. Toni did know that at least Araz and Julia used swearing and the word faggot in their speech. According to Hirdman, hierarchical and dichotomising activity that produces gender is one of the most important mechanisms in maintaining and reproducing the gender system (Hirdman 1990). In studying the structures of the power relations between hegemonic masculinity and masculinities subordinate to it, according to Foucault’s power theory, the social and institutional discourse can be emphasised (Jefferson 1994, 15). A hegemonic relationship is formed between two groups that have two different discourses (subjectivity/otherness). This relationship is caused by powerful positive and/or negative feelings that are directed at the other group. The unsymmetrical power relation between these groups is so self-evident that it is not even noticed. (Paechter 1998, 5–6.)

Cases Julia and Ida

The girls were mainly left out of or opted out of the visible solving of power hierarchy. As an exception there were two girls, Julia and Ida. Julia was bullied by the hegemonic group. The tough guys and the popular boys did not accept Julia’s behaviour, such as swearing, name-calling and kicking if she was provoked. This becomes evident from the following interview of Janne:

SM: Is there any girl you don’t like?
Janne: Julia. She always pisses me off.
SM: How?
Janne: By kicking and all. Hits without a reason.
SM: Really?
Janne: Or like that..
SM: Does she get pissed off if you say something to her first..
Janne: (Laughs.) I don’t say anything to her, I do like this (makes a face) and she gets really pissed off because of it. She always kicks.
SM: Does she get pissed off because of other boys than you?
Janne: Yes, of everyone. She goes and kicks them all. And she is really like that, that if someone goes up to her outside school so she hits them at once.
SM: Hits?!
Janne: Yeah, I’m sure. Julia’s like that.

In this data, it seemed that the boys in the dominant position did not tolerate that a girl reacted to provocation with ways of resistance that were seen as masculine. This lead to the judging of Julia’s behaviour and to outright bullying. It is notable that the quieter boys accepted Julia in their group, Vesa and Julia even had some kind of a relationship. Julia was Ida’s friend and Ida “dated” Olli who has the leader of the group in question. Within her own group, Julia did not feel the need to defend herself because the others accepted her.

Thorne (1993, 52) claims that boys and girls of the same age can be easily divided into romantic couples which increases the threat of heterosexual bullying and thus, drives the genders apart. This data does not support this claim. In the studied class, a girlfriend increased the boy’s status. Dating was used as an “alibi” for the friendship between a girl and a boy. A boy playing with girls ran the risk of being labelled feminine, a sissy, if he enjoyed the company of the girls without the function of dating.

The most popular girl of the class was Ida, who was liked by all the boys, including the ones belonging to other groups. She reacted to name-calling (for example, to variations of her name) without getting irritated, without resistance and took it as a game, which seemed to be an accepted way of reacting to provocation. The situation did not lead to bullying as it did in Julia’s case. In order to be accepted among the boys who participated most visibly in the power struggle, a girl had to demonstrate certain traits that were seen as typical for dominant masculinities, such as tolerance of provocation, interest in sports and hiding of true feelings. On the other hand, a girl had to avoid demonstrating representations seen as masculine – such as violent, aggressive reaction to provocation – that were seen as “unsuitable for girls”. In other words, Ida knew how to play according to the rules of the boys.

SM: Can you be yourself at school or do you have to play a role of some kind?
Ida: I can be myself.
SM: Can you show all your feelings? Or do you have to hide some of your feelings at school?
Ida: Sometimes.
SM: What are the feelings you have to hide?
Ida: If you are bullied and get sad you have to... Often I look happy.
SM: That you don’t feel a thing.
Ida: Yeah.
SM: And even if you are a little bit afraid you can’t show it?
Ida: Yeah.
SM: So can girls show hatred and rage?
Ida: I dunno... I guess not.
SM: Do boys show them?
Ida: Sometimes.
SM: Who do?
Ida: Perhaps all the tough guys.

In this study, as in the studies of Sean McGuffley and Lindsay Rich (1999), greater emotional friendship, openness and supporting of others was characteristic of the girls’ group. What was characteristic of the girls, was the individual’s attempt to “be nice”, which increased the solidarity of the groups. All the girls, except for Julia, avoided physical and direct aggression. Because the focus of the study is on boys, studying of the relationships among girls did not receive as much attention. In the interviews, both the girls and the boys were asked questions dealing with the same themes. On the basis of these interviews, girls teased the boys they liked. According to the pupils, girls rarely bullied other girls and when did so, it was seclusion from the group and name-calling. In this data, girls aimed at pleasing others or at being quiet and invisible in order to survive in the classroom community dominated by boys. If there was any bullying among the girls, it was harder to detect than in the case of boys. (See Olweus 1992, Salmivalli 1998.)

In the case of boys, there was constant guarding of their own social group, as well as labelling of deviation. For example, ethnicity and behaviour seen as feminine were perceived as deviant. The possible attempts of the girls to enter the territory of the boys were observed and the girls were made uncomfortable if they invaded the territory of the boys, as in the case of Julia. If a girl’s behaviour was within the limits of acceptable masculine behaviour, as in the case of Ida, she might be allowed to join the hegemonic group of the boys. At least Janne can be said to have used hegemonic masculinity in suppressing the masculinities subordinate to it and girls. (Compare McGuffley & Rich 1999, 605–627.)

If a boy did not defend himself against physical or verbal attack, his position in the hierarchy was usually diminished. Janne occasionally bullied Lauri by attacking him all of a sudden.

SM: You have written here (in the questionnaire) that bullying happens by calling names and kicking. Does this mean that Janne generally bullies especially Lauri by calling names and kicking?
Toni: Janne usually calls him names and sometimes he kicks.
SM: Lauri?
Toni: Yeah.
SM: What kinds of words does he use or what does he bully Lauri for?
Toni: Shouts something at him always.
SM: Does he say something like fatso or something?
Toni: Something like that.

Lauri did not defend himself but tried to leave the situation. Janne admitted that he purposely bullied Lauri but did not say why. It is possible that Janne wanted to demonstrate his power not only to Lauri, but also to other pupils of the class by acting in such a way (see Tuija Huuki’s article in this book.) For Janne, beating Lauri was an advantage since Lauri was larger in size and “good at wrestling” as Janne claims in the interview. Janne knew that Lauri was not going to get into a fight, which made him easy to defeat. What is more, Lauri’s social status was quite low and some thought that Janne was irritated by the friendship of Lauri and Araz. Even though Ari, whose status was higher, did not fight, Janne did not attack him. I have no information on whether or not Janne and Ari had sometimes solved their differences by fighting, or whether Janne’s respect for Ari’s physical immunity was based on Ari’s position as the most popular boy in the class. Janne tried to use subtler methods such as manipulation – spreading untrue rumours about Ari – in order to diminish Ari’s status. Gendered violence can be discussed in relation to Lauri’s as well as Julia’s, Ari’s and Araz’s cases, because violent action referred to the strengthening of the position of the one who bullies and to the weakening or reproduction of the position of the victims. By acting this way, the manner in which the pupils who were the objects of violence were seen as gendered beings was underrated.

It is most likely that the group of the quieter boys would have had power over marginal groups if they had wanted to use that power. In relation to girls and immigrants, the group of quieter boys had the advantage that they would probably have the support of the hegemony if someone challenged the group into a power struggle. The risk of girls ending up as the objects of physical violence of the boys was generally small, providing that they remembered their position in the margins. In the opinion of the boys, the girls were hardly hit or kicked.

SM: So what do you do then, do you kick back?
Janne: No way, I have never kicked any girl, except my sister.
SM: Is it like that you can’t hit girls?
Janne: Yeah.

Moreover, the immigrants regarded girls with respect, at least most of them did. Araz was the only one of them who might call girls faggots or whores the same way as he called the boys faggots.

SM: How do you see girls? In a different way?
Haytar: In a different way. They should wear a veil. You should be friendly and respect girls. In our country.
SM: You can’t call girls a whore or…
Haytar: Not at all.

Judging from the speech of Haytar, he thinks that the immigrants treat girls with more respect than the Finnish boys. The auxiliary “should” refers to the fact that things are not always like that in practice. On the basis of the observations and the interviews, I, howe-
ver, claim that violence, at least non-physical violence, that the immigrants direct at girls was less abundant than that of the Finnish boys. Even though it was, in principle, clear for the Finnish boys that it was not appropriate to hit girls, there was at least name-calling and provocation. According to Duncan (1999, 22), boys can verbally provoke and bully girls, but real boys do not hit girls since there is the risk of diminution of status, as well as being labelled a girl or homosexual. Exceptions can be made if there is a need to remind girls or subordinate boys of the supremacy of dominant masculinity.

Conclusions

On the basis of this data, the boys who pursued hegemonic position, constructed a certain kind of masculinity-based reputation, which, at its best, increased popularity in the class community and was the basis of a boy’s position in the power hierarchy. The most central ways in pursuing popularity and position were to demonstrate one’s masculine competence by being good at sports and in boys’ pretended fights. Other typical ways for boys to raise or maintain their status and position were stories of their own competence, masculine way of talking, competence in computer or PlayStation games, as well as owning certain objects. In order to be popular, a boy had to balance between too violent masculinity portrayed by the tough guys and the masculinity of the quieter boys. They had to able to defend themselves, but active, direct aggression was to be avoided. It can be claimed, in a rather oversimplified manner and in the light of this data, that the more common and banal, in other words, self-evident and invisible, the masculinity of a boy is, the more popular and respected he is in the class community.

In this data, violence appears as a gendered way to construct and reproduce the reciprocal power relations of those who participate in the hegemonic struggle, as well as to dominate the groups subordinate and marginal to hegemony. Furthermore, violence was used as a tool of resistance by the marginal groups. The tough guys and the popular boys participated most visibly in the struggle for hegemonic masculinity. The group subordinate to these was the tight group of the quieter boys that supported hegemonic struggle, but mainly opted out of it. Immigrant boys and girls were left in the margins. Most of the power was used by the tough guys, of whom one dominated the whole class. The tough guys were not popular since the masculinity they represented was too hard and aggressive. However, the most popular boy was a positive exception. He was an example of the fact that one could obtain a popular position and high status in this class without participating in the visible power struggle that included violent elements. If a boy proves his competence in other areas connected with hegemonic masculinity, he may obtain the popular status position in the social relations of the class.

Being Finnish was connected with power and popularity in the class community. Being Finnish was also banal in this class. It was perceived as self-evidently better than other nationalities which resulted in, for its part, marginalisation of especially the immigrant boys in relation to hegemonic masculinities. It would be interesting to study a class, in which immigrants were the majority. Would the groups of Finnish pupils and immigrants still be separate and would the power system in the class be based on the superior numbers, or would, for example, being Finnish be the basis for the power position?
On the basis of my results, I agree with Barrie Thorne’s view, according to which children should be directed into realising and accepting the fact that there are various ways to be a girl or a boy, and that no boy has to try to be better or superior than girls or other boys. What is more, gendered and racist language and behaviour should be interfered with more than at the present, and issues connected with these themes should be discussed between the pupils, teachers and parents. According to Thorne, a school, in which gender had as little significance as possible, would be ideal. In order to get closer to this aim, paradoxically, the meaning of gender sometimes has to be emphasised by legitimising alternative forms of masculinities. A gender sensitive perspective takes into consideration that in some situations gender has to be emphasised in order to promote the realisation of equality. (Thorne 1993, 169–171.)

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The Construction of an Acceptable Female Body in Finnish Schools

Hannele Harjunen

Abstract

The article focuses on exploring how girls' bodies are being moulded by the Finnish school. For my PhD research I have gathered data on women's experiences of being fat. One of the findings was that for most of the women who had been fat as a child named school as the place where they had learnt or they had been told directly or implicitly that they were too fat or their bodies were somehow deviant to the norm. It is evident that school is one of the most central places where girls are taught and where they learn the boundaries of the acceptable or ideal female body. In this article, I ask how the orders and organisation of the school set and reproduce this effectually gendered and violent standard of an acceptable female body, and how it affects on young girls' idea of themselves and their bodies.

In this article, I will apply Foucauldian thinking by considering being fat as a discursive category that is created, produced and reproduced through social practices for example through school and its institutions such as school health care and physical education. The data used in this article consists of 35 autobiographical writings and 12 thematic interviews with Finnish women aged between 21 and 65 years.

Introduction

The construction of an acceptable or ideal female body is a multi-layered and complex process. In public discussion, the media with its constant flow of images of airbrushed women is often pinpointed as the main source of today's oppressive thin-body ideal. Although media discourses admittedly play an important role in the production and reproduction of the conception of the ideal female body (e.g. Smith 1988, 37–38), they are by no means solely responsible for the creation of the thin norm. While it has been shown that mass media discourses do affect girls’ notion of the ideal body, make girls more dissatisfied with their own bodies and encourage them to use unhealthy ways to attain the
thin ideal (Oliver 1999, Thomsen, Weber & Brown 2002), I would argue that a significant part of learning about the boundaries of the acceptable shape and size of a woman's body is embedded in the organisation of everyday life and takes place in most everyday settings such as school. (Kosonen 1998, Lesko 1988, Tolonen 2001.)

In his famous work Discipline and Punish (1980), Michel Foucault named the school alongside hospitals, prisons and the military as an example of an institution of disciplinary power. According to Foucault, attempts to mould the subject are central to the practices and orders of all disciplinary institutions. Further, control and regulation of the body is oftentimes instrumental in these attempts.

The goal of disciplinary power is to create ‘normality’ defined by the dominant discourse. Normality is held as the ideal, and the aim of the normalising techniques is to produce individuals who have internalised the discipline and thus become ‘normal’ (Foucault 1980, 206–207).

In this article my purpose is to examine school as a disciplinary environment where dominant discourses concerning the acceptable female body meet. I will argue that school as an institution actively produces and maintains thinness of the body as a normative ideal for women. Consequently, fat body is produced as ‘deviance’ and ‘abnormality’ to the norm. The goal of this article is to explore some of the techniques that are used to identify, control and eradicate bodies that are considered as unacceptable, in this case fat. However, the aim of this article is not just to study the installation of power by tracing out some of the mechanisms of micropower that attempt to regulate and control the body in a school environment. This article is based on the findings made in the empirical data that I have collected for my PhD dissertation concerning Finnish women’s experiences of being fat. The data is used to explore the production of the acceptable female body as experienced by women who have been subjected to regulation and control because of the size of their bodies.

In the data there were three recurring situations that seemed to play a central role in the defining and producing of the body as unacceptable. In this article, I will limit my study to these three situations, namely encounters with the school health care system, physical education classes and peer group interaction during the breaks.

**Disciplinary power and school**

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault differentiates between sovereign and disciplinary power. According to Foucault, there are three major differences: sovereign power operates through identifiable agents, is fairly easy to locate and can be resisted, whereas disciplinary power is all-pervasive, therefore hard to locate, and because of this, difficult to resist. Foucault says that essentially all relationships are power relationships and disciplinary power is everywhere. Moreover, its workings are often viewed as naturalised and ‘normal’ since disciplinary power is all-embracing and is viewed as part of the organisation of everyday life. It rarely meets resistance, since there are no visible or identifiable agents that one could rebel against. (Foucault 1991, 182–185.)

We have all been shaped by disciplinary power, but the processes by which we are being shaped often remain undetected due to the subtlety in the exercising of power. Dis-
Disciplinary power is about control and continuous surveillance, it is effective, invisible and impersonal in nature. (Foucault 1991, 180–85.) Disciplinary power hides in the structures and orders of disciplinary institutions such as school. As Sari Husa notes, Foucault's thoughts concerning discipline seem to be readily applicable to the field of education and education research (Husa 1999, 68–69). School is one of the most central places where discipline is being learnt. Children are fed information about the world in the form of book knowledge, but it is also a central place of learning about social organisation and structure and the norms and values that prevail in society. Much of this learning happens through and in the body. When a child begins the school she/he immediately becomes a focus of various normalising techniques, many of which focus directly on the body. The children are taught to function in the hierarchies of school organisation both physically and socially. Their bodies are subjected to the normalising rule that attempts to make them controlled and standardised individuals. Disciplinary power that is located in the institutions such as schools creates its subjects. Disciplining of the body is a gradual process; little by little, posture, movements, shape and size of the body are put under control (Foucault 1980, 156–157).

The moulding of the body into a disciplined body is based on ‘dividing practices’ that aim to manipulate the subject. As Rabinow says, the dividing practices are a combination of science, or what is regarded as a scientific approach, and spatial and/or social exclusion (Rabinow 1991, 8). Through a number of divisions, for example, spatial organisation, examination, regulation and control of the body, the purpose of a disciplinary institution such as school, is to create what Foucault calls ‘docile bodies’ that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved (Foucault 1991, 182–185). In a sense, disciplinary power flows through the subjects body.

One of the most significant characteristics of disciplinary power lies in its attempt to define and create normality. School is an example of an institution where bodies are being classified as acceptable or unacceptable. According to Foucault, school as a disciplinary institution has the purpose to create disciplined subjects who conform to standards of normality concerning, for example, health, docility and so on (Foucault 1980). A normalising structure or order such as school seeks and weeds out abnormalities, anomalies, and deviance. Not only setting a standard, defining normality is also a system of grading people. Normal is graded against abnormal and those deemed not normal according to the dominant discourse are placed under surveillance and monitoring in order to become controlled.

Foucault’s theory concerning the body has been criticised of gender-blindness and presenting the body as a passive and unresisting object of power. Furthermore, it has been argued that Foucault does not adequately take into account individual’s experience and dynamic relationship to power (McNay 1992, 40–43). In this article, I approach disciplinary power from the point of view of experience of an individual whose body has become an object of various normalising disciplinary practices at school. The fat female body is viewed in relation to the normalising standard of the ideal female body that is being created at school.
Normality and being fat

What does it feel like to live in a culture where one’s body is constantly under scrutiny, where one continually receives the message that one’s body is not acceptable, and one’s value or competence as a human being is determined by one’s body size? These are the questions many fat people face daily, yet being fat has been rarely studied from the point of view of social sciences or personal experience. It has been, until recently, mainly approached as a medical question that can be solved by medicine, however, there is growing evidence that being fat can have serious other consequences for individuals beside health, including social, behavioural, and psychological aspects. (Cooper 1997, 1998, Polso 1996, Sarlio-Lähteenkorva 1999, Zdrodowski 1995, 1996.)

It seems that many of the social consequences of being fat derive from the cultural construction of obesity as an abnormality. In our society, there is a detectable cultural bias against being fat (Brink 1994, Kassirer & Angell 1998). For example, it has been shown that fat people are discriminated against in such crucial fields of life as health care, education and employment (Puhl & Brownell 2001, 778-805). Further it has been shown that the bias against obesity is widespread and the stigma attached to it is so strong that even health care personnel who specialise in obesity treatment are affected by it (Brownell & Teachman 2000, 1525–1531). Researchers especially in the United States have lately began to talk about weight-based discrimination, which means that a person’s weight is seen directly as the cause of discrimination. Studies have demonstrated that fat people, especially fat women, are frequently subjected to public ridicule and abuse and are constantly being pressurised to change, that is to lose weight, by medical professionals, media, as well as people close to them, in order to be socially accepted (Cooper 1998, Millman 1980, Polso 1996, Sarlio-Lähteenkorva 1999).

In Western societies being fat has been constructed as a bodily abnormality and a form of deviance. Presently it is impossible to consider being fat merely as bodily variation. The reasons for this are many. The construction of being fat as a deviance is a long and multi-faceted process, in which several discourses concerning the body meet. In the dominant discourse regarding being fat, for example, medicine’s definition of the normal body and medical attempts to create an optimally healthy body are entwined together with Christian-philosophical conceptions concerning morality, virtue, and moderation (Stone 1995, 413–424). In the particular case of women, these discourses are further linked with gender-bound expectations concerning appearance and the ideal female body (Stone 1995, Wolf 1991). According to a study by Silberstein, Striegel-Moore and Rodin, being fat is one of the most significant sources of feelings of shame and guilt for women (e.g. Silberstein, Striegel-Moore, Rodin 1987, 89–108).

Social stigma attached to being fat is strong and it has been argued that in the contemporary culture, a fat body has become one of the most stigmatising physical characteristics for both sexes.

Some of the stigma attached to being fat relates to the cultural emphasis placed on appearance. The importance of appearance has grown over the past decades. Mike Featherstone observed the threat of this line of development already in the early 1980s. He stated that
“(w)ith appearance being taken as a reflex of the self the penalties of bodily
neglect are lowering of one’s acceptability as a person, as well as an indication of
laziness, low self-esteem and even moral failure”. (Featherstone 1982, 26.)

In our culture thinness does not just mean the size of the body, but it is associated with
such qualities as being healthy, attractive and in control. In contrast, a fat body is viewed
as a sign of poor health, inefficiency and lack of personal will. As Pamela J. Brink (1994)
observes, fat people are doubly stigmatised both for their physical appearance, and their
assumed moral weakness. Fat women are further stigmatised for failing to fulfil the female
body ideal of thinness. Women have been for a long time the target of normative
demands concerning the body’s appearance, however, today male bodies too are becom-
ing under increasing pressure concerning appearance. Presently, dominant discourses
concerning health, virtuosity of character, and attractiveness all exclude the fat body.

School, discipline and girls

As Lois McNay among others has observed, Foucault does not talk about the female body
or the gendered character and objectives of disciplinary techniques in his work (McNay
1992, 11, 32). However, the role of school in the construction of gender and gendered
bodies is not insignificant. There is evidence that school effectually maintains and produ-
ces the dominant gender system through its practices and orders (Lesko 1988, 123–142,
Kosonen 1998, 14).

German Frigga Haug and her research group have shown how school quite inevitably
plays a central role in girls’ socialisation process into womanhood. They demonstrated
that female and male bodies are being shaped and controlled in different ways in school
(Haug et al. 1987). Nancy Lesko detected in her study concerning American high school
girls that inside the school curriculum, there seems to be a ‘curriculum of the body’ which
is to teach girls the boundaries of the proper female behaviour and appearance. According
to Lesko, girls’ appearance; clothes, make up, hair, behaviour as well as manners are
women’s school memories showed how the orders of school and physical education in
particular aim to define and determine the boundaries of an acceptable female body. Thus,
it could be claimed that one purpose of school is to create femininity that is perceived
acceptable according to the dominant discourse concerning woman’s role in society. This
is not to deny that women themselves do not play any part in the process (c.f. Smith 1988,
37–59).

An illuminating example of the role of school in the grooming of girls into culturally
acceptable femininity is provided by the Swedish historian Karin Johannissen who has
studied the 19th century all-girl boarding schools. These schools for the daughters of the
bourgeoisie were in essence exclusive disciplinary institutions designed to mould the girls
to conform to what was considered the ideal femininity of the times. The feminine ideal
of the 19th century bourgeois society was pale, fragile and physically weak. Johannissen
shows how the 19th century ideal femininity was created in a school environment by con-
tinuous surveillance and monitoring of girls’ behaviour, thoughts, emotions and body. Girls were taught to control themselves at all times, even when they were alone (Johannisson 1994). This exemplifies the essence and goals of disciplinary power.

Since then, the role of women in society has changed drastically. Modern school does not monitor girls as rigorously, but the motivation behind the attempts to regulate and control female bodies has remained at least partially the same. The purpose is to produce the idea of gender and maintain the gender difference. For example in Lesko’s view, curriculum of the body is central in creating gendered identity and consequently unequal relationships in society (Lesko 1988, 123).

Data

The data used in this article consists of 35 autobiographical writings and 12 thematic interviews with Finnish women aged between 21 and 65 years. Altogether, the data consists of 47 accounts of being fat. The data was collected during the spring of the year 2000 by placing a research request in one Finnish newspaper and one weekly published women’s magazine. In the request, I asked women ‘who have experience of being fat in a society that values thinness’ to write about their experiences or to take part in an interview. I asked them to tell about both the positive and negative experiences. The informants’ approach to the subject was expected to be based on lived and personal experience and it was probably influenced to a degree by the research request, in which the contradiction of being fat versus society that values thinness was stated.

The weight of the informants was not specifically asked in the request, since the experiences of being fat could also relate to their past, to the childhood experiences for example. However, majority of the women who wrote or were interviewed volunteered the information on their current weight themselves. Usually women recounted their personal weight development in detail in chronological order. In many cases memories were tightly linked to a certain weight. Women often began telling about a particular experience by telling how much they weighed at the time. They had an apparent need to give proof that they had ‘real’ experience of being fat. Many in fact commented on the normal weighed people’s tendency to talk about their ‘weight problems’ in their presence, which was found both insulting and annoying. The degree of informant’s fatness varied, but from the information I was given it can be drawn that all the women who responded to the research request could have been medically determined fat at some stage of their lives.

When I began the analysis of the data, I made an observation that the majority of the women who mentioned that they had been fat since childhood or as a child (29 of all the women in the data), named school as the place where they had learnt that their bodies did not conform to the norm and were somehow unacceptable. From the data, I was able to surmise that many of these women had become targets of various normalising orders and practices. The Foucauldian notion of school as a disciplinary institution that by regulation and control of the body aims at creating certain type of individuals seemed to echo strongly in the life-stories of these women.
Techniques of normalisation in Finnish school

In the data there seems to be some clear points of intersection that appear to be significant in the process of becoming defined as fat. It is obvious that the process of socialisation is gradual and multi-layered and it takes place on several levels at the same time (Foucault 1980). However, there are three distinct situations which appear in the data: encounters with the school health care system, physical education classes and peer group interaction. In short, medical professionals, teachers and students alike all participate in the discursive production of the fat body.

**Naming**

The most frequently told story in the data is when, how and by whom the women had been first defined as fat. School plays a major role in these life-stories, since most of the memories of being labelled as fat were linked to school. Many of the women can remember the exact moment they were first called fat or it was implied by another student, school nurse, doctor or a teacher. Quite surprisingly, only a few remember comments made by parents or relatives prior to going to school.

The women in the data who mentioned that they had been fat for ‘as long as they can remember’ or from childhood have gone through the normalising school system labelled as fat children. Their bodies have been defined as something that should be corrected and acted upon. Many have had their bodies placed literally under monitoring and surveillance. Many have been taught to monitor themselves and their bodies meticulously. Also, many of the women note that they had soon understood that girls and boys were evaluated differently, and that this was linked to the culturally and socially created ideal of the proper shape and size for women. The feminine body is equated with smallness and thinness.

The stories of women who have been fat since childhood illustrate how being fat is constructed as an abnormality in our culture. They show how a body that does not conform to the accepted norm comes under the siege of normalising techniques. Furthermore, these stories reveal how the conception and experience of being fat is being actively produced and how the process of definition may proceed.

A thought that appears frequently in the data can be summarised in the following quote from one 23 year old woman.

> I have now realised that I really was not that fat. I went through old photos and noticed that I looked quite normal, just a little chubby. (woman 23 years).

It seems that many of the women in the data have believed and internalised the thought of being fat and lived with that notion, although many of them now question the rightful-ness of the label or feel that their weight problem had been exaggerated. For many the consequences of being labelled fat seemed too great in relation to the actual degree of overweight they had had as a child. Some are even of view that they became fat, because they were treated as one.
There is a strikingly familiar narrative in the women's stories: first, many state that they have been fat from childhood; then they challenge the notion and begin to trace out the events that had contributed to their conception of themselves as fat.

**Measuring**

The attempt to regulate and control the body size is particularly visible in the stories relating to the practices of school health care. Children are regularly measured and weighed at school. It is justified by the need to follow the physical development of children and prevent possible medical problems. The goal is to detect any deviation from normal development. However, it should be understood that these practices are neither politically neutral nor innocent. One example of this is Saara Tuomaala’s research concerning public health promotion manuals directed at school children in the 1920s and the 1930s. In her study, Tuomaala demonstrates that school health care served nationalistic purposes in Finland. Social hygienic aspects were linked to the creation of the ideal citizen. Tuomaala shows that in the light of these guide books the ideal child of school health care has been strong, agile and thin from the early 1920s onward (Tuomaala 1999, 165–166). Weak, clumsy and fat children were regarded as unfit to represent the nation. In this context, what is perceived as bodily deviance is yet again associated with moral decay.

Many women in the data mention school weighing as a traumatic and stigmatising experience. In the most traumatic cases, weighing was made publicly in front of the whole class. Private knowledge of the body is made public, in a sense, the body is made public property and it is thus placed under the criticism and judgement of others. The practice of public weighing has been common in Finnish schools for a long time. There are nearly three decades between the experiences of these two women quoted below.

Weighing day was such a terrible shock. We were weighed in front of the class and everyone’s weight was pronounced in a loud voice so that everyone could hear it. I was bullied extremely badly that day. (woman 57 years)

As a child I was really reluctant to tell anyone my weight and the yearly weightings were a nightmare, or not the weighing itself, but the manner of it. We were weighed first and then we had to memorise our weight and finally when everyone had been weighed the teacher called us up and in turn we had to say the weight out loud in front of the whole class. (woman 32 years)

If the purpose of the public weighing is to increase the intensity of peer group control concerning acceptable body size, it has been successful. Fat children are often targets of bullying and abuse in school, which habitually involves name-calling, ridicule, social exclusion, discrimination and sometimes physical violence such as pushing. Many of the women in the data had been bullied at school, some of them for years, because of their size. Sometimes even teachers had participated in the bullying by calling children with insulting names or commenting on their eating habits.
Discriminating

Many women comment that public weightings clearly increased bullying and discrimination by other children. It seems only commonsensical that children who are labelled directly or implicitly as deviant because of their body are in danger of becoming bullied and discriminated against, especially if it seems that the institution itself gives the permission, or at least the means to do it by its own dividing practices. The body plays a central role when dominant groups define those who are regarded as ’others’ (Young 1990, 123, Hall 1999, 147–150). As Young says, the groups of people that are viewed as deviant by the dominant groups are always under a threat of harassment and violence, whether it is a fat, physically impaired, homosexual or ethnic body (Young 1990, 123–124).

Discrimination was systematic. I only got attention if I did something to entertain other children, brought toys to school and made jokes. In middle school other children stopped talking to me. I tried to relieve my loneliness by talking with teachers and crying at night. It was clear that I was not one of them. (woman, 23 years)

The feeling of ’otherness’ and not belonging were common for many women in the data. The weightings and/or bullying were instrumental in enhancing the feeling of guilt and shame and the sense of exclusion in the women. When the bullying goes on for a long time, its target may become used to it.

The situation always changed, sometimes I was bullied at school, sometimes at home, sometimes in both places. Then we moved, I was eleven and went to 5th grade. Boys bullied me, girls not so much. In middle school it got physical. I was never absent because of bullying, even though it was tiring. It was everyday life for me. (woman 36 years)

School children interviewed by Elina Lahelma for her study mention being fat as one characteristic among many others that may cause bullying. Based on this finding Lahelma concludes that anyone can become a target of bullying, since any reason is valid (Lahelma 1999, 90–91). However, I would underline the seriousness of bullying that draws from bodily difference, especially if the body is culturally determined somehow deviant to the norm as in the case of the fat body.

Marginalisation, exclusion and discrimination of a group of people because of a characteristic of a body such as fatness, is analogous to the marginalisation and discrimination that is based on ethnic background, disability or sexual orientation.

An interesting notion is that many women in the data have felt that the size of their body has become their only characteristic and that everything they do or fail to do depends on their weight (cf. Millman 1980, 105). The similar experience of ’reduced identity’ is reported also by disabled people (e.g. Reinikainen 1996) and people from ethnic minorities (e.g. Hall 1999).
Identification of the deviance is often the first step in the process of eliminating it. For some women in the data, school represented a place where their bodies literally became a focus of continuous and close monitoring and control. In an attempt to normalise their bodies, and perhaps to make them conform to the normative body ideal, girls as young as seven years old were put on a low energy diet. Their weight had been regularly monitored and their habits of eating and exercise were controlled. Women’s own later observations of not being especially fat as a child, make some of the practices of school health care appear downright violent. The violence of the practices is enhanced by the reported tendency of medicine to see obesity as a problem in itself. For example Kassirer and Angell have noted that sometimes the focus in treatment of obesity has clearly been more on normalising the obese person’s body, i.e. making the obese person thin than improving the patient’s health (Kassirer & Angell 1998, 52–54).

For many women the school nurse or doctor was the first one to comment on the weight. The experience has been mostly unpleasant and the health care personnel had oftentimes treated girls in an extremely insensitive and disrespectful manner. Two women tell about their encounters with school health care authorities as follows.

My weight became an issue for the first time when I was ten years old, and I am still hurt by the way it was done. The school nurse sent me to a paediatrician who put me on a 1000 calorie diet. I had to go to the nurse to be weighed regularly. I felt that all of a sudden everyone was monitoring what I ate or did not eat; parents, school nurse, teacher, relatives and acquaintances. For a while I was able to lose weight, but going to the weightings was hard for me and I always tried to go there in secret so that my friends would not notice anything. I felt that the school nurse did not only weigh my body but my worth as a human being as well. The diet and weightings ended when my parents got tired of taking care of it. A child doesn’t have know-how, or for that matter will to diet on her own. In any case, I had lost any normal relationship to food and eating. Even today, it is hard for me to tell what is a normal amount of food to eat. (woman 24 years)

In the early eighties, when I was at sixth grade (12 years old) a male doctor told me in a very rude way that I was too fat and that I should get rid of the flab. Until that time I had only got positive feedback from grown-ups. I was very mature for my age and did extremely well in school. The criticism that focused on my body was humiliating to a pre-pubescent girl and I was ashamed of myself. I left the doctor’s room crying and I still cried in class. My teacher took me out of the class and tried to comfort me and make up for the doctor’s hurtful words. I got obsessed with my weight. I became practically glued to the mirror, began to count calories and I lost 14 kilograms by the next year. I was very thin. Since then I have gained and lost tens of kilogrammes over the years. At the moment I weigh exactly the same as at the time I was first told I was too fat. Curiously enough, my current weight is within the normal range for a woman of my height and I was the same height when I was 12. If the doctor had simply told me that I should try to maintain this weight I would have been spared a lot of grief and anxiety. If all the school doctors are the
same, I am not at all surprised that so many young girls suffer from eating disorders. (woman 30 years)

The women who had been made to go on a diet as children say that at the time they associated it with being somehow deflected as individuals. Although some of the women had been told that their weight was monitored because of health reasons, those women who had been put on a diet at a very young age clearly could not see the connection between their weight and health at that age. Known health consequences relating to obesity such as cardio-vascular diseases, hypertension and type 2 diabetes are most likely to be too abstract for a child to comprehend. Instead, the experience for many was that they were criticised and judged because their bodies were different and they were themselves somehow bad. In essence, the message these women have received is that they are unacceptable the way they are and that they should try to change their bodies in order to make themselves accepted. Curiously, this is exactly the same message the media is accused of bombarding women with. The last quoted woman sees a definite link between the institutional monitoring and control of the body and the rise in the prevalence of eating disorders among girls.

Also the first woman cited is of view that her previously healthy relationship to food was destroyed by the diet. The same woman works as a health care professional herself and she comments that according to present-day knowledge, a child would not be put on a strict diet, but she/he would be instructed to make good food choices and encouraged to exercise. The second woman also comments on the obvious change in determining overweight that has happened since her childhood: for her the same weight meant being fat as a child and within a range of normal weight as an adult.

Good and bad bodies

Kaija Junkkari (1992, 61) has claimed that a disabled child becomes aware of her disability in school. According to Ulla Kosonen physical education marks the disabled child doubly and states that too thin, too fat and too clumsy children are in a similar situation (Kosonen 1998, 107). My data supports Kosonen’s view: physical education classes have been places of anxiety, shame and humiliation for many of the women in the data.

Physical education differs from other subjects in school in that it places the body directly in the focus of normative judgement. Physical education not only evaluates the performance of the body, but the body itself. Ulla Kosonen claims that the practices of school, especially physical education, teach the boundaries of the normative body ideal. Bodies are present in the physical education classes as performing bodies, but their appearance, shape and size are also under scrutiny. Since the body and its performance is continually evaluated and graded in relation to others, classification into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ bodies is inevitable. Further, the classification that takes place during physical education classes is in essence gendering. It is where, according to Ulla Kosonen girls are taught the suitable feminine ways to move and the boundaries of an acceptable female body (Kosonen 1998, 18, 110).
Also quite interestingly, the element of social exclusion and rejection based on the body is present in the physical education classes as an institutionally accepted practice. These techniques of exclusion are used by students and teachers alike. One of the most often mentioned in the data is the picking of teams. It is hard to justify the use of such an openly discriminating and excluding practice in education.

Fat children are discriminated against beginning from physical education classes in elementary school. When teams are picked, fat children are always left the last, even if they were good at sports. In teams fat children get to play the goalie since people assume that your size prevents the ball from going in. (interview, woman 23 years)

From school I can remember being called a pig and a fatso especially by boys, but I also remember how hard the physical education classes always were. I was clumsy and slow and got tired quickly. I was always left last when teams were picked. No one wanted me in their team. (woman 36 years)

Other students began to comment (on my weight) and it had to do with physical education. I was not used to sports and did not know how. I was never interested in sports and that’s why I did not know how to jump the vault or other stuff. It was always clear that they thought I could not perform because I was too fat. (woman 32 years)

The experience that one’s body is rejected, which in the data is usually translated as that one is rejected as a person, is extremely personal and painful. Many of the women in the data describe the shock of having one's body evaluated and criticised. One of the interviewees, a 29 year old woman said that when she went to school her previously comfortable body began to feel strange and unfamiliar due to the criticism to which it was subjected. Understandably, many of the women expressed bitter feelings for being labelled as fat, especially if they felt that in retrospect it had been done for apparently no reason. Since being fat bears such a powerful stigma, the social consequences of carrying the label for decades have been personally significant for most of the women in the data. For many women the outward judgement has had long term consequences, for example, in terms of body image. Some felt that due to the attention and the criticism their bodies had received at school they had completely lost the sense of their own bodies.

I think that I've never had a realistic conception of my own body and what it should be like. It was determined from outside so early in my life. (woman 32 years)

From old photos I can tell that I was just like everybody else when I went to middle school, not exactly thin, but not fat either [...] But I have never felt thin, on the contrary. Having been labelled fat as a child has left its mark. (woman 25 years)
Conclusion

Based on my data, it seems that school is one of the most central places where girls are taught the boundaries of the acceptable or ideal female body. Most of the women who had been fat as a child named school as the place where they had learnt that they were too fat or that their bodies were somehow deviant from the norm. It seems that what is understood as the normal body is being actively reproduced at school. In the data, there were three recurring situations within the school institution, where the body had become the focus of attention, namely school health care, physical education classes and peer group relations. The practices of school health care and physical education are discursively linked with each other. Further, the normative value judgements made by school health care and physical education classes become quite obviously transferred to peer group relations.

The effects of these practices are not always easily identifiable, since they attack the deviant body from several locations at the same time. The moulding of the body seems a natural and rational part of the functioning of the institution. In this article, I have attempted to demonstrate how school and its practices produce and reproduce the normative body ideal. I have used empirical data to illustrate how the regulation and control of the body at school is experienced by those who are subjected to it.

It seems that girls at least may be labelled as fat at school even though they are not significantly overweight. Girls and women are evaluated by their bodies in our society more than boys and men. It seems that certain practices of school for their part strengthen the conception of what is an acceptable female body, lay the foundation of feelings of insecurity concerning appearance and teach girls to incessantly monitor and mould their bodies in order to conform to the normative ideal of the female body.

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Boys’ Violence towards Girls in School Groups in Russia

Tatiana Dyachenko

Abstract

The research has shown that gendered violence between different genders exists at schools in Northern Russia. Generally the boys are violent towards girls.

The boys’ main motives of gender violence towards girls that were revealed during the research are the following: on first and second grades (age 7 to 9) – wish to play and run around, starting from second grade (age 8 to 9) – desire of power and showing strength, starting from third grade (age 9 to 10) – wish to attract attention, desire to show love. Boys of all ages believe that girls themselves are responsible for violence from boys’ side, and in ninth grade (14–15 years), girls start to share this opinion. Therefore, by senior grades girls accept their role of a passive object depending on a man.

The motivation of gender violence has reflections in everyday life. These are gender stereotypes of society, violence system of education and upbringing in Russia, different relation to pupils of different sexes and influence of media and aggressive computer games. Teachers and parents regard a girl as a more suitable object for upbringing and educating than a boy and therefore strengthen the role of a passive object as well as the role of victim in her personality.

Introduction

Violence in the relationships between boys and girls is an unspoken topic in Russian schools. Teachers and parents do not see any special problems with this issue. Violence in schools is not an issue in Russian educational sciences’ research either. The attention of researchers, psychologists and pedagogues is attracted to the topic of aggression and deviant behaviour among children and young people outside of schools.

I work as a crisis psychologist and as a researcher in Apatity. One of my aims is to open discussion on gender-based violence in school groups in Russia and to develop the methods for correction of these relationships and anti-violent pedagogy at school. In this
article I submit the results of an investigation of gender-based violence in pupil groups concentrating on boys’ violence towards girls.

A.K. Osnitsky has studied the aggressiveness of pupils and tried to reveal factors that influence it. According to his investigation, lack of love is often a background for aggressive behavior. But it is not aggressiveness stimulated only by deficiency of love and acknowledgement, and by expectation of punishment or memory of it, but also by an active attempt to get rid of the conflict situation. Adults’ aggressive behavior induces a child’s aggressive response as a defense and attempt at self-affirmation. (Osnitsky 1994, 66.) Osnitsky’s results give background for my understanding of violence.

In this article I use the concept of violence that I have developed during my practice as a crisis psychologist and as a researcher. I regard violence as a process, in which an earlier experience returns and is relived somehow. The main idea is that the whole negative emotional charge received by a person does not disappear by itself. It must eventually find a way out. In some cases, it may be through aggression, in other cases illness, laziness or passivity, and uncertainty. That means that all the negative energy comes back as aggression in relationships or destroys the body and personality from within. Generally the violence experiences date back to childhood. Very often people don’t remember the violent events of their childhood and are not conscious of the causes of their inadequate reactions. The person who is exposed to violence or has observed it receives a negative emotional charge of real violence, or the observer "records" the act of violence in his or her subconscious.

I consciously use the term “recording” and “program” to emphasise that the model of aggressive or victim behaviour often starts to act automatically and people involved in situations of violence do not always understand why they act in such way. There is also conscious aggressive behaviour, but usually it follows an unconscious pattern. This point of view on the causes and consequences of violence may not be exhaustive and complete, but it is the result of my understanding of the cases, which I confront in my practice.

Many people want to reject this pattern but cannot do so themselves and need the help of a psychologist or psychotherapist. Every client who comes to me with a problem of violence (victim or aggressor) has "violence recording" in his or her past. The program begins to act in the person’s life as a magnet, attracting similar situations. The person who has "recorded" this subconscious program is involved in the situation of violence either as a victim or as a perpetrator. As a rule, the topics of the situations are very similar.

Playing one of these roles is not always exactly the same – a person is not a machine or tape recorder. Every person and his or her behaviour are unique. A negative emotional charge is transformed according to individual features of personality and personal activity. Besides, it is not certain or necessary that all persons who have suffered a violent experience will reproduce the role of aggressor or victim. With self-control, developed consciousness and reflection, they can become conscious of their unconstructive behaviour, change it and refuse to take on the inadequate roles.

The concept of violence as a returning program is used to clarify the processes of appearance and reproduction of violence. The main question in this process is the choice of role. Two people who have the same experiences and the same program can choose different roles. From the perspective of violence the roles of aggressor and victim are the most central; that is why I concentrate only on these two roles. How does the choice of a social role for people with similar records in their subconscious happen? Why does one
person choose the active role and another the passive one? It depends on cultural, social, and biological factors.

Social and cultural reasons for violence include social hierarchical attitudes, stereotypes and styles of upbringing. The attitudes and stereotypes produce different behavior pattern in relationships of people of different hierarchical levels. Variables of the hierarchy may be the age, the social status, the racial differences, the sex differences, and perhaps others. In a hierarchical environment the relation tend to be subject-object relations instead of subject-subject relations.

Mutual relations between a subject and an object as mutual relationship between people seem to be the following: the subject has an active role and the power over the object and has more rights compared to the object. The object has a passive role and is subordinated to the subject. The object serves to satisfy the needs and wishes of the subject. Hierarchical social attitudes and stereotypes work, among other ways, through systems of upbringing and education in society. The Russian system of upbringing is based on adults’ domination over children; adults’ desire to have power over them. The educational system demands strict discipline, including full submission to teachers and the denial of any choice to children. Children cannot choose teachers, subjects in school, the amount of homework, or the timetable, and cannot protest against teachers’ violence. Adults declare that they know best what children need and don’t agree that they should ask children about that. So we can say that factor of age is very strong in the Russian hierarchical system.

Social hierarchical stereotypes act as a distributor for these roles if persons are placed in different levels. If the persons are placed on the same level it may start to cause other factors to distribute the different roles. Playing an active role as subject is better than playing a passive role as object, but not all persons can manage this. As a rule, physically or psychologically strong children, living in families with violent methods of upbringing, rebel against parents’ power, conflict with their peers, and give vent to all their accumulated aggression. I regard aggression, as a charge of energy, which comes from outside and then has to find a way out. Weaker or more sensitive children in such a family usually cannot resist the violence of parents and obediently do what they are told. These children are very convenient: they do not make any trouble during their upbringing. As a rule, all their problems are connected with their bad health. The children get ill because of all their suppressed aggression, and all their unexpressed emotions destroy their body and their personality. The aggression here is directed inside, for their self-demolition. These children often have chronic illness or (or and) lower self-esteem. A victim program embeds itself deeply in the subconscious and actually attracts offenders to the children. It is important to note that when a person is weaker, an opponent enters the active mode, the role of aggressor.

Women and girls appear as victims more often because they are placed in a lower level in the social hierarchy and usually have weaker constitutions than men. On the other hand, like many men, women too can switch to the aggressor role in relations with a weaker opponent (for example, her child), and therefore reproduce violence through the upbringing process. (Dyachenko 2000).

So we could say that activity or passivity of the role within violent situations forms itself under the influence of social, cultural and biological factors. The biological factors (the physical potential and the type of nervous system) are not reasons for violence, but
only its pre-conditions. In other words, if the social and cultural did not act in our life the biological would not act either. The system of upbringing and cultural traditions reproduces gender-based violence in society.

The aim and methods of research

The investigation was carried out in two schools of Apatity, in the Murmansk region of Northern Russia from October 2000 to March 2001 in 11 school grades: one 1st grade (6–7 year old of children), two 2nd grades (7–8 years old), two 3rd grades (9–10 years old), two 7th grades (12–13 years old) and four 9th grades (14–15 years old). The total number of children questioned was 249: 126 boys and 123 girls.

The goal of the investigation was to understand the causes of gender-based violence in school. To meet this goal the following tasks were chosen to be solved:
- to discover the presence of gender-based violence in school;
- to understand the motivation of gender-based violence in school;
- to study gender-based stereotypes of the images of a “real man” and a “real woman”;
- to study the difference in teachers’ attitude towards pupils of different sex;
- to study the influence of family relations on the formation of children’s gender stereotypes;
- to develop practical recommendations for parents and teachers.

Empirical methods used in the investigation are the following: questionnaires, interviewing, group interviewing, natural observation, and case studies. For the processing of data I used qualitative analysis, differentiation of processed data into classes, and quantitative statistical processing.

The methods of interpretation include a causal approach and a structural approach. The Causal approach is an interpretation of the data in terms of causes and consequences. The Structural approach is an interpretation of all the data of investigation in the system of links characteristics of type of links between the components of personality structure and the components of relationships in social groups (for example, system links between motivation and causes of upbringing, stereotypes, and personality traits and so on).

The results of the investigation

The presence of gender-based violence had been tested with the question “Do boys/girls offend you?” The answers differ from one school form to another, but the tendency is quite obvious (Table 1).
Table 1. Amount of boys and girls offended by boys.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>grades 1–3</th>
<th>grade 7</th>
<th>grade 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girls, offended by boys</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys, offended by boys</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen that the number of girls offended by boys is 2–3 times higher than the number of boys offended by boys. Despite this decline in numbers in the senior forms, the principal situation does not change. This shows that gender-based violence from the boy’s side really exists for all age levels in school.

The most typical forms of gender-based violence from boys towards girls changes with age. In junior grades (first, second and third) it includes name-calling, sneers, mockeries, action against property (damaging, stealing, hiding) and pushes and blows. In the seventh grades there are all the forms of violence that exist in junior grades as well as “dirty language.” In senior grades physical violence and action against property becomes apparent, but “dirty language” with more pronounced sexual connotations comes in bullying.

According to observation, in junior grades the violence is directed against different persons and has no systematic character. Fights appear suddenly as a result of playing, and equally suddenly children revert to friendly relationships. In the seventh grade the bullying becomes aggressive behavior, and is not occasional but systematic, and is repeatedly targeted at the same individual child. But this form of violence seems not to be gender based or to divide the sexes. At the same time gender-based violence here seems not to be bullying as previously described, but rather a fight between two groups: boys and girls. In senior grades the bullying becomes sexual and invisible; and passes out school. A boy can meet a girl and bully her after school.

It is interesting that teachers do not see the problem of gender-based violence in relationships between boys and girls. The teachers of all studied classes answered the questions “What are relations between boys and girls in your class? Do boys offend girls?” as follows; “Good relations, all the conflicts happen among pupil of the same sex.” Thus, there is a hidden “civil war” between sexes in school groups.

The motivation of gender-based violence was tested with the questions “Why do boy offend girls?” and “Why do girls offend boys”. The most typical answers for the first question are shown in Table 2 versus age and sex of children. The answers for the second question I consider in general rather than in detail.

Table 2. Typical answers for the question “Why do boy offend girls?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typical answers</th>
<th>grade 1</th>
<th>grade 2</th>
<th>grade 3</th>
<th>grade 7</th>
<th>grade 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>boys</td>
<td>girls</td>
<td>boys</td>
<td>girls</td>
<td>boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wish to attract attention,</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>desire to show love</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire for power</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls’ fault</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wish to play and to run</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot determine</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It can be seen that motivation evolves from “playing and running” in junior grades to socially and emotionally stimulated ones in senior grades. Consciousness in motivation grows with age also. The answers expressing the wish to play and run say:

“They want to run with girls”, “Boys want to chase after girls”, “Boys want to play with girls, but girls don’t want to, and boys start to beat them”, “They do it just for a joke.”

The motivation as a desire of power was expressed in the following ways:

“Boys show off their strength and power”, “He wants to show that he is cool”, “They think girls are weaker”, “Girls do something bad, boys punish them”, “Boys consider themselves to be more important than girls”, “They want to humiliate girls”, “Boys are jealous that girls are clever and want to show they are better somewhere.”

Desire to show love is expressed as:

“They don’t have enough wits to show their friendliness in a nice way”, “Boys want the girls to notice them”, “If he beats her it means he loves her.”

The answers expressing the boys’ belief that girls are at fault are:

“We hit them back” “Girls beat us and call us names themselves.”

But children themselves give this point of view on the sources of violence. The real causes and sources of gender-based violence could lie behind such motivation, and all the other survey questions were designed to reveal them. According to the gender approach, the stereotypes and expectations of society influence the behavior of boys and girls. That is why this study of the pupils’ gender stereotypes has been undertaken.

Gender-based stereotypes of the images of a “real man” and a “real woman” were surveyed with the questions, “What is a real man/woman for you?” The answers do not actually differ in different age groups. The main quality of a real woman is beauty and appearance both for girls and boys. For junior pupils these are beauty, beautiful clothes and hair; for senior ones, they are beauty, a nice figure, breasts and legs. The qualities of a real man are different for boys and girls: for boys the main quality of a real man is strength and power, for girls, kindness, sociability, and thoughtfulness.

Another aspect of gender stereotypes among children themselves was surveyed with the questions “What do you like most of all in boys/girls of your class?” In junior grades, both boys and girls prefer the ideal of a woman, preferring appearance and beauty in girls. But to senior grade students, preferences become different. Boys still prefer beauty in girls, while girls prefer kindness and attention to other people. This derives from different attitudes: girls consider other girls in their grade as friends, while boys consider girls’ appearance mostly, thinking of them as they would things or objects, especially sexual objects.

In the junior grades the most preferred boys’ qualities are different than the most preferred girls’ qualities: in the opinion of boys these are strength and power, for girls, kindness and sociability, plus the ability to defend. In the senior grades both boys and girls prefer sociability, a sense of humor, and friendship in boys. So, girls are ready to consider boys as friends, and boys look at other boys as friends as well.

Therefore, while girls of all ages look for friendly relations with boys, boys in junior grades look for opportunities to show their strength and power, using girls as an object,
and then in senior grades they look for sexual relations with girls. In any case a boy is a subject for girls, while a girl is an object for boys.

Another aspect of gender stereotypes is the social role of men and women. In junior grades it was studied with the question “Is life in society easier for men or for women?” while in senior grades, with the question “Does social discrimination between men and women exist?” To the first question both the junior grade boys and the girls answered that life is easier for boys and men. The boys said:

“We don’t wash dishes and don’t clean and tidy the house”,

and the girls supported this opinion:

“Boys can do what they want to”, “When boys become grown-ups they do not have to do anything around the house”, “When a man relaxes on a sofa with book, a woman does the housework.”

At the same time, many of the pupils believe that such a distribution of responsibilities in a family is natural:

“A man works hard and needs to rest at home; but he should help his wife sometimes.”

Many 3rd grade pupils mentioned that a “good housewife” is part of being a “real woman”. One boy wrote:

“A woman must cook, do the laundry, take care of a man, and be gentle.”

The girls also mentioned that a woman

“must be able to cook, be a good housewife, loving mother and wife, neat, diligent and thoughtful.”

This tendency is developed and strengthened in the 7th grades. Girls of this age believe that life is easier for men because

“a woman has much more work at home, but she is obliged to do it because she is a housewife first of all”, “a man is the head of the family.”

The boys actually repeat this opinion. Both the boys and girls of 7th and 9th grades believe that a woman has more responsibilities, while a man gains more rights.

So, it can be seen that an image of woman as a maidservant, cook, cloakroom attendant, a person who provides for a man and satisfies all his needs, is deeply embedded in girls’ minds, and this is claimed to be a natural situation. Such an image in pupils’ mind shows that a woman has a lower social status in the hierarchy of relationships. The group interview of girls in the 9th grade revealed that girls had already accepted their role of a passive object to men and explained boys’ aggression toward them as caused by the wrong behavior of girls themselves. Irina said:

“The boys do not offend us. Well, Vasja hit me once on my ribs last year, but that was my fault, I made him angry. Though, my ribs got broken.”

Her classmates agreed with her.

Teachers’ gender stereotypes can also influence relationships between boys and girls. Therefore an examination of teachers’ relationships to boys and girls was undertaken.

The difference in teachers’ attitudes toward pupils of different sexes was tested with two questions: “Whom do teachers prefer: boys or girls?” and “Who is more often critici-
Boys and girls of all ages gave the same answer for these questions: teachers prefer girls because girls do better at school, and are more accurate and disciplined. Boys are more often criticized because they are worse in learning and behavior, less disciplined and fight more often. Group interviews in the 3rd grade showed that boys feel themselves insulted by girls because teachers prefer girls. And this provokes a desire to hit and push girls. Boys said

“girls are more often asked, and they more often have good marks, girls gain the teachers’ love and thus put boys behind; girls are more clever, they think faster, and that is why we take revenge on them.”

The boys also emphasized that one of the main reasons why teachers prefer girls is that “teachers and girls are both women.”

Therefore, we can see that a teacher prefers girls in class. Perhaps a teacher likes a girl as a suitable object for teaching, and this stimulates these qualities in her. Teachers perceive independent and protesting girls worse and more critically than such boys.

“I haven’t enough energy and time to fight with boys. If girls will be hooligans…Girl must show model behavior for boys!”

So teachers make higher demands of behavior on girls compared to boys. A specific feature of school education in Russia is that pupils are supposed to be receiving knowledge rather than be active and creative. Thus, the educational system as a whole helps to strengthen the gender stereotype of girls as passive objects, exploiting the girls’ tendency to be more disciplined and making higher demands of behavior on them. On the other hand, throughout the period of education this system creates in boys a feeling that they are underestimated, and this produces the desire to compensate through violence against girls. One girl during the group interview put it as follows:

“a boy has been beaten or punished; he feels bad, he beats a girl to get rid of this feeling and to win over somebody.”

One of examples is a boy Petja, a third grader, who “declared war” on to all the girls of his class. The study of this case has shown that the boy had a good relationship within his family; his parents did not use violent methods in upbringing. Petja has high level of intelligence and the ability to maintain self-control. But the relationship between Petja and his woman-teacher are poor. The teacher is annoyed by his independent personality and his wish for freedom. For all his three years in school he was exposed to constant abuse from the teacher, who gave 10–12 negative remarks against him in public during each class period, charging him with low motivation to learn and giving him bad marks. Perhaps because Petja received such negative sentiment from his teacher he directed it against girls as weaker persons. On the other side, girls are at a lower level in the social hierarchy according to gender stereotypes and boys can consider themselves as people who have more power toward girls. If this is so, we can see the action of two factors of violence together: social-cultural and biological.

The influence of family relations on the formation of children’s gender stereotypes was tested through interviewing the children. A boy Vova, a first grader, who showed gender-based violence in his class, gave to the question “Why do boys offend girls?” the following answer:
“Because girls behave themselves badly; I want to make them arrange the toys in order but they don’t want to, and I could hardly force them to pick up their toys lying all over the place. I told them I would spank them with my belt, and they cleaned everything up right away.”

To the question “Why do men offend women?” he answered:

“My father nearly strangled my mother and beat her when she came home at 10 pm. She must be at home on time”.

To the question “How do your parents punish you at home?” he answered:

“My father beats me with his belt, but seldom, only once a day. But he beats my brother Slava five times in a day, because he wets his bed at night.”

This example, showing the direct link between violence at home and gender-based violence at school, is beyond all comment.

Physical punishment is widely used in Russia. In my practice as a school psychologist I have often met parents who are sure that this kind of punishment must be used sometimes and may be very useful for children in their future because such children will remember better what they should not do. This kind of punishment is especially practiced in families where alcohol is prevalent.

A boy Sasha, a third-grader, who actively shows gender-based violence in his class group against all the girls, is exposed to abuse both from his teacher at school and from his brother at home. He does not mention his suffering and emotions to his parents. The relations between children and parents in the family were good, but his older brother beat him every day. The teacher was constantly charging Sasha that he reads slowly and could not understand the grammar rules. All his negative emotions he vented on those who are weaker, the girls.

The common feature of all the cases described above is that the boys talk to nobody about their negative feelings, and their aggression is looking for a way out in the form of gender-based violence. In Petja’s case, the boy is exposed to gender-based violence from his teacher, in the case of Vova the boy observes gender-based violence and is exposed to his father’s violence, and in the case of Sasha the boy receives mixed violence – but all the three boys return it in the form of gender-based violence and one reason for it can be that the girls are weaker than they are.

Girls also confront violence at home and they can also act as aggressors but this topic is outside the scope of this article.

It is necessary to say that apart from the previously discussed causes of gender-based violence, there is one more produced by adults, which has not been studied by specific questioning but seems to be quite evident to us from observation of all the pupils. This is the influence of the media on forming gender-based violence. In modern video and movie culture, the stereotype of masculinity is usually connected with power and aggression, and just these qualities are presented as a guarantee of success in life. Gender stereotyping is embedded in computer games based on war, fighting, and aggression. By acting aggressively on the monitor screen children achieve success, and then they go to the next “higher” level.

The boy Petja, mentioned above, declared in his grade “the Third Children’s World War”. The boys armed with toy-guns started to construct command points and to set
ambushes for girls. Each boy in the grade is evaluated by the number of girls “killed” with a toy-gun, pushed into snow or “captured” in ambushes. The boys who “kill” 8 girls pass to the next higher level and receive a medal for it. The girls complain:

“They look at us as just bags for beating, as little dolls, as something lower in rank.”

It was revealed in the interview with Petja’s mother that the boy spends all day playing his favorite computer game. Using the rules of the computer game, the boy creates the same game in reality. So Petja has found or even organized an “adequate” form of expressing his aggression accumulated during classes.

The boys, who were brought up in situations of adult violence and under the influence of a masculine stereotype, are not able to express positive emotions—joy and love—adequately. Nobody taught them to be tender, gentle or kind. According to gender stereotypes boys must be strong and confident. They must not to cry and express their emotions. The absence of ways to express feelings of love and sympathy leads to gender-based violence as an inadequate tool of showing good feelings. This is clearly seen from Table 2, where the “wish to attract attention, desire to show love” is mentioned as one of the motivations of gender-based violence by boys. A group interview with boys of the third grade discloses the following motives for gender-based violence:

“A boy offends a girl to attract her attention and to make her understand that he likes her”; “He shows her his power to make her understand how strong he is and to make her love him”; “A boy likes a girl, and he offends her not to show her his real feeling, not to give a reason for making fun of him.”

The girls’ answers are:

“A boy likes a girl and shows her his power using another girl”, “He want to get to know her, to introduce himself.”

**Interpretation of the results**

The research has shown that gender-based violence between different sexes exists in schools in Northern Russia. The number of girls offended by boys is 65% in junior grades, 56% in the seventh grade and 45% in the ninth grade, while the “background” number of boys suffering from boys, boys suffering from girls and girls suffering from girls are about two times less. Thus, the amount of gender-based violence from boys to girls is evident.

The most typical forms of gender-based violence against girls change with age. In junior grades there are verbal violence (calling names, sneers, mockeries), action against property (damaging, stealing, hiding) and physical violence (pushes and blows). Here, violence has a situational – impulsive character and the victim is not always the same person. Violence is directed at any child. In the seventh grades there are all the forms of violence that exist in the junior grades and “dirty language” appears. There is also bullying here, but it is not sexually divided. Gender-based violence seems to be a fight between
two groups: boys and girls. In the ninth grades physical violence and action against property is apparent, but "dirty language" with sexual words is also used in bullying.

The main motives of gender-based violence revealed during the research are: the wish to play and make physical exercise in grades 1–2; starting from the 2nd grade the desire for power and showing strength, starting from the 3rd grade the wish to attract attention and the desire to show love. Boys of all ages believe that girls themselves are responsible for violence from boys, and in 9th grade, girls start to share this opinion. Therefore, by the senior forms girls accept their role as a passive object relative to a man.

The following discussion points out the true reasons for gender-based violence, which underlies the children’s motivations. The first motivation is the desire to play and run with girls. When a boy tries to play, he hits and pushes her, and takes something away from her. The cause of that behavior is that boys cannot communicate with girls in a socially adequate way. They cannot organize their play in a friendly way. A boy is afraid to come up to a girl and to suggest playing, and therefore he starts to tease and bully her. The second motivation is boys’ desire for revenge. The reason for the wish to take revenge on girls for their aggressive acts may be the absence of mutual understanding between boys and girls. Girls wish the boys to be friend with them; boys mostly consider girls’ appearance and do not consider them as friends. As a result, girls are insulted by this and start to offend boys. Afterward boys want to take revenge on girls.

On the other hand, the cause of such girls’ behavior may be because girls as well as boys cannot communicate well with peers of the other sex. The observation of school life shows that children can communicate more successfully with peers of the same sex. In communication with pupils of the other sex, there are very often many problems. Aggressive acts toward member of the other sex, according to children’s norms of behavior, are more approved by classmates of the same sex. The third cause of the desire for revenge is that teachers are more attentive and pleasant to girls. Girls are more often favored and more highly esteemed. The relationship between teachers and girls is more trusting and warm. Boys feel this as an insult. Why are teachers more pleasant to girls of all ages? Girls are more diligent and disciplined pupils, and so they give the teacher more positive emotions. In addition, it may be explained by the results of a cross-cultural investigation by M. Arutjunjan which has revealed that Russian men and women, unlike men and women from Poland, Hungary, and Germany, are oriented to a relationship of understanding, trust, and respect within a group of their own sex. In other investigated countries, there are more trusting and understanding relationships between sexes. (Arutjunjan 2001, 69) Possibly women teachers consider boys as members of an opposite group and girls as members of their own group. It is also possible, of course, that teachers consider boys as people who must be more successful in their future life and in their profession, and therefore ask more of them.

The third discovered motivation is the desire for power. The first reason for this is gender stereotyping. Boys consider girls as objects whose main feature is appearance. Boys believe themselves to be subjects of communication and struggle. These roles define the character of relationship between them: a subject is a higher role in relationships and has the ability to act independently and influence an object. An object performs a lower role and has none of these abilities. A girl is supposed to be a passive object from her earliest years. It is embedded in her mind that the most important things for her are appearance
and ability to perform housework because she has to marry successfully in the future and take care of the man.

The second reason is violence at home from relatives and at school from teachers. The entire upbringing system of Russia both in school and at home is based on feelings of fear, fault and shame. Added to the passive gender stereotype, this violence forms the role of victim in girls. Teachers and parents regard girls as a more suitable object for upbringing and educating than boys. They exploit girls’ qualities of diligence and discipline, stimulate these qualities, and therefore strengthen the role of passive object in her personality. Parents and teachers would like to do the same with boys also, but boys more often resist it. However, parents and teachers win in this struggle because of their status. Boys compensate for all the accumulated humiliation received from parents and teachers by humiliating and abusing girls as weaker persons. According to my observation, girls have more duties at school and at home. Boys have fewer duties because adults lose patience when they want to make boys do something. It is easier for adults to give all duties to girls.

Sociological investigations in Russia show that most mothers and fathers prefer to see in children of both sexes subordinate forms of behavior. It is most typical for girls’ parents. 73% of mothers believe that the subordinate role of girls is not so bad. Such features as readiness to listen to adults, giving in but not insisting on, not contradicting, being patient, having self-control, subordinating one’s own interests to others’ interests, and being trusting and obedient are useful features, and more useful for girls than for boys. These features are supposed to be encouraged in girls. (Pushkareva 2001, 31)

Thirdly, media and computer games create an image of a “strong man” as a successful person and therefore form an inclination in boys to fight, wage war, and create violence. The fourth motivation, desire to express sympathy and love, has its cause in boys’ inability to express their positive feelings because nobody teaches them how to do this, and also because social stereotypes do not allow boys to be gentle and tender. The fifth motivation is that girls themselves provoke violence from boys given the absence of mutual understanding, because of the difference in gender expectations. This may be the cause of girls’ aggressive feelings toward boys and boys’ aggressive behavior. Perhaps it is girls’ attempts to make boys see girls as friends. Girls themselves most often explain their aggressive behavior as a desire for revenge against boys. A girl looks at a boy as a subject of communication, while a boy sees himself as a subject of fighting. At the same time, both look at a girl as an object, a thing, in whom appearance is preferred to other qualities.

**Recommendations for parents and teachers**

To prevent gender-based violence schoolteachers and parents should change their violent ways of upbringing and education that are based on feelings of fear, shame and faultfinding. It is most important in relation to younger children because little children have weak defenses and ego strength when confronted with violence. The earlier the psychological trauma happened the worse the consequences will be in the child’s future life. An alternative way to violence in children’s upbringing may be positive non-violent pedago-
gy, which is founded on a positive approach to children, the removal of feelings of fear, fault and shame embedded in children’s minds and the building of a democratic relationship between children and adults. Harmony in relationships between a child and important adults, such as teachers and parents, prevents the negative emotional charge in a child’s personality that would otherwise have to find a way out, and so prevents violence in the child’s environment. (Dyachenko 2002.)

A gender approach in upbringing is another way to prevent gender-based violence in school. Now there are two directions in pedagogy from a gender perspective. One of them is the sex-role or traditional patriarchal direction. Another is a new one, known as the gender approach in pedagogy. The gender approach means that education and upbringing must be built on the main principle that a person is more important than his or her sex. This approach presupposes that girls and boys may choose their experiences, school subjects and professions independently of traditionally gender expectations. Boys may show attention, gentleness, and girls may be strong and confident. (Shtyleva 2001.)

According to the gender approach, teachers and parents should be aware of and change their attitudes to girls as suitable objects of upbringing, and they should share out duties more equitably between boys and girls. Boys should have more duties in the classroom and at home. Teachers should stop criticising boys so much, try to start more trusting and warm relationships with them and give them more emotional support. Both teachers and parents must raise the consciousness of girls as the active subject of relations, including gender ones and they must help her develop her creativity, and independence. A girl should realise that she is a subject of her own fate in the professional arena.

It is necessary to teach boys to express their positive feelings, including sympathy for girls, and by adequate methods, to teach boys methods of safely expressing tension that they feel, and methods of working without displaying negative emotions.

A long-term goal of the gender approach in education may be to unveil the potential of people to be successful in a variety of areas, which traditionally do not correspond to the person’s sex role. For men it is the capability to realize them in family life, and for women it is the possibility to realize them in professional life. Finally, all this is a way to improve mutual understanding and relationships between men and women. So the gender approach and non-violent approach in pedagogy can be the way to prevent gender-based violence in school and society. In my opinion, instructional work among teachers and parents in the described areas is the main focus in violence prevention.

References

Girls, Bullying and School Transfer

Neil Duncan

Abstract

This small-scale study examines girls’ claims of peer-harassment at school. Seven girls who had a history of school refusal and school transfer due to bullying were interviewed about their experiences. Additional data from the schools and education welfare service supplemented the case studies. The girls reported high levels of both indirect aggression and physical violence against themselves and other victims. The findings are discussed in the context of a culture of feminine aggression in the schools, and related to official arrangements for school admission, exclusion and transfer within the local education authority.

Background to this study

This small-scale project followed on from a larger qualitative study of sexual bullying in four high schools in England (Duncan 1999), and was in some respects a pilot study for a larger project underway at the time of writing. The sexual bullying project derived unpublished data on a case where one girl, Petra1, had transferred schools without declaring her real reasons for the move. The reasons for her transfer only became apparent when her chief persecutor, Mandy, was excluded from the original school for attacking another girl, and was admitted to the same new school (Blunkett Rise school) as Petra – thus reuniting aggressor and victim.

Petra exhibited several signs of extreme stress that might have been recognised as emotional reactions to bullying (Sharp 1995, Borg 1998), such as not eating, withdrawal from social groups and self-injurious behaviour, but resisted attempts by teachers to discuss her problems until the family, school and social services eventually completed the picture.

1. All names of persons and places have been changed for reasons of confidentiality.
Petra’s case was at first thought by the school, and by myself as both researcher and member of staff, to be an isolated incident. However, a review of girl transfers into our school indicated that Petra was not alone in seeking refuge from bullying by moving away from the original scene of her troubles to Blunkett Rise. At least three girls had recently taken the same evasive action, but none had declared the problem to parents or professionals before their move.

The problem of “refugee” transfers emerged to be far greater than the school had imagined. The records of pupils on roll at Blunkett Rise showed that 33 pupils had joined the school after the official beginning of that school year, 2000/01 – making up around 5% of the total number of pupils. Of these transfers, 21 (63%) were girls. In interviews with Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) after admission, eight of these girls cited being bullied at their previous school as the reason for requesting transfer, but had concealed their motives at the time of request due to fear of retaliation. Of the other girls who had transferred into Blunkett Rise, three had been excluded for bullying at their original school, whilst the remaining girls held either undisclosed reasons for transfer or had a mixture of reasons.

From this information, it appeared that bullying amongst girls was having a serious impact upon the stability of local school populations. Apart from the refugees’ own distress and safety, the potential upheaval of transferring schools, the non-attendance prior to transfer, and the induction into the new school all had negative implications. Moreover, any benefits of school transfer could be completely negated by similar problems at a new school unless additional support was available.

It is important to note that these figures only represent mid-term transfers (others moved at the scheduled point at the beginning of the school year). Also, the sample was taken in early May, only ¾ of the way through the year, so others could yet be admitted. Indeed, the EWOs had a list of a further 7 girls requesting admission to Blunkett Rise.

### Pupils and schools in context

To facilitate a wider view of pupil migration between schools in Singleborough Local Education Authority (LEA), a little background knowledge is needed. Singleborough’s:

- social and economic characteristics are below average. There are concentrated pockets of deprivation and 20 per cent of jobs are unskilled. (OISTED 2001)

These pockets of deprivation and the unequal distribution of wealth in the area are reflected in the composition of its schools.

The 13 secondary (high) schools in this local authority are described unofficially by the Education Welfare Service as falling into three groups. The first group is an elite academic group of three schools, well-funded, oversubscribed and in a position to control pupil entry and exit to their best advantage. A second group of 5 schools are recognised as high-performing, orderly institutions that have a mixed intake of students’ ability and social background, and aspire to join the elite. These schools generally are oversubscribed too, but have fewer legal controls over entry and exit, and need to resource learning and behaviour support initiatives to maintain their standards.
A third group of schools exists which are under-subscribed. This group of 5 has many empty places with all the disadvantages this situation brings, in fact, three of these are only 80% filled (OfSTED 2001). These schools are under constant scrutiny by the LEA for opportunities to close them or reduce their capacity as cost-cutting exercises. The EWOs believe that a substantial number of pupils on roll at these schools come from homes where parental choice of school is not a high priority, where education is not especially valued, and where many of the parents themselves have had unfortunate and negative experiences of schooling (Hook 1999).

External indicators (inspection reports and attainment tables) of this situation show that such schools habitually gain poorer results in public examinations, take a higher proportion of pupils with special educational needs, have greater rates of truancy and show higher numbers of exclusions for anti-social behaviour (Lauder et al. 1999).

As a whole, Singleborough LEA excludes proportionately many more pupils than other LEAs, with only 9 out of 150 LEAs excluding a higher percentage of their secondary school populations. Statistics were not available at the time of writing to give a breakdown of Singleborough’s exclusion rate for girls, but the national trend is around 5:1 boys to girls (DfEE 2000).

**Bullying amongst girls**

The majority of research into bullying has tended, intentionally or not, to concern itself with the activities of boys (Stanley & Arora 1998). Where specific mention has been made of girls, a high level of agreement exists in the literature that could be crudely put as “boys bully physically, girls bully mentally.” The modes of bullying used by girls are considered to be more subtle, clandestine, psychological, and intended to cause emotional distress rather than physical pain (Bjorkqvist et al. 1992). These characteristics are thought by many to be more difficult for adults to detect and resolve, but are also given less consideration by school authorities because they are rarer and less disruptive to the smooth running of schools than the violent activities of boys. Summarising the findings of their research on girls’ exclusion from school, Osler et al. claim:

> The verbal and psychological bullying more commonly engaged in by girls is more readily overlooked by school authorities than the physical bullying more typically engaged in by boys. As a result, there is often an institutional failure to tackle bullying amongst girls effectively. (…) Whilst girls highlight bullying as a serious issue facing them in school, the matter is given a lower priority by the professionals who were interviewed. (Osler et al. 2002, 4)

For as long as feminists have engaged with the issue of girls’ friendships, they have demonstrated that those friendships are qualitatively different from those of boys’ (Lees 1987, Brown & Gilligan 1992, Hey 1997). A number of characteristics of female friendships have been explored, and, whilst the emphasis may have been on varying aspects and returned varying results, an overall picture emerges of an emotional closeness that appears absent in the esprit de corps amongst males.
This is not to say, of course, that girls’ friendships are more desirable or pro-social than that of boys’, although there is considerable evidence for that possibility, but that there is seemingly a greater investment amongst girls in the production and maintenance of intimate homosociality. With such high stakes, there is a concomitant risk that if things go wrong with an intense best-friend relationship, the outcomes can be especially difficult to bear (Nilan 1991, Stanley & Arora 1998). On this matter, Jane Kenway and Sue Willis are worth quoting at length:

A point too frequently overlooked is that many girls’ greatest emotional energy and deepest emotional investments while at school are in same-sex friendships and the social – in pleasurable connections. (…) their longing for painless female communities and the importance of being with their friends. Girls feel most betrayed when their friends particularly, and other girls generally, do not support them after boys have harassed them. (Kenway & Willis 1998, 142)

Kenway and Willis’ point on betrayal of trust is an important one within the finely-nuanced world of girls’ relationships portrayed in the literature, and was expected to surface in this present study. However, details of critical incidents in the case studies quickly indicated much more brazen behaviour in operation, and aggressive female behaviour largely autonomous from males.

Method

Two secondary schools (age range 11–16 years) in Singleborough were chosen to explore the phenomenon more closely, Blunkett Rise and Morris View. These schools were selected on the basis of high levels of pupil migration in and out, but exact records of pupil movement across the LEA were incomplete, so there may have been some schools with even higher pupil traffic than those used here.

Records of girls who had transferred into Morris View and Blunkett Rise (for reasons other than family relocation) were scrutinised by the EWOs. Girls were then selected on the basis that they had documented experiences of bullying, school refusal and school transfer, and the young person and their parent(s) had consented to be interviewed. The families were told that the research was concerned with the experiences of girls transferring school due to personal problems, and that they could opt out of the interviews at any point with a veto on their data. The girls chose their own pseudonyms for the purposes of publication, and in addition to place names being changed, some non-essential details have also been altered to prevent deductive identification. Similarly, where official reports have been cited, they have not been fully referenced.

Seven girls were eventually interviewed using semi-structured techniques. All the girls were white, working-class, and happened to be in Year 10, that is 14 or 15 years of age and in the penultimate year of compulsory schooling. The girls were interviewed by myself with a female EWO present, and sometimes a parent was present too. The interviews lasted for about 40 minutes to one hour and were recorded onto audio disk for transcription and subsequent analysis. The interview transcriptions were hand-coded for
themes relevant to the core research question: what are the main issues relating to girls’ bullying and non-attendance at school?

The purpose of these interviews was to allow a wide range of initial themes to emerge, thereby providing a basis on which to design further research. Whilst such a small number of interviews is not intended to be representational of a wider picture, it does provide intensive insight into the experiences of these few individuals who share key circumstances.

Subsequent interviews were held with the EWOs attached to Blunkett Rise and Morris View schools. The EWOs described these girls’ stories as “typical” in many ways, corroborated some of the interview claims, challenged others and offered additional contextualising data of their own.

**Emergent themes from the girls’ interviews**

Space limits the range of topics covered in the interviews, so three issues have been selected for discussion here: girls’ accounts of the forms of aggression deployed against them; their views on why they were persecuted; and their responses to the bullying.

As highlighted elsewhere (Owens et al. 2000, Duncan 1999), a good deal of bullying took the indirect forms of social exclusion: rumour-mongering, name-calling and insinuation, that had the effect of socially displacing and emotionally destabilising the target, and were often carried out by erstwhile friends:

ND: What made you move (schools)?

Stacy: (ex one school, now at Blunkett Rise) Well I was being bullied by some of my friends, well, ex friends.

ND: Can you tell me a bit more about that?

Stacy: Well, it started when I became friends with this one person, (...) well...best friends with this one person, and another girl who was in most of our lessons joined our group, so there was three of us then and this was going all right. But because I live in a different area (...), they used to go around together at night time, and they spent more time together than I spent with my best friend. So after a while, they got to be more best friends than with me, and after a while they started being nasty to me.

ND: What sort of things did you notice them doing then?

Stacy: Well...they would leave me out of conversations (...) and if one of them was going somewhere they’d tell the other person but not me.

Stacy described the girls at her school as being generally friendly with one another, but everyone having a best friend. This pairing system was considered to be of great importance to one’s social status in the school, and threats to the equilibrium were serious:

Stacy: (...) I was friends with quite a few other people, but they all had their best friends and I didn’t want to do to them what this other girl had done to me.
ND: So is there a name for that kind of thing, what do you call someone who does that?
Stacy: Bullying.
ND: You’d call it bullying? It’s funny though, because I think most people think of bullying as gangs of people beating someone up… How did it affect you?
Stacy: I didn’t want to go to school anymore. I didn’t want to be around anyone.
ND: Did you tell anyone about it?
Stacy: No.
ND: Why not?
Stacy: Well…I felt ashamed…that she didn’t want to be friends with me anymore.

Such behaviours might be described by teachers as low-key bullying, if recognised as bullying at all (Hazler et al. 2001), but its importance to the girls involved is an indication of organising principles for their social relationships, and underpins more aggressive modes of bullying. Similar accounts from the other interviews demonstrated that these problems were viewed as petty by adults, and consequently went unresolved. Not only did they remain unresolved, lack of open discussion seemed to inhibit the development of a language with which to explore the issues.

The name-calling and rumour-mongering that characterised much of the low-key bullying was highly gendered: it focused abuse on those aspects of the target that were specifically feminine by attacking their feminine identity and sexual reputation.

Terms of abuse that have long been recognised as male weapons against women (Jones & Mahony 1989) were deployed with venom by girl bullies, and sexual behaviour, real or imagined, was a common point of conflict. Frequently, girls would attack another for an imputed interest in a boy. Stacy was “blamed” for fancying a boy that was the object of a tougher girl’s affections. Despite denying any contact with the boy, she was still approached at the end of a French class:

Stacy: Well, she (bully) came up behind me and wouldn’t let me get out of the chair.
ND: What did you say?
Stacy: I just didn’t say anything, I waited until she finished and walked away.
ND: What did she say?
Stacy: That I was a little slut and should be punished.

All the girls understood that the romantic associations in their schools were controlled by “hard girls.” If you were not one of the hard girls you should not expect to fancy a boy, especially a popular boy, without permission:

Terri: (ex 3 schools, waiting for admission to Blunkett Rise) The hardest (girl) in Year 9, well I never do PE (Physical Education) much in the gym, and I was sitting down and I didn’t know this girl, the hard one, like, loved… loved… really liked (a boy)… it was one of those relationships. And this boy was messing about hanging, like hanging off the big ropes they have…
ND: Impressing you?
Terri: Yeah, he was calling out to me, and things. And I was sitting in the dinner hall that day and she comes up to me and punches me in the arm and says “what’s this about you staring at him” and all this “ra ra ra”.

Hard girls would make random public threats in order to assert their authority over subordinate girls like Stacy and Terri. Others, like Lorraine, were aware of the code, and took precautions to avoid such confrontations, shying away from any contact with boys in school:

Lorraine: (ex 3 schools, now at Blunkett Rise)...if, say like a popular lad, or a lad that hangs around with popular lads started going out with me, then they (the hard girls) are going to say “why are you going out with that Gippo?” (Gypsy)

ND: Would that put them off?

Lorraine: Yeah…

(…)

ND If one of the popular lads approached you to go out with him, and you liked him, would you go out with him?

Lorraine: No.

ND: Why?

Lorraine: Because of what people would say…(…) about me.

Heterosexual feelings had to be carefully managed in case they caused someone offence, but presumed homosexual feelings were completely proscribed. Gemma’s best friend Sue rejected the advances of a boy, and went to sleep at Gemma’s house that night. The boy retold the tale to some of their classmates who distorted Sue’s preference for Gemma over himself into an example of lesbianism:

Gemma: (ex one school, then tutored at home, now at Morris View) He started saying she was a lesbian and everything…

ND: He said she was a lesbian?

Gemma: But then he was saying we both was. Because she skanked (rejected) him so she could go with me. (The rumour) was going round the school that we were lesbians.

As well as overt name-calling and social exclusion from the larger girls’ group, graffiti appeared on the girls’ toilets, and eventually Gemma’s friend left the school to avoid further degradation. This left Gemma feeling abandoned. She fought with one of her female tormentors and was subsequently punished by the school.

Still concealing the real reason for the conflict from the teachers, Gemma claims she suffered in silence for another 12 months. She regrets that she eventually did tell the teachers, because this escalated the tension, and what had been name-calling became threats of violence. Eventually a gang of three girls broke a toilet door down and spat on her. Even when she transferred schools, the victimisation continued:

Gemma: It was all right at first (at the new school) then I started getting emails (from the previous school) on my computer, saying I was a lesbian and everything, and they were going to batter me when they saw me.
Other insults and grounds for victimisation included not having many friends, allegedly having been beaten by your father, being physically dirty or smelly, having an older sibling who had been bullied at the same school, and being a “Gippo.”

Gippo is a common term of abuse in this locality. Its etymology is “Gypsy”, used in a negative sense to mean dirty, unhygienic, untrustworthy and alien. That meaning has become distorted however, and it is now used to denote a person who does not attempt to keep up with peer fashions through ignorance, poverty, or a different set of values. Lorraine’s family could not afford the designer label clothes that the elite girls all wore, but retained an air of personal dignity that offended some of her peers:

Lorraine: It was mainly the lads, and one girl in particular, in my tutor group

ND: What were they doing?

Lorraine: Mainly calling me names, saying Gippo, slag, things like that.

After a long period of verbal abuse and threatened violence, Lorraine transferred to Blunkett Rise where all went well for some months as she rebuilt her identity. This fresh start ended abruptly, however, when Kim, one of her former persecutors, was excluded and given a place at Blunkett Rise too, an almost identical situation to that which highlighted this problem some years earlier.

Soon after Kim’s arrival, a teacher called out the class register and confused Lorraine’s name with Kim’s. Kim “flipped” and shouted at the teacher “don’t call me Lorraine, I’m not a smelly Gippo, at least I have a bath!” Lorraine says that the girls all laughed at her, but when Kim was sent out of the class, the same girls tried to get Lorraine to fight her.

Worse was to come. Clara, Kim’s confederate from her previous school, was also excluded and moved to Blunkett Rise:

Lorraine: Clara got sent to this school too, and they both had a go at me all over again.

ND: What was Clara doing then?

Lorraine: Just copying Kim. (...) Today, actually...

ND: What? Today?

Lorraine: Yes...in science this girl goes “I was talking to your ex boyfriend the other day” and I goes “was you?” and she goes “yeah,” and she called Kim over and they was talking, and then they was saying that he said “you have saggy tits, smelly fanny” and everything. And then they was all laughing and stuff.

ND: (...) How do you deal with it? Do you think worse of yourself because of all this?

Lorraine: Yeah, I, I feel like...erm...that...I’m nothing...why, why am I in this world when I could be dead... and I wouldn’t have all this hassle...and ...

Lorraine was one of three of the interviewees who said they had stopped eating because of the bullying. Their circumstances varied, but they shared the same motivation – they wanted someone to notice their despair without having to go and ask for help, principally because of fear of retaliation, but also because they did not have a language to describe and explain what was happening to them.

The interviewed girls all expressed desperation for the close supportive relationships continually denied them by the malevolent control of the bullies. One girl, Chloe, said she
was explicitly ordered to leave the school by her tormentors. They spoke about their feelings of hopelessness and entrapment, of the pain of fleeing their school to seek refuge, only to be humiliated again when their old problems resurfaced at the new school. Sometimes this was not due to reunion with their old aggressors, but caused by being new and vulnerable, having low confidence or making mistakes with new associations.

As well as the suffocating pressure of indirect bullying, all the girls interviewed claimed they had been physically assaulted. In the general literature on bullying, most research emphasises indirect or psychological forms of aggression deployed by girl bullies (Bjorkqvist et al. 1992, Stanley & Arora 1998, Owens et al. 2000). The present study provides emphatic reportage of various forms of direct physical assault on girls by other girls, including gang beatings, individual fights, spontaneous exchanges of blows, organised fights, punching, kicking, head-buttng, spitting, and so on. Only the use of weapons is absent from the list that might be associated with boys’ violent activities:

ND: So can you tell my why you moved schools?
Chloe: (ex one school, now at Morris View) Cos I kept getting bullied, like… kept getting beaten up nearly every day…
ND: Really…what school was that at?
Chloe: Byer’s Way Secondary.
ND: When you say you were getting beaten up, were you actually being hit?
Chloe: Yeah. I was getting punched and pushed around, like. I was getting kicked in the back and got up against the wall by my neck and that…

Several incidents were reported outside the school, when opportunities arose outside teacher supervision:

Chantal: (ex one school, now at Morris View but refusing to attend) There’s this one girl, Viv, she beat me up really badly (to Mother), didn’t she?
Mother: Yes…
Chantal: She stamped on me loads of times, didn’t she? My ear was black, footprints all over my head, my ear was a mess.
ND: But that was out of school?
Chantal: Yeah.

Most of the violence described took place during breaks at school, with the toilets being a particularly dangerous place to visit:

Terri: (A group of hard girls came into the girls’ toilet) and they wanted two’s off a fag (to share a cigarette). They didn’t like it cos I was answering them back. I said no, so she slapped me round the face. She asked me what was the matter, and I said “nothing, I’m just feeling a bit sick,” and then the other girl slapped me round the face and said “oh well you’ll get over it”. They were like begging me, well telling me, to give them a fag, and then this other girl got the main one’s head and pushed it so it hit me on the nose.
ND: Why? To hurt the other girl?
Terri: No, to hurt me. I’d had enough of it so I gave them what they wanted and walked away…home.
Listening to the girls’ accounts, several quite astonishing in their viciousness, raised the issue of veracity and accuracy. Although it is impossible to claim complete “truth”, many of the details were corroborated by the EWOs, parents, recorded on the school’s security TV cameras, or cross-referenced by other pupils. There was even a convincing nonchalance about how some of the girls played their injuries down:

**ND:** Were you badly hurt?

**Gemma:** They were kicking me in my belly and in my face. I had red marks and bruises all over my face. I had nothing broken, just red marks on my face.

It seemed that some girls were so used to violence in their lives that, whilst they feared and suffered it, they expected it, and were resigned rather than indignant. Two of the girls mentioned their fathers’ involvement in dealing with their complaints that indicated a callous and destructive male attitude in the family home:

**Gemma:** They came round my house at half eleven (23.30) and were shouting up at my bedroom window “Gemma, you fat slag” and stuff like that. (...) and my dad took me out to find them.

**ND:** Why?

**Gemma:** Cos he wanted me to have a fight, one to one, so they would leave me alone.

**ND:** Did you want to?

**Gemma:** I didn’t really want to…

**ND:** Were you scared?

**Gemma:** Yeah…

Gemma was taken out in her dad’s car, found two of the girls, and was abandoned to them. She says she fought one, and “beat her up”, but the next night they came back in force and the police were called to her house.

Lorraine’s step-father took an even less supportive stance. With a history of violence against her mother, and subsequently serving a prison sentence for assault, he beat Lorraine and threatened her to illustrate the facts of life:

**ND:** Why did you not tell your mum (about the bullying)?

**Lorraine:** Because my mum was with a partner that said if you had problems at school, hit them. (...) If I told my mum, she’d tell him, and then he’d like come up to me and start hitting me, and saying stuff, he goes “this is what you’ll be getting in later life”, and hitting me and saying “if you don’t hit them back, you’d better get used to this.” (...) It came to the end of my tether when I ran away to social services. (...) He had threatened me with a knife, cos £10 had gone missing. He said if I didn’t own up to taking it he’d chop my fingers off.

Whatever credibility such reports have, they certainly revealed a discourse of violence against girls that they depicted as common. The interviews pointed to a culture of conflict and violent resolution, or, perhaps worse, a continuation of sporadic spats, separated by periods of fear. It is this cultural dimension, the violent behaviours were embedded in the everyday relationships that formed the core of the victims’ rationale for why they were targeted.
Reasons for bullying

The girls gave a variety of superficial reasons for their victimisation – being new to a school, not mixing well or having few friends, jealousies over boyfriends, having older siblings that had already been bullied at that school, and so on. Terri thought she was attacked because there were rumours that her dad beat her up, and Lorraine thought that she was singled out because all of her primary school friends had moved to different secondary schools.

Whatever the attributions for the bullying, one common factor was the culture of female violence that esteemed physical aggression and social power in “top girls.” Even Stacy, who had described her initial problems as being displaced from her best friend, demonstrated how the “hard girls” of the school were central to her social exclusion and persecution:

Stacy: One of my ex friends told people at school that I was pregnant by this boy who was friends with this girl Zoe, quite a hard girl, and she threatened to beat me up. And they turned the whole of the school, well all the girls in my year, against me. (…)
ND: Do you think the girls were doing it (making rumours) because they wanted to hurt you, or to get in with Zoe?
Stacy: To get in with Zoe, cos everyone wants to be on her side.
ND: Why? Is she a particularly nice girl?
Stacy: No! If you are on her side, she won’t hurt you, but if you are not on her side she’ll beat you up.
ND: Has she beaten many people up?
Stacy: Well she’s put someone in hospital…
ND: Boy or girl?
Stacy: Girl.
ND: Does she just hit girls?
Stacy: No, she hits the little boys sometimes.

Each interviewee stated that they knew their aggressor bullied other girls, but no one seemed able to stop her. The girls were asked why the bullies were able to continue hurting so many people with impunity. In every case the interviewees referred to the bullies being “popular girls”:

ND: So why do you think they were doing it (bullying you)?
Lorraine: Because they thought they were popular and hard doing…because they thought they were better than everyone else.
ND: (...) If I was to take you to a new school. How would you know who the popular girls were?
Lorraine: They would have loads of friends, they would have loads of boys after them, and they would be a smoker.
ND: What else?
Lorraine: Erm…they’d mess around in lessons.
The interviewees were adamant that to be popular you had to be tough. Popular girls would be the antithesis of what the school would consider a model pupil. The personal characteristics esteemed by the peer group were aggressiveness and propensity for anti-school behaviour:

ND: It’s usually nice people that are popular…
Chloe: She was popular because she was hard. (…) Cos at that school most people ain’t good behaved.

Although the interviewed girls were based at only two schools, Morris View and Blunkett Rise, their experiences covered seven secondary schools. Only two schools were mentioned where pupil discipline was thought to be “good”, otherwise there was a high consistency in the descriptions of the dominant pupil culture in Singleborough secondary schools:

ND: (…) How would you describe the most popular girls in these (3) schools that you’ve been to?
Terri: The ones that are always getting into trouble…always fighting.
ND: They’re the most popular ones?
Terri: Yeah.
ND: Popular amongst the girls or popular amongst the boys?
Terri: Both.
ND: So why does being naughty or badly behaved make kids more popular?
Terri: Just cos, other people find it funny…the other kids think they have the guts to do stuff like that, they’re cool and that.

From the victims’ point of view, there was no illusion that such a hard image genuinely endeared other girls to be friends, these were relationships of convenience, of survival, that passed for friendship within that culture, but the likelihood of extricating oneself from the game was very low:

Gemma: People be nice to them and all that, they’re scared of them cos Kelly Smith is the hardest kid in the school, so…
ND: But just because she’s hard doesn’t mean everyone has to like her, does it?
Gemma: I don’t think people like, really like her, it’s that they have to cos they’re scared of getting beaten up.

Responses to bullying

The literature in this field offers information on both responses and effects, often running the two together. This study was too small to draw any inferences between the type of bullying and the type of response (Rivers & Smith 1994), but the girls each reported a range of responses to the attacks. Responses to bullying can be analysed in a number of ways, for example, Stanley and Arora (1998) cite Childs’ (1993) four types of coping
strategy, but the most appropriate categorisation here appeared to be along active/passive and constructive/destructive axes.

*Active-constructive* responses included trying to reason with the bullies or building new relationships with other peers. *Active-destructive* responses included physical or verbal retaliation towards peers, or attempting to set up a competing clique.

*Passive-constructive* responses included seeking advice and help from teachers or parents, or positive self-talk that reduced psychological harm. *Passive-destructive* responses included school refusal, negative self-talk that increased psychological harm, fasting, substance abuse and self-injurious behaviour. This schema is rudimentary, and needs important refinement, for example, the location of "school transfer" might fall under several headings.

Future studies will also consider how bullying situations such as those described can be successfully resolved, but the selection of the present case studies showed nothing the girls attempted was successful. Although most of the girls tried more than one of these strategies, their lack of success can be measured by the fact that, eventually, they all resorted to flight from the problem, some passing through four schools.

A recurring comment by the girls was that they would have liked their tormentors excluded from the school rather than they themselves having to flee it. This issue is a complex one as it connects with the schools’ legal situation (DfEE 1998), teachers’ recognition of bullying situations (Galen & Underwood 1997, Hazler et al. 2001) and the general levels of aggressive behaviour tolerated in schools. Appeals to teacher intervention were considered to be useless or even harmful, and some girls claimed that even some teachers were bullied by the aggressive girls:

ND: (…) But how would that happen without the teachers seeing it?

Chloe: Most of the people aren’t bothered if the teachers see, they push the teachers out of the way and that, a couple of the girls, they don’t care what the teachers say.

The government’s policy on school exclusion of disruptive or violent pupils makes it very difficult to exclude children permanently. Despite persistent flagrant anti-social behaviour, bullies and victims are kept within schools wherever possible:

Chantal: (…) Kelly Smith, the amount of times she has got done (caught by teachers) and she, you know, I know she’s hit, well, I think she has hit nearly every girl in Year 10, she has hit loads of people. My Auntie, she cleans here (Morris View) and she says that, they’ve put new cameras up around the school, and she says that they’ve got her on camera head-butting and kneeing this other girl right in the face and she’s still denying it! She says it isn’t her! (…) She just gets away with it.

This dramatic claim was supported by staff at Morris View who agreed that Kelly Smith had physically hit virtually every girl in Year 10, and Kelly was still only in Year 9. Some of the girls interviewed recognised that excluding a bully might simply prompt their friends to retaliate, or for the attacks to continue in the neighbourhood rather than in

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2. There are numerous procedural obstacles to prevent summary exclusions of pupils aimed to protect the pupils’ rights. Where schools do succeed in excluding a pupil, they are, in effect, financially penalised and the recorded instances are used to create league tables to highlight such “failures.”
school. The effectiveness of any response to this type of bullying was always overcome by the vindictiveness of the persecutors whose malevolent influence prevailed throughout the community and even reached into the refuge schools. The professional view from EWOs and teachers was that exclusion would mean just moving the bullying problem from one school to another.

The hopelessness of the situation for bullied girls pervaded the interviews. These were girls who had run a gauntlet of abuse and persecution for years, but still had no end in sight. The personal damage to them was brutal. Self-harm by cutting or burning flesh with cigarette ends, eating disorders, abuse of slimming or sleeping pills, depression and anxiety, and in two cases, attempted suicide, formed the desperate attempts of these girls to relieve their situation.

**Summary**

A significant amount of the literature on girls’ bullying is concerned with its subtle and clandestine nature, of behaviour that fits in spirit with the malicious essence of bullying, but lies indistinctly at its margins. This study expected to hear girls’ accounts of friendship cliques and fallouts leading to social exclusion, and of the emotional hurt associated with those artful techniques described in the literature on indirect aggression amongst girls. Instead, the evidence of indirect aggression was present, but obliterated by accounts of very direct aggression and physical violence.

The testimony of these girls is as unambiguous as possible and their experiences fit the core criteria of many formulations and definitions of bullying: aggression, power differential, repetition, intent to distress (Olweus 1993, Smith et al. 1999). The modes of bullying described in the interviews indicated levels of physical violence more associated with the most severe cases of boys, and very uncommon in other literature on girls.

A highly significant finding of this study is the similarity of references to the characteristics of the girls’ persecutors as popular. Clearly, there is an established critical mass of support and collusion amongst the girls for the kind of aggressive attitude displayed by the “hard girls” in some of Singleborough’s schools. Morris View and Blunkett Rise are schools with highly motivated and well-trained staff, and each has a clear policy on anti-bullying, so there remains the puzzle of why such a virulent culture of violence prevails within them.

Blunkett Rise and Morris View fall within the third unofficial category of Singleborough as conceptualised by the EWOs. The five schools in this group begin the academic year with few parents of able or motivated children choosing them. Those who do choose them decide largely upon the schools’ proximity to the family homes, or as third or fourth choice after oversubscribed schools. Throughout the school year, the more popular schools can afford to exclude pupils who do not meet their standards of behaviour or achievement, and these children will find difficulties in being accepted by another popular school. Over time, these disaffected and disruptive pupils gravitate towards unpopular, under-subscribed schools that have vacant places and are obliged to admit them for economic and legal reasons.
As these schools take in an ever-higher percentage of aggressive pupils, some of the more academically motivated pupils suffer greater disruption to their lessons and social life and are driven to move out, possibly taking the places recently vacated in the popular schools. This cycle of movement operates like a valve, letting disruptive and less able, less motivated pupils, flow into a few “sink” schools, and floating the more able and higher motivated children out of the “sink” schools and into the popular schools.

In addition to this ingress of aggressive excludees, a steady flow of self-excluding pupils – school refusniks and refugees from bullying – migrates to the same schools, adding further pressure on the pastoral and disciplinary systems of schools that were already in difficulties.

The result is a multi-tier schooling system that relegates a significant number of pupils to an impoverished experience in which bullying and aggression are very prevalent. In this situation pupils’ value systems are disconnected from official academic discourse and replaced with an alternative culture where highly gendered physical and social power is esteemed (Mac An Ghaill 1994, Duncan 1999). For the girls within this socio-cultural pupil world, a great deal of bullying is centred upon sexual reputation (Wolpe 1989, Duncan 1999), as evidenced in the sexualised nature of the insults (slag, bitch, whore, etc.) and points of conflict (boyfriends, sexual orientation, attractiveness, etc.)

High status is claimed by those girls who are popular with boys and girls, and who have had many romantic associations. If one is not possessed of natural attractiveness (if such a thing exists) then one can still attain status by destroying, physically if necessary, the prospects of others, and founding alliances based upon fear.

In many schools, bullying between girls has not been tackled because of its purported “invisibility.” In Singleborough, the situation is highly visible. It may simply be more conspicuous due to a demographic and economic legacy in the LEA that makes pupil transfer between certain schools an early easy option. But in other LEAs, the indicators of non-attendance at school and high volumes of pupil traffic between schools ought to be examined carefully in order to render visible dysfunctional and pernicious peer-group cultures before intervention can take place. The answer to Bjorkqvist et al.’s question “do girls manipulate and boys fight?” might be more problematic than has been thus far appreciated.

References


Chapter 2: Gendered and Sexualised Harassment and Coercion in Various Environments
Told, Denied and Silenced. Young People's Interpretations of Conflicts and Gender in School

Sanna Aaltonen

Abstract

Different kinds of conflicts are often thought to belong to everyday school life. In this article I will study the interpretations young people have of school as the scene of conflicts, especially as the scene of sex-based harassment with pupils as the targets of harassment. The article explores to what extent do the young people think that gender has to do with the school conflicts. The data consists of 40 compositions on school and sex-based harassment or bullying. The compositions are written by boys and girls in the uppermost level (9th grade) of a Finnish comprehensive school. The school is represented in the compositions as both the scene for the worst nightmares and as a harassment-free happy community. Both my analysis and earlier research indicate that school as a context blurs the gender dimension rather than bringing it out. Critical assessment of the present as regards the concepts of conflicts between genders seems to be difficult partly because a possibility for a school romance directs both the pupils and the teachers to interpret conflicts between girls and boys as flirting, playing or joking. Furthermore, school conflicts are usually talked about as bullying that can be understood as a gender neutral phenomenon where the genders of both the target and the actor are mainly random. The article is based on my ongoing sociology doctoral thesis in which I discuss young people's notions and experiences with sex-based harassment.

Introduction

Different conflicts i.e. open or hidden bullying, harassment and discrimination situations, are thought to belong to everyday school life. However, pupils in schools have very different and among themselves conflicting views on whether there is bullying in school and if there is, how serious it is (cf. Gordon et al. 2000, 129, 135). In this article I will study the different interpretations young people have of school as the scene of conflicts, especially as the scene of sex-based harassment with pupils as the targets of harassment. I will especially discuss to what extent do the young people think that gender has to do with the
school conflicts. The article is based on my sociology doctoral thesis in which I discuss young people’s notions and experiences on sex-based harassment.¹

At one level I understand gender as a dichotomical girl-boy division, on another level as different possibilities of being a girl and a boy, and on another level as varying meanings given to gender according to social relations and situations (Thorne 1993, 29, 157–159). Heterosexual harassment is an example of a situation where the dichotomical and hierarchical meaning of gender is emphasised and comes into view.²

My material consists of compositions by ninth grade girls and boys which were written according to my instruction³. The pupils wrote the compositions in their own class rooms during a school day. (Cf. also Aaltonen 2001a.)

In its entirety the composition material consists of 108 compositions which vary in length, from a two sentence comment to five page narratives. In this paper I will concentrate on compositions that mention school in connection to sex-based harassment or bullying. There are altogether 40 of these texts, 20 of them are composed by girls, 20 by boys.

School-themed compositions have a connection to the writers’ everyday school life, even though they cannot be read as direct documents about what happens in school. All the events that are described in the compositions are possible in principle (cg. Aapola 1999, 212). I assume that the pupils have taken elements for their compositions from different sources so that the events that have been experienced, seen, and heard in school are mixed with the stories that are produced by the media and the imagination.

I will examine the compositions and their school references as accounts which the pupils can use to make things understandable, both to me as a researcher and to themselves (Coffey & Atkinson 1996, 84, 100–101, Suoninen 1999, 20–21). The accounts are based on meanings which are used for examining the world and at the same time the accounts reciprocally take part in the shaping of their meaning (Suoninen 1999, 20–21).

1. The research is part of the Finnish Academia and University of Helsinki financed research project lead by Elina Lahelma: “Inclusion and Exclusion in Educational Processes”. Thanks for the comments on the earlier versions of the article to Tuula Gordon, Elina Lahelma, Vappu Sunnari and two unknown referees.

2. Another productive approach to analysing gender is Judith Butler’s (1990) idea of making gender. For example in the most common type of harassment, a man targeting harassment at a woman can be seen as an act that represents (a certain kind of) man (cf. Pulkkinen 2000, 53).

3. Personal relations are a pleasant and important part of everyday life but can also be unwanted as in bullying. This is true also in relations between genders. In the best possible case the relations between girls and boys or women and men are a mutual and welcome way of making friends and giving attention. Sometimes showing interest can be disruptive and one-sided or can feel like deliberate bullying and harassment. Sex-based harassment or molestation, such as groping, dirty jokes, name calling or even sexual violence are targeted at both the young and the adults. According to studies harassment is usually targeted at women and girls but also men and boys have similar experiences. The harasser and the target can be of the same gender.

Comment on the arguments and discuss what differentiates pleasant and unpleasant shows of interest, especially in relations between genders. What are your opinions on the reasons, the problematics and the generality of sex-based harassment experienced by young people? If you think it is a problem, what kinds of solutions do you think there are? You can also talk about examples about your own experiences or your friends’ experiences for example in town, in school or among friends or tell a fictional story.

Make your own title or choose from the following:

“Leave me alone!”
Sex-based harassment – a silenced problem or total fuss?
A boy can be harassed too.
Girls as targets of many types of harassment
Thus I will study both how pupils write about school, gender and the school conflicts and about how they shape and justify their views and how they have situated themselves in relation to the studied phenomenon.

**School as a scene for conflicts and romances**

The forms of sex-based harassment directed mainly at girls, its resistance and effects have been studied with such qualitative methods as interviews and a recollection method (Herbert 1989, Larkin 1994, Korhonen & Kuusi 2001). It has been proven that harassment has harmful effects on the pupils’ school attendance, which has in itself an effect on their further possibilities (Larkin 1994). Many researchers have emphasised that school experiences have an effect on the construction of sexuality and gender relations also on a larger scale (Eder et al. 1995, Hand & Sanchez 2000, 720–721). Helena Saarikoski (2001, 226) aptly writes on the meaning of school, on how the separation of for example good and bad women is not invented in school but that its application in one’s own environment might be most eagerly studied in the school yard. In their compositions the girls and the boys refer to places central to them such as home, the discotheque, cafes and streets as a scene both for conflicts and for fun and adventure (cf. Skelton & Valentine 1998, 194). All of them do not spend their time in discos or cafes but everyone has experiences from school for the last nine years, and part of these experiences can be public and shared. School and school trips are seen in the compositions as important places for meeting a potential partner, starting dating and also for the aftermath after the break-up. Conflicts, especially bullying are obviously connected to everyday school life despite the fact that bullying probably is explicitly forbidden in most schools and this ban has been reported in the school rules and regulations:

> I will act kindly, politely and properly towards all those who attend the school. I will not bully anyone. (Http://www.malmiya.edu.hel.fi/jarjestyssaannot.html) 4

I led the pupils to their composition assignment by referring in the beginning of the instruction to a conflict familiar to them, bullying. School bullying and the importance of intervention has been studied in recent years (e.g. Salmivalli 1998) and there has been a lot of public discussion on the matter. One can presume that both the teachers and the pupils have in recent years improved in their sensitivity to notice at least systematic and frequent bullying of one pupil. Then again, as Elina Lahelma (1999, 88–91) states, teachers have problems separating bullying from playing partly because the pupils do not tell of their experiences and teachers change according to individual subjects do not necessarily see the continuance of bullying.

Even though I asked the pupils to think especially about gender relations, many wrote about relations between pupils in school in a gender neutral way in the bullying framework and in terms that they would for example position parties in genderless bullied and bullies. "There must be bullying in every class", one girl writes in a matter-of-fact and sure manner. The bully stories are also shared as the same bullying descriptions from both

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4. This secondary school is not my research school.
previous years and now can be found in more than one pupil’s composition. The fact that many pupils write about bullying and not harassment can be due to the fact that bullying as both a phenomenon and as a concept is more familiar and less embarrassing and uncomfortable compared to sex-based harassment. The interpretation framework for bullying seems to enable the specific and personal analysis of bullying incidents and their reasons and consequences: a few of the pupils write about being bullied in a surprisingly personal manner. The extent of the bully discussions and the general knowledge of bullying has certainly not made the experiences of being bullied any easier but they might make telling about it easier.

Even though school bullying and sex-based harassment have their own established definitions, it is naturally not a question of separate, clear cut phenomena. The definition of school bullying emphasises the repetitive and continuous bullying of one pupil (Salmivalli 1998) and the definitions of sex-based harassment emphasise the one-sidedness of the attention or the approach and the relation to gender (Varsa 1993). In their compositions the pupils mix terms such as bullying, teasing, harassment and disturbance when referring to conflicts in school, and it is not always clear what kind of an incident is referred to with each term. The following passage from a composition describes a repeated and systematic bullying targeted at one pupil, this bullying is based on gender or sexuality. The passage is a fitting example of a situation where the gender dimension is hidden if there is only reference to bullying when describing it.

[...] Sometimes a girl/boy might slap the other party on the backside in clubs but that is not so serious, (it has happened to me too) in a way one expresses interest towards the other. But it is not always so innocent. Small example: a girl is teased and provoked. She is afraid to come to school because she knows that yet again she will be pawed, teased and provoked. The girl has friends but they only think that the boys are interested in her. Even if they were it is not right to show it like that so it violates the other one's sexuality. She has tried many times to say to these guys that she does not want them to bully her like that but they do not believe her. To her, school is a nightmare so long as she has to go there (this I made up) [...] (Do we turn a blind eye too much? AT45) 5

In the above passage the girl illustrates the difference between harmless and harmful attention with examples situated in a disco and in school. She shows that spatial context, the scene together with the nature of the act is meaningful in how disturbing single interaction situations are estimated and what kind of reaction is seen as a suitable response (Aaltonen 2001b). In discos touching without permission can be interpreted by the girl as a sign of interest, and as a possible course of action for both girls and boys. Instead in school attention can become harmful as there are several intrusive boys and one has to see them every day. The writer does not ponder the teachers’ interpretations or their possibility to influence the situation but notes that friends do not necessarily support you if they ignore the girl’s interpretation of harassment and interpret the situation as normal.

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5. The two full stops inside the square brackets in my material passages signify that I have left out text from the beginning/the end of the passage. Also I have added my own specifications in square brackets. In the end of passages I have added the title of the composition to contextualise the passage. The letters AT refer to a girl and AP to a boy. The number attached to the letters is a random number given to the compositions.
heterosexual relations (cf. also Lahelma 1999, 91–92). School as a compulsory institution can be a trap for the target of harassment as compulsory obligation and the unconditionality of the time-space paths in school (Gordon et al. 2000, 53, 148) might bring the conflict parties together over and over again. As the writer of the following passage states, attention regarded as either harmless or harmful might become intrusive just because of its repetitiveness or risk of it, or because pulling away from the situation is difficult.

[...] I believe that every woman wants to have some attention, in school boys are pulling girls by their braids and some small things, and it is not taken seriously. But even in a situation like that you are repeatedly the object of ridicule and someone is hanging on your braid all the time, it is not nice [...] (Wanted and unwanted attention AT37)

All harassment or bullying situations are not necessarily systematical and targeted at one person but by nature random, targeted at anyone and all, especially girls. This type of harassment is mirrored in the compositions to teasing or provoking but as the girl I have quoted above writes, also to wanted attention. If "every woman wants attention", pulling by the braids can be considered a sign of successful portrayal of femininity.

**Harassment is always somewhere else**

Bullying is presented in the compositions in a quite unproblematic manner as a phenomenon that belongs to one's own school life but some want to keep gender relations and conflicts between genders apart from their own school. First of all some compositions that do not mention school at all can be interpreted so as to say that harassment as a phenomenon is located out side of school. In these examples the writer defines sex-based harassment as distant to the writer-self both locally and as an experience. Harassment as a phenomenon is only connected to certain times, to alcohol use, leisure time spaces or pick-up joints in other words somewhere else than in school during daytime.

I do not know much about sex-based harassment, I don't go out to town that much in the evening, and I don't go out otherwise either. So I don't have experiences about sex-based harassment and I don't know anyone who has.[..] (Sex-based harassment AP45)

**Not in our school – as far as I know**

There is an example of gender invisibility in the conflicts in one's own school in the below passage from a composition. Before the passage the writer has stated that bullying is "stupid".

[..] Usually there are some people in school who are a bit different, and then when everyone notices that someone is odd in their opinion, everybody starts to bully that person together. In our school there is no bullying between genders. I myself
get along with both girls and boys. When younger, boys and girls have difficulties in getting along together but when you get a bit older you notice that you can also talk to girls. [...] (Young people's relations to others AP48)

The writer is searching for justifications for his absolute claim that "In our school there is no bullying between genders" by appealing to his personal experience and at the same time denying that he would bully girls. A few of the other boys also suppose that "in our school" there is no harassment but the observation is more reflective and more uncertain than the above mentioned writer's. The following passage is a descriptive example of the reflective style where the boy immediately in the beginning of his composition denies experiencing or seeing harassment but goes on to ponder the difficulty in drawing the line mainly from the girls' perspective:

In my opinion sex-based harassment is maybe just total fuss because I have not at least seen or experienced it but for some others it might be even a big problem in school or at work. Or it depends if for example teasing girls or (bullying) is categorised as sex-based harassment but it doesn't seem to bother the girls, maybe because for example the bully is a boy who is popular with the girls and their pal. So the girls know that he is only doing it in fun and they don't mind. Then again sometimes the teasing might go too far like to intimate things that the other doesn't want to be told or talked about. [...] (Sex-based harassment – a silenced problem or total fuss? AP14)

Also many other boys justify their "not in our school" suspicions first by writing that they have not seen harassment but in the end they themselves are not convinced of this statement either. Saying that one cannot see sex-based harassment refers to two types of seeing. Harassment can happen hidden from view, one of the boys referred to this by writing that "sex-based harassment experienced by young people is difficult to prevent as it is impossible to monitor for example in school."(AP03). On the other hand visibility or invisibility refers to interpretation differences which are dealt with by many boys in their compositions. Harassment is socially and culturally invisible or rather made invisible so that both the pupils and teachers name many situations as natural relations between genders which actually are uncomfortable situations to the target (Lahelma to be published in 2002, Palmu 1999, 187, Kenway et al. 1998, 101–113, Herbert 1989, 21–26, 44, Larkin 1994, 265–267).

Gone are childhood and childish manners

The writer of the next text is reluctant to see excepting pushing and name calling "that kind of harassment" in his own school but makes up examples from upper secondary school and public places during leisure time. Thus harassment is located also in this composition in the end in a totally different time and place than his own school.

In my opinion in this school there is at least not much that kind of harassment. At least I haven't seen any direct harassment. Of course there is sometimes you see
some guy and some chick shoving each other and telling each other off. At the upper secondary slave market [at a party?] there is quite a lot of sex-based harassment. When my brother was there they all had to get on stage and perform something. There was one where the chick had safety pins put on her clothes and the guy's eyes were covered and they spinned him around and then he looked for the safety pins. I guess that most of the harassment happens when people are out drinking and then starts to harass some chick when they are drunk. I've heard all kinds of stories from friends. [continues by telling two examples]

(Girls as targets of many types of attention AP24)

This type of activity taking place outside school hours but (silently) approved by teachers can be called institutional harassment, and challenging this can be especially difficult.

Unlike many other pupils, the writer of the following passage allocates sex-based harassment to the time period after secondary school. For example the writer (AP48) I quoted in the beginning of the segment states that in his own school there is no harassment because growing up means at the same time maturing and this makes proper relations between genders possible. At the same time compositions which refer to harassment episodes that only happen in primary school build a difference between conflicts due to childlike manners in the past and the peaceful and adult-like coexistence today (cf. also Tolonen 2001, 156–157).

[...]

In my opinion listening to filth has lessened in secondary school, maybe because we have grown up but in primary school it felt like no-one could even talk in a friendly manner. Then you were just mean for the sake of it, it had nothing to do with sexuality because knowledge about it was vague. Some boys went around calling everyone gay but they did not connect it to anything. [...]

(Sex-based harassment – a silenced problem or total fuss? AT33)

[...]

In primary school boys called some of the girls "whores" even though they hardly knew what the word meant. However, the stigma could follow you all through school life and make life very difficult. [...]

(Girls as targets of many types of attention AT38)

In both of these examples the harassment in primary school is explained as childhood ignorance and general malice. Calling someone names connected to sexuality is shown as just random malice which can have long term effects like in the latter example – the stigmata of a whore follows to upper secondary school and the only end to it is the ending of school. The possibility of a gender dimension in conflicts is connected to the harasser's awareness of sexuality. You can see from the compositions that the assumption is that if the bully is not believed to understand the contents of the sexual vocabulary, it cannot be actual sex-based harassment or sexual teasing6.

In the light of the examples one can also discuss the changing of sex-based harassment forms during age. Barrie Thorne (1993, 154–155) talks about youth as a gendered transition from childhood that is regarded as innocent to institutionalised heterosexuality. From the viewpoint of a ninth grader the calling of names in primary school can be shrugged off with childlike manners and ignorance. The safety pin game in upper secondary

6. Thank you for Kaia Yesilova to this remark.
school between girl-boy pairs can be interpreted so that heterosexuality is brought up explicitly and at the same time possible unwanted touching that the girl experiences is carnevalised. Following Thorne's thinking, secondary school can be thought of as a period when many of the pupils' thoughts of sexuality are clarified and through new knowledge or awareness they have to learn the assessment of dimensions of sexual in- tervention and the definition of boundaries between pleasant and unpleasant sexual attention (cf. also Jackson 1999, 25).

**Characteristics of the target and the bully**

Next I will discuss how the examples of school conflicts and the parties of the stories are characterised and positioned and also what kind of activity the positions enable. First of all, most of the writers, especially the boys, position themselves in their compositions as reporters of the situations and as neutral observers more than as the ones experiencing or as parties of the situations. Harassment is also written about as a phenomenon without the specification of the doers or targets of the harassment, only as a thing that happens.

[..] Harassment is everywhere, in schools, in the street, while shopping, in Finland, abroad, during the evening, during the day...[..]

(Girls as targets of many types of attention AT12)

**Victim type or just anyone?**

In many of the compositions the bullied is positioned so that an inambiguous reason that is located in the target is given, usually the general phrase is “people who stand out from the masses are often bullied” (AT38). School as a compulsory, multi-year institution gathers the masses i.e. pupils of the same age group into a common space where the pupils' characteristics are comparable. Talk about standing out from the masses blurs the gender dimension of many of the conflicts and makes bullying a gender neutral term which is not necessarily enough to represent all conflicts. That mass or crowd that the target from the pupils' stories is compared to is not necessarily all the pupils from the school or the class but pupils of the same gender as the bullied. So the question is often about noticing and valuing the differences of the gender specifics.

Many of the difference making acts and the rules of including and excluding from groups can be located in the body of the bully target which is defined for example as being of wrong colour and thus being abnormal or ugly (Young 1990, 123, Haug 1984, 62). When the reasons for excluding are connected to the body, they seem as natural and undeniable as the body (Haug 1984, 62). The changes in a young person's body i.e. "development" is most conspicuous in the growth in height and the development of breasts, only the latter having strong connotations to sexuality. The size and development of breasts is a topic of comments already in primary school (Thorne 1993, 141–142) and is mentioned in both the girls' and the boys' compositions.
In school you can hear loads of criticism on your looks. Especially when I was a couple of years younger and I was more developed than the other, the criticism and comments were distressing. When you are not comfortable with yourself all kinds of comments feel bad. I still receive attention for these same things but it does not feel as bad anymore. You sort of have grown mentally to accept yourself as you are.

(Girls as targets of many types of attention AT40)

Especially in primary school it is easy to be a target for this type of sex-based harassment because boys start to get interested in girls and they don't think a girl is normal if she does not have a full figure. In those days TITLESS! shouts were common and they made a girl be ashamed of her figure. If you did not want to be bullied, you would wear loose sweatshirts instead of tight tops.

(Different types of attention AT42)

In a study by Jane Kenway and Sue Willis (1998, 102–103) the boys in school believed that some people were victim types i.e. they caused the harassment themselves, and it was only a coincidence that most of them were girls. Kenway and Willis disagreed and called harassment sex-based, with which they referred to harassment that was targeted at girls just because they were girls. (Kenway et al. 1998, 102.) The same kind of a conclusion can be made on the basis of the two examples mentioned above. The girl's body is the target of criticism and no body type seems to free the girls from criticism. The target of harassment can be any girl as the next passage shows.

Some boy wants to show his friends that he is tough or something. He goes up to a girl and squeezes her by her knobs [breasts] and other sensitive places. The girl can only try to wriggle away. The boy is laughing but the girl might feel really bad afterwards.

("Leave me alone" AP35)

In the three above mentioned composition passages the girl or girls are put in the target's position and they are all portrayed as trying to act in some way to avoid or get rid off it. The first passage's girl referred to inner changes, to mental growth and self-acceptance, and the other girl trusts in covering up the deviation from the beauty standard. Other examples show that the girls have difficulties in arguing over appearances or at least there is no mention of such activity. The boy writer in the third example sees the girl's possibilities for activity as small, that the girl who has been groped "can only try to wriggle away". Even though the girl can do something else in principle, shout insults at the boy or tell about it to the teacher, the statement can be mirrored to several compositions emphasising on the smallness and weakness of girls compared to boys, or it can be interpreted as an assumption about the impossibility of an equal physical fight between a girl and a boy.

In addition, the girls at the school are compared to each other, as a second comparison surface in the compositions is the normative ideal of presenting heterosexual sexuality. Deviancy from this is controlled. An unsuitable appearance for one's own gender or non-heterosexual behaviour is stated as a reason for exclusion or harassment (cf. Lehtonen 1999).
I agree that I have been harassed. It started when I came to secondary school. I was bullied because I was a girl who looked like a boy, so it was just an appearance thing. I haven't been bullied anymore because my appearance has changed. [...] 

(Sex-based harassment – a silenced problem or total fuss? AT30)

 [...] People who stand out from the crowd are usually bullied. I know a few cases where two girls have been really good friends. It started to bother the guys in school so they nicknamed them lesbians, without thinking about it that much. The story went around quickly and soon everybody "knew". [...] 

(Girls as targets of many types of attention AT38)

Pupils who write in the first person about the bullying or the harassment which has been aimed at them on the basis of different appearances, usually talk about how they have survived the experience (cf. also Aapola & Kangas 1994). Survival stories and talking about them differs according to gender. In the girls' stories the girls who looked like a boy "appearance changed", the fat girl "grew in height, lost weight" and the girl who was more developed than the others "grew mentally to accept herself as she was". In the boy's story his growth in height that came with age, but also going to the gym encouraged the boy to defy his bullies and hit them. "That stopped the bullying". Even though there has been active work behind i.e. the changes in appearance, the changes in the girls' stories are illustrated as things that happen. The boy brings forth his own active role in the change going process away from the position of being bullied: going to the gym as part of the building of the self and fighting as a clear turning point.

The dirty old man and the boy next door

Bullying and harassment that is especially targeted at girls is often explained with factors due to the target. Another way to explain sex-based harassment and also sexual violence is to look for reasons in the actor's difference or deviance. Especially compositions which had a solid, often dramatic plot with beginnings and ends, had a black and white set-up where the actor was a perverse, mean and cruel boy or male teacher and the target a nice and friendly girl. The target of the disturbed person or the dirty old man might also be a boy. [...] Boys can be harassed also in school or on the way to school when some teacher of other pupils looses it.[...]

(A boy can also be harassed AP11)

In the next portrayal where the harasser is named as one certain actor and the target as any of the girls, the characteristics of ethnicity (and culture) of the actor have strong secondary meaning. Although in this example the girls are portrayed also as being partly responsible for the continuance of the situation as they did not try to influence the ending of the harassment. [...] In primary school we had this gypsy who was squeezing and groping all the girls. The girls did not like it but they did not complain either. [...]
When the harassment is explained with the factors of the target, the composition on the bullying is often written in passive, as a phenomenon that you "fall" victim to, and the group of bullies does not have to be defined in any way. Also in examples where boys grope girls, the parties can be any boys and girls and the only reason for the bullying is gender. The fact that boys bully girls in school – pulling them by their braids as the classical example – is as self-evident as that bullying "happens" in schools. Categorising a man who is considerably older or drunk as the harasser is easier and definitely more clear than categorising a familiar boy of the same age who can be interpreted as a friend joking or as a potential partner showing interest.

The unpronounced gender of school

The location, in this case the school, has meaning in how conflicts are perceived, interpreted, defined and solved. According to my polyphonic material it is not possible to make a specific distinction between the interpretation methods of harassment that happens in school and harassment outside school but the school seems to stand out from the composition in a very special way. The school is represented in the compositions as both the scene for the worst nightmares and as a harassment-free happytown. One special characteristic about school is that it is a compulsory institution that gathers the age groups together. Some pupils write about the comparing and the criticism over looks or about how exactly in school sex-based harassment can change into something systematic and make one's life nightmarish. Then again others are doubtful over whether school – especially "our school" – conflicts have anything to do with gender. Both my analysis and earlier research indicate that school as a context blurs the gender dimension rather than brings it out.

First of all Finnish comprehensive school is thought to offer equal possibilities for both girls and boys which means is practice that gender does not have to be taken into account at least not in the curriculum (Gordon et al. 2000, 39–40, 200). This way of thinking is connected to the self-evident Finnish gender neutral equality thinking (Julkunen 2001). Because gender and sexuality are both hidden and unpronounced in schools, according to many researchers (i.e. Tolonen 2001, 33, Epstein & Johnson 1998, 108) it can also be presumed that conflicts connected to them are easily left unnoticed and unproblematised by both the pupils and the teachers. Talking about sex-based harassment can generally be thought of as embarrassing because it challenges the idea of gender neutrality and reminds all of the power differences between genders (Julkunen 2001, 46). It is difficult for a woman or a girl to talk about sex-based harassment which is targeted at her because only scornful positions are offered to her: helpless victim, fanatic feminist with no sense of humour or provoker who with her actions, clothing and behaviour has caused the fact that she is the target of harassment. Also complaining about rough handling in the school culture i.e. squealing is generally thought of as disgraceful.

Another factor that makes it more difficult to interpret unpleasant attention as sex-based harassment is the school's position as a place where pupils meet other pupils every-
day, both the ones that they want to spend time with and the ones that they want to avoid on the account of their welfare. Of course it is understandable that pupils do not find it tempting or meaningful to interpret the present as potentially threatening, to see your schoolmates as victims or actors and see your own school as a scene for sex-based harassment (cf. Gordon et al. 2000, 129, 135, Korhonen & Kuusi 2001, 28, 31). The fact that some pupils illustrate in their compositions "our school" as a harassment-free place or at least position harassment in primary school or upper secondary school shows that the critical assessment of the present at least with the concepts of conflicts between genders is difficult. According to the compositions the people in school can offer both romance and nightmares and this possibility for romance directs both the pupils and the teachers to interpret conflicts between girls and boys as flirting, playing or joking (cf. Saarikoski 2001, 250–255, Palmu 1999, 187).

Thirdly, school conflicts are usually talked about as bullying which has its reasons mainly in the differences of the bullied. Even though bullying seems to be a functional tool for reflection for the pupils, it returns the reasons for bullying to the victim's characteristics and hides the gender dimension. Bullying can be talked about and understood as a gender neutral phenomenon where the genders of both the target and the actor are mainly random. The concept of sex-based harassment that I introduced in the compositions brought up the gender dimensions of the school conflicts and stories that do not necessarily fit the normal concept of bullying.

In the school interpretations by the pupils the same spectrum of opinions presents itself as in earlier research (cf. Gordon et al. 2000, 129, 135): others talk about the comments targeted at self and others deny the whole existence of the phenomenon. Little attention is paid to the boys’ position as the target of bullying based on gender or the teachers’ role as the negotiator of conflicts. From the spectrum of opinions one can assume that there would be discussion in school over the matter, at least at a general level. The opinions over the self-evident nature of the reasons of school bullying and harassment were repeated in the material, these opinions should not be accepted by the teacher but they need to be untangled. In the seemingly gender neutral school life it is time to seize conflicts and their gender connections, no matter if these conflicts are called bullying or sex-based harassment.

References


Aspects of Sexual Harassment from a Swedish Perspective

Kerstin Hägg

Introduction

As a researcher and lecturer in the Teacher Education of the University of Umeå and the Center for Women Studies I have been engaged in questions about gendered power relations and the formation of gender in everyday life in connection with structural and social changes in the society (Hägg 1993, 1997).

Folkhemmet is a well known symbol of the Swedish Welfare State. The ideology behind this symbol was initially that the state should create a good and safe home for everybody and thus improve living conditions for the underprivileged by legislation, reform, and democracy. Education, health care, safe jobs, good flats and houses should be available not only for rich and privileged people. In the first versions of the welfare state women were almost invisible. The ambition was to fight for wages that would make it possible for a worker to support a family so that his wife could stay at home to take care of the children and housework. When welfare benefits such as unemployment benefits, health insurances were established, these benefits were connected to the labour market and to some extent to one's income, and are still today to a large extent.

The public sector expanded rapidly during the 50's, 60's and 70's and jämställdhet – equality of opportunity or gender equity was then included as an important part of the Swedish Welfare State.

Formal aspects of jämställdhet are well developed in Sweden today. Gender relations in education and at work, as well as individual formations of gender, are closely connected to structural and ideological changes in society. Equal opportunity policies have had a great impact on development in Sweden. Great changes have definitely taken place, but Sweden is far from being a country with gender equity when various aspects of living conditions for men and women are compared. (SOU 1998, 6, Om kvinnor och män 2000).

The equity legislation focused initially on equal rights for women and men in education, in the workplace, in relation to parenthood and family policy and against discrimina-
tion based on gender. Power relations between men and women in public and private life were not on the agenda. For a long time issues related to sexualised violence were invisible and changes in the legislation in that respect were always the latest compared to any other sections of equity legislation. (Dahlberg et al. 1989).

The official code for information about sexuality, contraceptives and pregnancy was clinical and part of health education for heterosexual families. If, or rather when, women were beaten, raped, threatened or intimidated sexually they were more or less to blame for bad, careless or irresponsible behaviour. The perpetrators should be understood or at least forgiven, as they were either mentally ill or drunk beyond their own control. (Eliasson 2000, 35–43). Feminist researchers and activists and especially the women’s shelter movement began to make this hidden agenda visible during the 70’s. Important changes in legislation have been gradually been made during the last decades of the 20’s century. Knowledge about sexualised violence and gendered power relations is now available, but still not always generally accepted. Changes in gendered power relations, as well as attitudes, beliefs, values and actions are slow processes and difficult to achieve.

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment was initially and is still legally related to the workplace. The results from the first Swedish study about sexual harassment attracted attention when it was published in 1987. Many of the participating women (17 percent or 340 of 2 000) had been sexually harassed at work. (På grund av kön 1998, 9). In 1991 sexual harassment was defined as

every form of undesired conduct based on gender or undesired sexual behaviour that effects the employee’s integrity at his or her workplace (Jämställdhetslagen 1991:443 § 6 my translation).

The latest version of the law about sexual harassment includes all forms of unwanted behaviour based on gender. The responsibilities for employers have been increased. (Jämställdhetslagen 1999:433 § 22a,b). They are now obliged by law to make an investigation when they have been told that sexual harassment might have or has taken place, and then take the necessary measures to stop the harassment.

Investigations into sexual harassment at the workplace, schools and universities have been carried out during the 1990's. (Kullenberg & Ehrenhals 1996, Tydén 1999). The results vary depending on aims, methods, definitions, scope, where and when the studies have been done. In a study carried out at the University of Gothenburg, a distinction was made between four different phenomena. Sexual harassment is defined as a scale of acts ranging from unwelcome compliments, looks, gestures that suggest and invite offers of sexual relations. Gender bullying, means use of debased language that violates one of the sexes. Special treatment and discrimination of one of the sexes includes different ways of asserting domination and using power to intimidate or give unfair privileges to one of the sexes. Acts of sexual encroachment come under the Criminal Code. The results of this study show that although sexual harassment by the given definition does occur, the use of debased language that violates one of the sexes and special treatment and discrimination
of one of the sexes is more frequent and that acts of sexual encroachment seldom occur. (Eliasson 1998, 2).

Recently an investigation of the frequency of violence against women in Sweden was carried out (Lundgren et al. 2001). In this study sexual violence is defined as a continuum including

all forms of physical, visual, verbal or sexual acts that are experienced by the woman or girl, at the time or later, as a threat, invasion or assault, that have the effect of hurting her or degrading her and/or take away her ability to control intimate contact. (Kelly 1988 in Lundgren et al. 2001, 16).

In this study all aspects of gender bullying are defined as sexual harassment. The results show that a large number of Swedish women have been victims of violence from a man and that sexual harassment is also a common phenomenon. One third of female students, regardless of age, had been sexually harassed during the last 12 months and close to two thirds of them had had such experiences earlier. (Lundgren et al. 2001, 63–64). Despite differences in percentages in the results these and other studies show that acts of sexual harassment undoubtedly take place both at work, in schools and at universities.

**Initiating a pilot study about sexual harassment at Umeå University**

A committee against discrimination and harassment, DisTra, was set up at Umeå University and began to work according to the first plan of action in 1998. A revised version to the action plan was published in 2000. DisTra has the status of a consultative working committee in cases that might be discrimination or harassment on various grounds. DisTra organises seminars and gives information about issues connected to discrimination and harassment when invited to do so by faculty boards, departments or student organisations. The members of the working team are representatives of the students’ unions and a group of professionals working at the university. I am DisTra’s chairperson and the Officer for Equal Opportunities its secretary.

DisTra has been consulted about many different problems and some of them have been cases of sexual harassment, but not very many. One conclusion could be that Umeå University has created a workplace for students and employees where sexual harassment seldom occurs. Another probably more realistic conclusion is that there are many unreported cases, but we do not know anything about the frequency or about students’ attitudes to and awareness of sexual violence.

An investigation into students’ health and well being was carried out in 2001 (Olofsson 2001). The large majority, 95 percent of 1585 students, reported that they were very or fairly satisfied with their present situation. A somewhat larger number of women than men reported experienced bullying or insulting behaviour from fellow students and teachers. Unfortunately, there were no specific questions about sexual harassment included in the questionnaire.

The same year DisTra agreed to support a pilot study. The plan was to invite students to participate in focus group interviews. One of the members, a man working at the Students’ Health service and I wanted to begin on a small scale with students from the
Teacher Education of the University of Umeå. There were several reasons for choosing this group of students. In order to acquire a diploma as a teacher every student should have knowledge and experience of how to promote gender equity. In the national curricula for compulsory, as well as upper secondary schools, equality opportunities are included in the value base that should be the guiding principle for teachers and administrators. To work in the spirit of the value base should be both an obligation and an inspiration for teachers. Teacher Education courses should accordingly provide student with knowledge about conflict solving and sexual bullying.

We sent letters to students inviting them to take part in separate focus group interviews for women and men, but we received very few answers. We learnt that many students were busy writing their examination papers or occupied by their final practice period in schools.

In 2002 we tried again. This time we published a letter through the network for students at the Teacher Education of the University of Umeå inviting them to participate in a pilot study about bullying and sexual harassment and asking them to contact us for individual interviews. Time was almost running out, when I finally got the possibility to interview seven students, five women and two men, aiming to become teachers in various subjects and different stages from preschool to upper secondary school.

The themes for the interviews were the students' own experiences of bullying and sexual harassment among pupils and students, from teachers/lecturers towards pupils/students, from pupils/students towards teachers/lecturers in the nine-year compulsory school, in the upper secondary school and at the university, and their opinions about how they had been prepared to deal with bullying and sexual harassment as students at the Teacher Education of the University of Umeå. The interviews, lasting 45–60 minutes, were tape recorded and a written summary of the interview was sent to each interviewee for comments.

The students began school during the 1980's. The youngest one left upper secondary school in 2000. Their experiences of school are from different, mostly fairly small places, all but one from the northern part of Sweden.

The interviews are reports based on personal memories, interpretations and experiences and as such providing valuable information for further studies, but not valid for conclusions about the frequency of sexual harassment at Umeå University.

**Experiences of bullying**

Six students witnessed bullying at school, mainly as exclusion, teasing and threats, but a few of them also as mild forms of violence. Looking back these students are upset or surprised when remembering that grown-ups often did not notice what was going on.

Four students were bullied, two of them both by classmates and teachers. Three students occasionally participated in the bullying others.

In some schools status and privileges were connected to sports and in one case to sports and good results in school. Those who did not succeed were also excluded from participation in social groups not related to sport. The interviewees connected their teach-
ers’ leadership style to this kind of bullying. They had been authoritarian teachers supporting competition among pupils and openly supporting successful boys.

To make friends with those who were bullied or actively take a stand against bullying might have lead to exclusion. One of the men had a strong position in his secondary school. He could be on friendly terms with one of the bullied boys and invite him to join the group without any negative reactions from the others, but he did not actively try to stop bad jokes and teasing.

An interviewee had experienced that a girl in her first class had been bullied both by boys and girls because she easily lost her temper, shouted and fought back, something girls should not do. In her teens a new girl in the class had misbehaved in ways that were not accepted by the leading girls in the class. They made her stay away from school by freezing her out and calling her names. She managed, however, to return and stay in school when she got support from the school nurse and a small group of girls she could trust as they were not members of the group that had bullied her.

Three students reported episodes when teachers had been bullied by pupils in form 7–9 of compulsory school. Some of these events were told as stories about humorous teasing, others as cruel outbursts of frustration when teachers could not cope with a difficult class. There were also examples of organised and spontaneous revenge when the teacher was regarded as the enemy. The hierarchy among the pupils was erased at least as long as the class was in involved in such actions of revenge.

**Uncertainty about sexual harassment**

Initially the interviewees did not recall that they had experienced what they would define a sexual harassment. One women was shocked by what she met when she began to study psychology at the university. It was a large group of students. The men dominated the public arena and the atmosphere made her remain silent, even when she wanted to ask questions or argue. She had never had that experience before but she had now learnt that at the university women participated more actively in discussions in small groups or when they were in majority.

According to some of the interviewees, men are often given much attention both by the women students and by the teachers in groups with few men. They also think that students are generally more positive to men as lecturers. This was not defined as sexual harassment, but rather as gender equity issues.

Three women had been verbally bullied at school by their teachers – two by women, one by a man. I would define their examples as sexual harassment or gender bullying. The teachers had repeatedly used degrading names in front of class, in two cases related to the girl's body, in the third case by not using her proper name, but calling her 'saucy girl number one', and her only friend in the class 'saucy girl number two'.

One student referred to some very unpleasant things that had happened at her upper secondary school. An elderly supply teacher was very disinterested in his work in class, the girls tried to avoid him as he had something unpleasant around him. The interviewee knew that he had sexually intimidated and frightened one of the girls in her class. He had
used computers at school to load down pornography and many teachers were shocked, but he was allowed to stay for quite a while, as there was a shortage of teachers.

Four interviewees said that sexist language had been part of everyday life at school, used both by girls and boys, but mostly by boys, sometimes just to express annoyance, sometimes in order to intimidate a special girl or boy. One of the men students had realised that his generation and the younger ones in his hometown lived in a culture of sexist language. He began to reflect on the meaning of those words when he became a student and realised how degrading they were both for users and listeners. Now he disliked the jargon when he met his friends at home.

One student had friends at home that had been victims of sexual violence, one of them when she was still a student in upper secondary school. All interviewees referred to fears and frustration Hagamannen had created through of assault downtown Umeå and a rape that took place on Campus a few years ago. The police did not succeed in finding the perpetrator. Since then the realities of rape have been frightening for many women at the university. The interviewees spontaneously talked about how they had reacted and how it had affected them and still does.

The interviewees thought that sexual harassment was a rather unusual phenomenon at the university, although they believed that it did happen sometimes. They suspected that those involved would probably not talk about it, especially if the perpetrator was a lecturer as they believe that students sometimes might be afraid to be looked upon as trouble-makers.

Pubs, restaurants and parties were looked upon as more or less free zones for dating, hunting and flirting. What happened there was not defined as sexual harassment at the university. The women said that they had to take care not to get into trouble. The strategies differed among the interviewees from not visiting such places at all, to never going out alone, not drinking too much or as one them said by showing your strength by socking the person who did not respect a NO.

**Tools for teachers**

None of the students felt that they had learnt how to deal with conflicts among pupils in school. A few had had some good experiences of how problems had been solved by teachers, when they themselves were pupils, or by supervisors when they had been practicing in school. They had not encountered bullying or heard anything about sexual harassment during their short periods as trainees at schools, but they were aware of the fact that they might have to face such problems when they began to work as teachers. They were convinced that many of the theoretical courses they had had could have included practice. Conflict solving skills had been discussed at seminars, but not used when there had been a very severe conflict that had involved both students and teachers according to one of the students. The methods used had been to try to silence what was going on.

Three women have taken part in courses as scoutmasters and riding-masters and had had experiences of being group leaders and instructors that they thought would be more useful for them in the future work as teachers than anything they had so far learnt about group leadership and conflict solving at the Teacher Education of the University of Umeå.
The interviewees believe that by promoting *learning by doing* and by developing teaching methods that are combinations of theory and practice in the Teacher Education of the University of Umeå would provide students with much better tools for their professional life as teachers including conflict solving and awareness of the gender issues.

**Reflections**

The interviews contain convincing information about the students’ willingness to learn how to prevent and stop bullying and sexual harassment. They know that they will be expected to handle such problems as teachers. They feel that they need practice and they think that the connection between theory and practice should be strengthened in many courses. How to meet these demands from students is a great and important challenge for the Faculty of Teacher Education.

As mentioned before the interviews are very few in number and the results cannot be used for generalizations. The results have inspired reflections about values and attitudes concerning gender relations and difficulties connected to definitions of sexual harassment, and I wish to conclude this article by discussing some of them.

The interviewees have an understanding of the concept of sexual harassment that seems to be very close to the definition used in the Gothenburg study, as they made a distinction between sexual harassment and gender bullying (Eliasson 1998). They had experienced or noticed a very few instances of gender bullying, nothing they would label as sexual harassment, which is not surprising as sexual harassment usually takes place when nobody is observing what is going on. The interviewees thought that sexual harassment was an rare phenomenon at the university although they had heard that it did happen. However, they believed that someone who has been sexually harassed or bullied would prefer not to speak out about what had happened as students do not want to be looked upon as trouble-makers.

Some students referred to instances of gender bullying from their own schools but none of them had seen or heard anything they would label as bullying, sexual bullying or harassment in schools where they had been teacher trainees. The interviewees might have been lucky enough to have their practice in schools with few problems. Another explanation might be that the interviewees now are grown-ups and not directly involved in what is going on among the pupils in a classroom or in a corridor. The fact they are adults might make it difficult for them to decode what is going on among pupils.

School is an arena for gender processes and being gendered is of great importance for young girls and boys, and especially so in a period of their lives when sexuality, gender identity and falling in and out of love are of great importance. Sexual bullying is denied and ignored at school for various reasons; tradition, teachers’ work loads, prudence or ignorance (Duncan 1999). It would be interesting to find out if the ignorance and passivity is partly due to a very special form of adult blindness, an inability to take in and understand gender processes among teenagers, as these processes change and develop in close relations to what is going on in the surrounding world.

In an overview of research about changes in the gender patterns in school in the direction of gender equity, the conclusion was that new forms of interaction between boys and
girls in classrooms have not been established, but some displacements in gender patterns related to other social structures have been observed. (Öhrn 2002, 42–46).

Four of the interviewees were academic pioneers in their families. I did not focus on questions about class background but, it seems as if there is a relationship between the frequency of sexist language used at school and the social structure of the area where the school is situated. When studying gender processes among young people many different aspects have to be considered, as well as different ways of coping with conflicting demands and ideologies.

An ethnologist who studied one class during the last three years of compulsory school found that the girls tended to reduce the effect of sexist words, as they said that such words had now lost their original meaning and were now used to express annoyance and anger, replacing old-fashioned curses. But it was obvious though that the researcher in some situations observed reactions showing that it was an insult to be called whore or to have to listen to other sexist expressions. (Lundgren 2000).

What we do know is that gender bullying and sexual harassment to a large extent are still the hidden agendas in schools, at universities and in the workplace as well as in other areas in Sweden. There are at least two conflicts to consider when we are trying to understand this. One is perhaps locally Swedish, another worldwide. As I see it the first one is related to the history of the equal opportunities policy in Sweden. The other one is related to what I defined as the sexification of modern societies (Hägg 1998).

The ideology of equal opportunity is generally accepted, or at least not openly questioned in Sweden. As mentioned before, there have been great changes in the direction of gender equity, but the top-down administration of equal opportunity programmes in the workplace and in schools have also created resistance and indifference. This is an issue that needs to be highlighted from many different perspectives. The ideology and ambition has been to create equal opportunities but in spite of many efforts to implement this in everyday life it has been difficult to realise. Demands from the workplace, men’s resistance to take responsibility for housework and childcare have given individuals and families problems that they have tried solve. One solution for many families has been to maintain a very traditional division of labour at home. During the 90’s the huge cutbacks in the public sector, and the inability of the welfare state to keep up with the demands and the development of the neoliberal market economy has led to a dismantling of the welfare state. Although no one officially wants to change the ideology of equity, there are arguments against this ideology. These arguments are neither connected to power relations or the construction of normality and sexuality, but rather welfare of children and the economical differences between men and women. Other arguments used to question gender equity are that as we still have not reached the goals in spite of all efforts, we have to accept that people do not want gender equity, it is against our nature – women prefer other things than men, we are different and we should accept that.

Equality of opportunity plans contain action plans against sexual harassment. In many of these plans a good workplace is defined as a place that it is free of discrimination and harassment. The action plans are of great importance when someone wants to report a case of sexual harassment but if and when someone is sexually harassed, reporting might be difficult, as it will break the official image of normality. This might create problems despite good law especially in two situations. One is when the harasser has a leading position and/or is a person with influence and power and support from many people inside
and outside the workplace. Another situation is when the offences are defined as gender bullying and as such are not taken seriously. The comments might be something like this: it was not meant to be an offence; it was just a joke. To keep silent might then be the easiest way out. The students in the interviews hinted at such explanations when they expressed that students are afraid to be looked upon as troublemakers both in relation to lecturers and fellow students.

The law from 1999 that was based on The Government bill Kvinnofrid (1997/98:55) is a landmark in the legislation about sexual violence in Sweden. The bill Violence Against Women comprises, inter alia, new legislation, changes in legislation, measures for a more effective work within the police, the prosecution and the social services and increased financial support for the shelters. The work with the Bill has been coordinated by the Minister for Equality Affairs in consultation with the Minister for Justice and the Minister for Health and Social Affairs.

The law has strengthened the possibilities for professionals, as well as volunteers engaged in issues related to gender equity, and there are many counteracting forces fighting for supremacy in the construction of gender and sexuality.

Gender equity policy in Sweden has really supported changes in many ways but also created new ideals to live up to. There are laws and action plans to support victims of sexualised violence. Sexual harassment, including gender bullying, is now defined as one pole of the continuum of various forms of sexualised violence. This definition is not yet generally accepted and I am afraid that this broad definition of sexual harassment will create confusion.

Mental and ideological pressure on individuals and groups to achieve and live up to gender equity might be a new pressure to keep silent and not report about when gender bullying and sexual harassment are used as abuse of power.

The globalisation and the development of the market economy have opened up new possibilities of influence quite contrary to the equal opportunity ideology. As I see it this conflict has not been openly studied, questioned and related to the official gender equity policy. In Sweden radical changes in living conditions have taken place and what I call sexification has rapidly invaded everyday life since the 80's. The sexification of everyday life is closely connected to the new economy. The human need for closeness and love, sexual lust and sensualism is openly exploited commercially in a more explicit and forceful way as commodities than ever before. (Hägg 1998, 21–22). Almost all commodities on the market are gendered, either in themselves by the way they are directed to either the real man or the real woman, or by the way they are advertised. By combining things, cars, telephones, food, insurances etc to bodies, part of bodies, romantic scenes, love making, happiness, consumers are expected to connect feelings and sexuality with these commodities. New media have opened up for sexist advertising everywhere. The press has followed. Serious daily newspapers publish pictures and text that would have been labelled as pornography 20 years ago, but also articles against sexualised violence and trafficking. There are many other examples of such ambivalent liberalism all around us. The production of pornography, videos and films, where sexualised violence is practiced in many different ways are now easily available everywhere. The development during the last decades has in this respect been a backlash against values crucial to women’s movement
all around the world. At the same time, however, feminist researchers have made visible hidden realities about sexualised violence (Eliasson 2000, 157–183). There are many hidden connections to detect here and discuss in relation to gender equity policies in Sweden and elsewhere.

The relation between more liberal attitudes towards drugs and prostitution in some countries in Europe and the EU, sexualised violence, sexual violence against children and trafficking undermine efforts to create gender equity. The fight for freedom for girls and women as individuals and human and sexual beings is a threat to male power all around the world.

The interviewees made a division between what is acceptable in working and in private life. They almost took for granted that sexual harassment was to be expected at students’ pubs, clubs and restaurants, as at any other public place of the same kind where you expect people to take initiatives and try to find partners, but as a no is not always accepted as a no, women must have strategies when faced with unwanted behaviour. It goes without saying that reactions to rejections sometimes are very abusive. Because of this it is important to use strategies that do not make unpleasant situations worse. Women have to be careful and responsible – otherwise they might get into trouble.

These attitudes among adult women have some similarities with gender process going on in school. According to studies in the UK young women have developed an understanding of femininity, masculinity and sexuality that is mainly based on beliefs and ideas of what men like and want. This attitude has been defined as male in the head. The girls tried to live up to what they thought or knew were their partners’ expectations were even when it caused them a lot of trouble (Holland et al. 1998, 171–191). It is likely that young women in Sweden also have male in the head as conceptions of themselves, of their bodies and of sexuality. There were some such tendencies in a Swedish study about women students and their sexual habits. Some of them accepted things they did not like, as they knew or believed that this was what their partners wanted and liked. (Thydén 1999, 6).

Knowledge about attitudes and values around sexuality is needed to shed light on the meaning and consequences of sexual harassment. The ongoing sexification in society and the media production of sexualised violence are still concealed in many clouds that have to be blown away if policymakers at all levels really wish to find out what kind of concepts and ideas young people and adults have about gender relations and sexuality.

Conclusions for further studies about sexual harassment

We had problems finding students willing to participate in the pilot study. This is a problem we have to analyse in the first place. It is very important that questions about sexual harassment must be very clearly specified and defined in questionnaires and interviews. This was not satisfactorily done in the reported pilot study.

A design for a study at Umeå University about the frequency of sexual harassment should comprise students from different fields of study and preferably have one questionnaire for women and one for men. These questionnaires should contain questions about attitudes and experiences related to sexuality, pornography, prostitution and other
issues related to sexism and sexification of everyday life. In-depth interviews with students who have experienced sexual harassment would help us to understand what kind of problems such experiences create and what kind of support the university should provide. Without more knowledge and deeper analysis many efforts to stop sexual harassment and gender bullying are like playing blind man's buff.

References


Gender and Sexual Harassment and Coercion at the University of Oulu – Challenges for Measures

Mervi Heikkinen

Abstract
The purpose of this article is to continue the discussion regarding gender and sexual harassment and coercion at the University of Oulu. In the 1990’s, gender and sexual harassment, which has been evident in its many forms, was discussed by Vappu Sunnar, Arja Rautio, Matti Nuutinen and Marja Väyrynen. Their research examined the University of Oulu as a studying environment. In this article, I will examine encounters of gender and sexual harassment and coercion based on data collected during the spring 2002. According to the data, Oulu University undergraduates, doctoral students and staff have experienced gender and sexual harassment and coercion. People encountering harassment are quite alone with the situation and unsure about how to deal with it. The problem is not individual, however, but rather organisational.

Introduction
Western science is presented as a way to acquire scientific, objective knowledge. Metaphorically, masculine scientists expose and conquer feminine nature. The whole scientific community are defined by this implicit heterosexist ideology. This ideology with its unbalanced power structure produces inequality at every level and function of the university. Organisations, such as universities, are central for the production and reproduction of gender.1 The patterns of activities are then generalised by the actors of the university to other organisations. (Acker 1992, 259, Calás & Smirchic, 1992, 223) Sexual harassment can be viewed as gendered component of organisational structure (Acker 1990, 142).

1. According to the university law, the goal of universities is to produce knowledge based on scientific research and to offer teaching based on it.
People can meet their spouse and mate in their working and educational environments. (i.e. Haavio-Mannila, 1988). Academics find their spouse from the academy, often even from the same discipline (cf. Husu 2001). Gender, sexuality, caring and attraction are part of the human relationships and interaction even within working and educational environments. Gender and sexual harassment and coercion, however, do not involve caring and attraction, but misuse of power to subordinate another person in the sexual domain. (Thomas & Kitzinger 1997, 1, Mankkinen 1999, 220.)

Gender harassment consists jokes and comments that implicate stereotypic and discriminative attitudes. In addition to this, sexual harassment includes physical or verbal unwanted sexual intentions against good manners (seductive behaviour), sexual bribes, compelling and coercion. (Mankkinen 1995, 24–25) Gender and sexual harassment and coercion is unwanted and one-sided physical or verbal sexual behaviour where sexuality and/or gender are used as a mean for subordination, questioning or control (e.g. Sunnari et al., 2002). Sexual harassment is defined as one form of sexual violence along with prostitution, rape and child sexual abuse. According to the feminist definition, it is identified as one manifestation of the larger patriarchal system in which men dominate women (Thomas & Kitzinger 1997, 1).

At the beginning of the research of this topic area, before the concept was fully established, the phenomenon was examined by applying such concepts as 'unwanted sexual attention', 'sexual coercion' and, increasingly, 'sexual harassment'. The earliest studies where the concept of sexual harassment was used were conducted in North America in the mid-1970's, when women movements brought into publicity individual women's experiences of discrimination encountered in working organisations, demanding justice for them. The adoption of the concept of sexual harassment and the definition of the phenomenon resulted in the understanding of sexual harassment as a manifestation of gender discrimination. Along with increasing research and awareness raising, the phenomenon that had previously been understood as a private trouble was transformed into a public societal and organisational problem. The concept became established in a relatively short time, and it was considered simultaneously within both educational and occupational organisations. (Thomas & Kitzinger 1997, 1–5.)

According to Alison M. Thomas and Celia Kitzinger, sexual harassment can be divided into 'quid pro quo harassment', which is manifested as sexual claims, and 'environmental harassment', which refers to harassing behaviour because of gender and makes the victim feel defensive in their working or educational environment. (Thomas & Kitzinger 1997, 4–5) Sue Wise and Liz Stanley (1987) define sexual harassment as 'sledgehammer harassment', which is used to refer to the most extreme cases of offensive physical assault. 'Dripping tap' harassment consists of everyday repetition of encounters that might be ignored, such as whistling and estimating looks at body and clothing. According to Wise and Stanley (1987, 114) and Thomas (1997, 133) this form of harassment is most common.

According to Debbie Epstein (1997, 167), normative gender has been produced through heterosexist harassment, where the assumed desire for the 'opposite' gender is central. These binary understandings of gender are based on the conception of heterosexuality as normal and the norm, whereupon homosexuality is forbidden. According to her, this is the central reason for the existence of 'sexist harassment', which she presents in relation to the enforcement of heterosexuality. Epstein criticises the explanations of sex-
ual harassment, which have been strongly related to the reinforcement and preservation of the power relationship between men and women. She represents four factors that are implicated in power relations: 1) Gendered and sexual relations are built up in line with other differences, such as age, race, ethnicity, class and/or disability. 2) Heterosexuality is the norm, and exceptions from that are punishable. 3) Harassment of homosexual men or men who are assumed to be homosexual is part of the building of power structures. 4) Sexist harassment and coercion can be seen as pedagogy whereby men and women are educated to accept the heterosexual norm (Epstein 1997, 158).

The phenomenon of 'sexual harassment' has been studied in Universities and Higher Education Scandinavia, Europe (e.g. ESIB and the European Conference on Gender Equality in Higher Education), and, with a great impact, in North America.

In Finnish studies of the field since the late 1980's, the concept referring to the phenomenon has been 'gender harassment and coercion' (sukupuolinen häirintä ja ahdistelu). In this Finnish concept, 'sexual' has been replaced by 'gender'. The reason for this is that in former studies, sexuality has been verified as a tool of power as well as an area in which power is used. (Mankkinen 1995, 24)

Research on gender and sexual harassment

Quantitative research has been done on gender and sexual harassment, but the results are quite variable. According to the Finnish Equality Barometer, 29% of women and 14% of men have been sexually harassed (Melkas 1998). Especially young women encounter harassing behavior (ibid.). In research conducted in Finnish universities (Mankkinen 1995, Varjus 1997, Sinkkonen 1997), gender harassment and coercion have been encountered by 2–34% of students and staff. The results vary by discipline, but the common trend is that women are harassed more than men. These studies have aimed to confirm that the phenomenon of gender and sexual harassment is a serious issue. Awareness of the phenomenon and the impact of women's movement correlate positively to the quantity of sexual harassment experiences.

Quantitative research about sexual harassment and coercion is Teija Mankkinen's study (1995). Mankkinen collected her data using questionnaires and conducting eight thematic interviews. The focus in her research was to discover who had been subjected to sexual harassment during their career, who had encountered sexual harassment during the

2. The National Unions of Students in Europe conducted a project titled "The hidden Agenda – sexual violence in Universities" which is co-funded by the Daphne Initiative of the European Commission. The project produced altogether three reports 1) Best Practices against Sexual Harassment and Violence at European Institutions of Higher Education, 2) Conference report on ESIB's Gender Conference: The Hidden Agenda – Sexual Harassment in Universities, and 3) Research and Results on Sexual Harassment and Violence at European Institutions of Higher Education.
3. Publication "Hard Work in the Academy" is an outcome of the First European Conference on Gender Equality in Higher Education held in Helsinki 1998.
4. Quantitative workplace research has been done in the US, UK, and Canada, where 42–88% of women and 15–33% of men have encountered unwanted sexual attention. (Thomas & Kitzinger 1997, 4).
5. Akateemista nuorallatanssia. Sukupuolinen häirintä ja ahdistelu Helsingin yliopistossa.
past two years, what the sexual harassment had been like. The results of the study showed that 11% of the staff members and 3% of the students had experienced sexual harassment at some point during their time at the university, while 7% of the staff members and 3% of the students had been harassed during past two years. (Mankkinen, 1999, 219)

According to Mankkinen (1995, 25), unwelcome and one-sided sexual or sexually toned verbal and physical behaviour was emphasised in the informant's definitions of sexual harassment and coercion. Mankkinen points out that her informants frequently defined sexual harassment, which makes her conclude that the definitions are commonly known and socially approved. (Mankkinen, 1995, 25–26)

Liisa Husu's (2001) study about women in academy addresses academic women's experiences of hidden forms of discrimination. According to her, sexual harassment and motherhood are particular, because she interprets these topics as especially gendered. Data were gathered from eleven Finnish universities. Husu's findings are controversial to the public idea of Finland as one of the most advanced countries in equality matters.7

Would you tell about your experiences? Study about gender and sexual harassment and coercion in the University of Oulu

The University of Oulu personnel strategy (1995) states that the university shall provide equal working circumstances and activity and career development opportunities for everybody in spite of their worldview, ethnic background, age, religion or sexual orientation. However, a survey dealing with student abuse in the University of Oulu in the 1990's (Rautio, Nuutinen & Väyrynen 1999) and a study about the students' study burden (Sunnari 2000) have shown that students have experienced gender and sexual harassment and coercion. The encountered harassment has consisted of sexist study materials, sexually toned gestures or expressions, sexual hints and jokes, sexually oriented improper comments about appearance, body, clothing or private life and even pressure for sexual favours. Sexual harassment has been experienced mainly by women, but also by men. Harassment made the students feel confused and furious, but it occasionally even led to a change of career line. (Sunnari et al. 2002)

The University of Oulu has appointed four equality contact persons for students and staff. For the past four years the individuals who have encountered sexual harassment have had a possibility to contact them.8

The main aim of data collection in the spring 2002 was to provide an arena for telling about experiences of gender and sexual harassment and the thoughts related to it. Students

6. Sexism, support and survival.
7. In Finland, slightly more than 50% of university graduate students are women and half of PhD students are women, but only 20% of them will get top positions at universities. The university organisation is traditionally patriarchal and hierarchical and maintains a homosocial atmosphere. According to it, men help only men to get promoted in their career.
8. The staff relations manager has received five contacts concerning sexual harassment during the past three years. The male student contact person has been contacted once during the past year and the female contact person three times in a four-year period. This information was gathered by phone calls to each person in the early fall 2002. These contact persons mentioned a possibility of overlapping cases.
and staff were encouraged to write by presenting provoking questions: Does gender and sexual harassment and coercion continue even after the organisational, societal and juridical emphasis to on equality issues in the late 1990’s? Is there a need to discuss the topic anymore?

**Informing students and staff about study in university newsletters**

Students and staff of the University of Oulu were publicly informed about the study. The first phase of the study was started on the international women’s day, which was the 8th of March, 2002. The university's internal newsletter 'Tietopisto' and the student bulletin 'Ylioppilaslehti' published my article on gender and sexual harassment and coercion. In this article, I invited students and staff to write informally about both their own experiences and incidents they had witnessed as outsiders. How did the harassment happen? Where did it take place? How did others react to it? How was the situation seen and experienced? What kinds of procedures were used in the harassing situation? What things affected the situation? How can harassment be prevented? The virtual www form enabled anonymous replies, and the other possibilities to reply included e-mail, mail and telephone. The www form included a box for contact information, in case if person was interested in further discussion about the issue.

The second phase of data collection took place in May 2002. I mailed letters to the university staff. The content of the letter was the same as in article published in the university newsletter and the student bulletin: information about the study and a request to tell about personal experiences or incidents seen from outside. In between these two phases of data collection, Women's Studies in the University of Oulu, the NCRB project and the Aware project organised a seminar entitled 'Dialogue between Africa and the Arctic'. The seminar dealt with violence in educational organisations.

The informants contacted me through a www form, e-mail, mail or phone. Additionally, some people talked to me face to face about their experiences of gender and sexual harassment and coercion. I had altogether 18 contacts during the period of data collection. In this article, I will examine a limited set of data, which consists of the experiences of the people who replied to me and gave their contact information. This enabled me to ask for a permission to use their experiences in this article anonymously and to continue dialogue with them.

9. The 1987–1995 equality law, the 1997 University of Oulu functional equality plan, which was noticed and rewarded nationally, and the 2001 instructions for sexual harassment cases, when equality contact persons were appointed.
10. [Infobite]
11. [Student paper]
13. The Aware project’s "Increasing Awareness in Educational Organisations of Sexualised and Gendered Violence" publication and web project 2001–2002 are partly funded by the European Union DAPHNE initiative.
Description of the gender and sexual harassment and coercion cases encountered and their consequences

The data came from seven people, who are both students and staff from University of Oulu. They are six women and one man from the Faculty of Natural Sciences, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Medicine, Technical Faculty and Faculty of Humanities. The replies of five women are about personal experiences of gender and sexual harassment and coercion, while one woman described two incidents witnessed from outside. The male respondent wrote about a female colleague's revealing clothing.

A woman who belongs to the university staff describes harassment incidents that two female exchange students have experienced. These are the two harassment cases in the data that had been witnessed by an outsider.

Exchange students have been harassed in the university. A professor called one foreign female exchange student openly and several times "Samantha Fox", referring to her breasts.

A male member of the university faculty harassed another foreign exchange student in a coed sauna evening. The student asked if this was due to her dark skin and her being different from the others. This faculty member was pertinently reprimanded in a faculty board meeting.

A female student told about her experience of trying to solve the harassment case with negotiations at the university, which did not lead to a compromise.

My own harassment experience occurred in the corridor of the student apartments connected to the university building. An unknown male touched my buttocks while passing me in the dark stairway leading to my apartment. I was shocked, but I spoke out to the harasser. In the following discussion, it turned out that he was not a tenant but a senior researcher of the university. I wanted a third party to be present in the negotiation and I contacted the equality ombudsman of the university, whom I told about the incident and my wishes of how the incident should be handled. Equality ombudsman contacted the perpetrator and discussed the incident with him, but he wasn't interested in taking part in a common compromising meeting in which his superior, the personnel manager, a specialist in sexual harassment cases, the equality ombudsman and I would all be present. He told the equality ombudsman that he would file a criminal report if anybody would contact him regarding the case. My means to solve the situation seemed to come to the end and I didn't know what else to do. Finally, after two months, I decided to file my own criminal report of the harassment incident with the police.

From the university's standpoint, it was problematic that the harassment occurred in the corridor of the student apartments connected to the university building. This area is not governed by the legal obligations of the university, because it belongs to the student housing organisation. Still, the university staff has access to enter the building.

In these two different reports, the result was that the perpetrator had to take responsibility for his actions. In the first case the perpetrator was reprimanded and in the second one the incident became a police case. The decision to make a harassment case public at the orga-
nisation level is demanding. In these cases, the harassed person was a female student and harasser was a male university professor and a male senior assistant. All the males had and continued to have an organisational position within the university where the harassment took place.

In two cases a female student came to talk to me personally. They told me about the harassment they had experienced. In the first case a male student constantly stalking the female student in university surroundings. He followed her to the lectures and sat down very close to her. After a while she felt that he came too close as he was constantly breathing to her neck and seeking his way into her company. Later on he tried to use an excuse to visit her. She felt anxious because of this kind of behaviour. She did not known what else to do than try to avoid him the best she could. Finally, tired, she told him to stay away from her with strong words. That helped a little so the person was afraid to come so close.

The second case is from the situation where a certain male advisor gave a course assignment for the female student, by saying “Here is an easy verbal assignment for a girl”. The female student felt intellectually belittled, because of the assignment that she got was more challenging than other assignments. She said that first she was astonished and then later furious. She felt that the student advisor questioned all female students' self-confidence by his attitude and belittling behaviour.

A postgraduate student described how her ingenuous relationship with her supervisor was shattered during a trip connected with her studies.

Having attended the seminar in a good working relationship, we went out for a meal and a drink. In that situation, my supervisor asked to go into my room (he made clear his intentions of going to bed together). The situation was very difficult, confusing and shocking, and it destroyed my trust in him as a work mate, especially as a supervisor and any future possibilities. Afterwards, it was impossible for me to seek support from my supervisor. I wasn't able to share my ideas with him. My encounters with him were limited to the obligatory meetings that were crucial for me to continue my postgraduate studies. Because of the lack of confidentiality, our discussions were unproductive and I developed an internal need to avoid him. Support from my supervisor would have been extremely important. Because of his special expertise on the very specific research field. I was able to discuss the situation with only one fellow worker, who had difficulty believing it (because my supervisor was considered an "old-fashioned gentleman"). Afterwards, she told me that she understands what I was telling, because of his similar behaviour experienced by other colleagues, but then I was alone and left alone with my research work. My motivation for working began to lag. I wasn't able to return to work and had to take an extended sick leave. There were several reasons affecting my health, but the working relationship with my supervisor and the threatening change in it were not insignificant.

A male staff member asked in his e-mail about the clothing of a female staff member and whether it can be defined as sexual harassment.

Can improper clothing be considered sexual harassment at the workplace, and how can improper clothing be defined? Wearing a mini skirt to the workplace has been discussed in publicity. This time, the question is about not wearing a brassiere.
young female worker doesn't use a brassiere, and she sometimes wears really thin blouses so that her breasts and nipples can be seen very clearly. For me, it is the same as if men would not wear any underwear and would be dressed in thin, white, cotton trousers that you could see through.

The respondent doesn't claim directly that this incident has been harassment. However, he responds to my request to tell of gender and sexual harassment and coercion. This raises a question: “Is it acceptable for a man express feeling uncomfortable about women’s clothing?” Clothing has been and still is one of the very central forms to perform one’s gender. Gendered appearance is strictly controlled, reproduced through fashion and maintained through mass media. Connell describes with the term ‘emphasized feminity’ the pattern of feminity, which is given the most cultural and ideological support (1987, 187). In fashion characteristic for femininity is emphasis of sexuality. Feminine body figures are visible, which can be practically produced by see-through materials. According to this the core of the fashion is to portray girl and women sexually seductive for a male gaze. Connell (1987, 188) notes that most of the promotion of emphasized feminity is organised, financed and supervised by men. Emphasized femininity is performed especially for men and it is linked to the private realm of the home and bedroom.

A female university staff member tells about her experience in the working environment.

I wonder if the trouble caused by foreign men bring to their female colleagues at the workplace has been discussed. I was polite and friendly to our foreign newcomer. Once he asked if I was dating and I gave an affirmative answer. Still, he sent me an awkward message regarding a trip with a nice companion that I supposedly won. I answered that I wasn't interested. Later on, he sent me a bunch of flowers that I returned. I was really embarrassed and didn't know what to do. My work mate discussed the issue with another foreigner, who explained the situation to another person. After that, I was left by myself. Later on, I discussed the issue with another foreign man about possible misinterpretations, etc. I wondered why this man who bothered me didn't accept the fact that I was dating. The person answered "of course not", because if I had been dating, my male friend would have intervene and settled the situation. I was shocked. Finnish women learn to take care of such situations by themselves.

The female respondent ponders how to consider cultural manners when communicating with people of various ethnic backgrounds. Indisputably, cultures have different ways of defining acceptable interaction and behaviour between man and woman. The interesting point in this experience is that she did not mention foreign women causing trouble by their behaviour. Here we come to the heterosexual norm of organisational interaction. It is assumed that the perpetrator and the harassed are heterosexual.

Struggle in the domain of sexuality is essential in the workplace power games, where women's success depends on how they manage to negotiate their own sexuality (Acker 1992, 254, Pringle 1989, 176). Sexuality is also an area where women are treated with double standards. In a heterosexist culture, women face expectations of sexuality and sexual favours. If they respond to these expectations, their educational and career achievements will be presented and viewed based on their sexuality.
Overview of the situation based on the cases

The analysed data included three cases where the victim or the perpetrator of gender and sexual harassment was a foreigner. In all of these cases, the perpetrators were Finnish or foreign male staff of the university, while the victims were Finnish or foreign women who were studying or working in the university.

All cases discussed here were experienced as harassment or harassment seen from the outside. None of the informants told about harassing someone. People have experienced gender and sexual harassment and coercion in their workplaces and educational contexts. Could the perpetrators be unaware of the harassing nature of their behaviour? Connell's examination of masculinity offers an interesting point of view to this. According to him, masculinities are cultural and social constructions that are centrally produced and reproduced through misogyny and homophobia. The central construction of a heteronormative culture is hegemonic masculinity. According to Connell, we could see gender and sexual harassment and coercion as part of the reproduction of the masculinities – this case having academia as its context (Connell 1987, 183).

Wise and Stanley's (1987) metaphoric concept 'dripping tap harassment' describes well the slow and continuous process of ignoring unwanted sexual and gendered behaviour. And their term 'environmental harassment' makes the phenomena a pervasive part of the context. The most extreme case, which could be defined as 'sledgehammer harassment', does not occur in the data. Gendered and sexual harassment took place in many forms but coercion was not reported. However, this does not mean that it does not occur at all.

Insults of physical inviolability and sexist harassment were experienced or observed in all of the seven cases. In seven cases, women were encountering harassment from a male perpetrator. Who was a professor, colleague, teacher, supervisor or another student. Harassment was described as unwanted touching, innuendoes or outrageous comments, belittling based on gender and sexist name-calling.

In one case, a female fellow worker's clothing caused a man feel uncomfortable. He described her see-through blouse without a brassiere as narcissistic and inappropriate clothing for the workplace.

Consequences of harassment for the victim, the harasser and the university organisation

The student and staff who had experienced harassment has developed physical and psychological symptoms, such as stress, physical illness, questioning oneself, shame and irritation. Among the students, gender and sexual harassment had been circumvented as an irritating situation, which remains as an unpleasant memory. The students were worried about the powerful position of the persons who could harass and belittle students. The students and staff were also unsure if the situations they described fulfilled the criteria of the harassment. There was also uncertainty how to deal with the situation, who to contact etc.

The postgraduate student described her uncertainty and lack of support after she had been harassed. "I was alone with the problem". The student's consultation of the equality ombudsman did not lead to the result she wanted "My means to solve the situation seemed to come to an end and I didn't know what else to do". A female staff member described her own experience as follows: "I was really embarrassed and I didn't know what to do". A postgraduate student also writes "I was able to discuss the situation with only one fellow worker who had difficulty believing it (because my supervisor was considered an "old-fashioned gentleman". According to the University of Oulu equality board, gender harassment and coercion is a personal experience based on the person's background and worldview. In this definition, the whole responsibility is left to the person itself.

According the current policy, at the moment when you are emotionally shocked, questioning yourself and feeling weakest after the harassing incident, you are expected to be personally responsible for the whole situation.

According to the equality law, workplaces and educational institutions are responsible for protecting their workers and students from harassment in the workplace and the educational environments. The university is obviously failing in this respect. These experiences definitely reveal a willingness to discuss and share the situation with others. They clearly implicate that harassment is not only a personal problem. It is not only a question of everyone's own definition, but rather a socially and culturally constructed understanding. These people do not present straightforward approaches that would be demanding to the university organisation.

In all these cases, the people who encountered harassment took care of the situation themselves. They aspired to solve the issue alone or with the support of a fellow worker and, in one case with, the support of the equality ombudsman. Bringing up the harassment case and dealing with it requires a lot of courage. Everybody should at least have the information of whom to contact in the case of sexual harassment. It seems that tackling the issue of harassment requires special resources and competencies from the working and studying environment, which are not fully developed yet.

For a harassed person, the situation is difficult. Studying and working becomes more complicated in the process of avoiding the harassing personnel. This also affects negatively one's career. Harassed people do not know who to contact, where they would get support from, and how they should act. Questioning concerning the person's experience of harassment experience victimises them again.

At the moment, the emphasis is on after-care of harassment. It doesn't mean that nothing can be done proactively. It is very obvious that the university organisation needs to put effort on preventive actions. The question about gender and sexual harassment concerns the whole university organisation, including victims, perpetrators, and those ignorant of the phenomenon. It is crucial to develop practices to support them and also confidential contact channels.15

It is a matter of individual experience and definition, but also of organisational and societal practice.

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15. My contribution was to develop a web-based contact form that enables people to contact anonymously or by including their names and contact information.
Conclusion

A small percentage of the total number of students and staff told about their experiences. These data were collected over a short period of time and with quite unassuming information. Sharing experiences about gender and sexual harassment and coercion requires many complex processes of becoming aware. First of all, the person must define the 'encountered harassment' as an exceptional behaviour, to name it as gender and sexual harassment and coercion, and also, while writing about it, admit it as a problem at least at some level (compare Heiskanen & Piispa 2000, 10–11). No-one told about failure or a long-lasting harassment experience. There is reason to think that there are many cases that have been silenced. In contemporary discussion, harassment has been viewed as especially shameful for the harassed person. The reason for harassment has been sought in the harassed person's provoking behaviour. Rhoda Unger and Cindy Crawford (1996, 536) point out that former victimisation of violence against women predicts a new possibility to be victimised. Accordingly, an individual cannot be left alone to cope with an incident of gendered and sexual harassment and coercion. Gendered violence is a wider organisational and cultural problem.

Kathleen V. Cairns (1997, 94) states that women rather keep silent and blame themselves about the gender and sexual harassment and coercion that they have encountered and are unwilling to report about the unjust behaviour they have faced. Cairns (ibid.) presents that silence is not a 'personal' problem, but a matter of fact produced by the systemic discrimination. She identifies three interconnected processes that produce silence and self-blame: 1) The woman's self is fragmented in the patriarchal society, where womanhood is defined through degrading and limiting questions instead of who. 2) The androcentric norms of social life reflect internalised physical and psychical adjustment to womanhood, through which embodied femininity and limited understanding about personal agency are formed. 3) Women's silence can also be seen as resistance. (Cairns 1997, 94) These responses to my request have made me sure that the issue has not been discussed yet, but this is rather a beginning. Carrie Herbert (1997, 30–31) presents three partial models to interfere with gender and sexual harassment and coercion. At first, teachers and lecturers should become aware about gender and sexual harassment and coercion. Secondly, educational organisations should have practical instructions for how to handle the issue. Thirdly, boys and men should be educated to be in equal interaction with girls and women without gender and sexual harassment and coercion. This last one is very challenging because we are already operating at the level of the cultural deep structures that define gender (Epstein 1997, Cairns 1997, Anttonen & Riimala 1998).

Jeff Hearn presents actions against sexual harassment, which includes levels of individual, more collective as well as organisational and managerial actions (Hagman & Hearn 1999, 217). I include these levels also in my suggestions of actions against sexual harassment. Furthermore, based on the results of this study and according to Herbert's model, I present three central challenges to the University of Oulu: 1) open public discussion, 2) clearly defined reporting and handling channels, and 3) continuous research on this phenomenon.
References

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Sexual Harassment in Layman Confessions and its Consequences

Vappu Sunnari, Anja-Leena Huotari and Niina Kuorikoski

Abstract

The article examines sexual harassment, which took place in a religious connection, in a situation in which the harassed person was experiencing a deep sorrow. In addition, the article takes a look at the ways in which the religious community reacted to the harassment and to the demands of the harassed person to bring the harasser to account for his actions. Violence connected to the event was both spiritual and sexual, but this article will focus mainly on the latter. The aim of the article is to advance the discussion on sexual violence and the ways to eliminate it not only in religious communities, but also in other educational communities.

Background

Finland is characterised by relatively high homogeneity in religion; 85 percent of the population belongs to the Evangelical-Lutheran Church, and there are only very small religious minorities in Finland (Välimaa 2001, 31). Additionally, there are some small revivalist movements inside the Evangelical-Lutheran Church (Heino 2002). The Laestadian movement, which emerged in the 18th century, is the biggest of the movements. (Lamminmäki-Kärkkäinen 2000.) The newest of these movements is the Neo-Pietism, which is also called the fifth revivalist movement. The emphasising of the gifts of the Holy Spirit such as healing the sick, prophesying and speaking in tongues is one of the characteristics of the charismatic movement (Havia 2002). Another characteristic is to assume that some people may receive a special anointment to act as “the channel of bles-

1. One of the central reasons for this might be that from the 16th century until 1889 all the people were automatically members of the Lutheran Church and it was the only religion that was allowed. More recently, it is possible to belong to other religious dominations.
During the past decade one special theme that has brought about co-operation between members of different revivalist movements is the resistance to the ordination of women. (Mikkola 2002.)

In spite of the religious homogeneity, the everyday life of the Finnish people is not very religious (Helve 1999). People become members of the church through baptism as a child, at which the child is given a name. After this, confirmation class, marriage and funeral are the only links to the church for many Finnish people.

Religious traditions have been the object of feminist critique in Finland since the 1980’s. The main focus of the critique has been the misogyny and underestimation of women that is included in the interpretations of the Bible, the Christian doctrines and the canon of the church. (Vuola 1994, Nenola 1999.) Recently the critical discussion has spread to the areas of corporeality and sexuality (Koivunen 1994, Vuola 1999). However, sexual violence that takes place in religious communities has not been studied in Finland. Recent studies elsewhere (e.g. Lundgren 1990, Boasdottir 1998), and some very problematic revelations – such as the paedophilia that was revealed in the Catholic Church, and in Sweden, the murder of a young Islamic woman who defied the Islamic gender system – have shown the importance of these discussions.

The focus of the article

The focus of the article is the on sexual harassment experienced by a Finnish female primary school teacher in a situation of layman confession and pastoral care, and on the long lasting process that followed the violent events. In the examination, special attention will be paid to which issues of the harassment-event and the following process will be given a meaning by the harasser and the representatives of the church, compared to which issues the harassed person will give meaning to. The article was written in tight cooperation with the harassed woman. She read and commented on the text in its different stages, and agreed that it be published. Other parties to the event have not read the article, but their identities will be protected by pseudonyms, by not mentioning details that would reveal their identity, and by not referencing their writings fully. Moreover, some non-essential details have been altered.

2. Every Finnish school child and adolescent, however, studies Evangelical-Lutheran religion in comprehensive school, and in the secondary school in almost all the cases their families do not belong to some other religion.
3. In religious contexts, confession refers to an event with two parts; the so-called confession and absolution (Kettunen 1998). In the Finnish Evangelical-Lutheran church, confession can take place in services as a so-called general confession, as a private ceremony between the employee of the church and the one who confesses, and as a layman confession. Both of these can be collective or private in form.
4. The pastoral care of the church refers to helping people in religious as well as other issues of life. Nevertheless, since the beginning of pastoral care, there have been disputes about the positions of psychology and theology in this matter. (Aalto et al. 1998.)
5. The representatives of the church refer to cathedral chapter and a high-ranking regional official of the church, who will be called Vartija in this article.
Sexual violence – a silenced problem in religious environments

"Male" violence against women is a form of violence that can be found all over the world. It has been argued that it is found in every socio-economic, ideology, class, race and ethnic grouping, although its extent and quality vary culturally and historically. (Bachman & Saltzman 1995, Heise 1997, Rospenda et al. 1998, UNIFEM 1999, United 1999.) What is more, issues connected to sexuality seem to be common components in that type of violence. However, the point is not sexuality as such, but rather control and domination in which gender and sexuality are used as tools. Many researchers even claim that sexuality is at the heart of male domination over women and prefer to use the term *eroticisation of women’s oppression* while discussing most of the male violence women encounter (e.g. Jackson 1987, Lundgren 1990, Richardson 1997).

Sexual harassment, coercion and rape are examples of sexual violence⁶. Sexual harassment was first – in the 1970’s – discussed in the context of working life and it was defined as the making of sexual demands in unequal power situations. More recently, the form of harassment received the specification *quid pro quo harassment*, allowing the discussion to extend to different environments, and new terms were introduced. The term *hostile environment harassment* is one example of that terminological development, and at the same time it is an example of the development in the way of understanding sexual harassment. *Hostile environment harassment* means sex-based harassment that creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment. (Thomas 1997, DeBruin 1997.)

Unexpectedness and one-sidedness are important characteristics of sexual harassment, and it is the same with power imbalance, which can be either formal or informal. Forms of sexual harassment are usually divided into three different types: verbal, such as remarks about body/looks, sexual jokes, verbal sexual advances; non-verbal, such as staring and whistling; and physical from unsolicited physical contact to assault/rape. (Vanen & Seder 1998, 5, Sandler & Shoop 1997, 5, 7–8.)

The significance of sexual harassment is often minimised and trivialised. Additionally, victims of harassment are labelled as over-sensitive, troublemakers or lacking a sense of humour. All the labels are stigmatising and they can hence influence the manner in which the victims wish to keep quiet about their harassing experiences and the consequences, although these consequences are plentiful: from beliefs about personal vulnerability, anxiety, self-doubt to marginalisation and dropping out of the harassing environment. On the social level, sexual harassment maintains and reinforces a hostile atmosphere, and stereotypes of women as sexual objects⁷. (Lott 1996, Mankkinen 1999, Cairns 1997, Thomas & Kitzinger 1997, Sandler & Shoop 1997, Timmerman & Bajema 1999, Eyre 2000.)

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⁶ Sexual violence can be defined to include any physical, visual or sexual act that is experienced by the woman or girl at the time or later, as a threat, invasion or assault, that has the effect of hurting her or degrading her and/or takes away her ability to control intimate contact. This definition includes, for example, rape, sexual assault, wife-beating, sexual harassment, incest, child sexual abuse and pornography. These acts are overwhelmingly, though not exclusively, male acts of aggression against women and girls. (Maynard & Winn 1997, 179.)

⁷ In this article, we do not deal with the part of sexual harassment that is used to maintain hegemonic forms of sexuality and to keep people of minority sexual orientation silent, nor the part of sexual harassment where women act as perpetrators. This does not mean that we would not see the importance of dealing with them.
Women keep quiet about most of the sexual harassment they have encountered. One of the reasons for this is that when bringing the experienced harassment before the public, the harassed person has to set her or his vulnerability on a double trial: because the act that has shaken the identity of the harassed person will become publicly known, and because the assumption that the careless and powerful harasser cannot be expected to act with high morality even when the harassment is dealt with publicly. Kathleen V. Cairns (1997) who has studied sexual harassment in Canadian academia perceives the fragmentation\(^8\) of women’s self-esteem and the psychology of adjustment, as well as the silence of women as a learnt resistance, as some of the reasons for keeping quiet.

Churches and other religious communities have factors connected to doctrines, as well as the organisation of action and the organisational idea that make them special in relation to sexual violence. Firstly, these institutions are often strongly patriarchal (Lundgren 1990, Farrell 1991, Nenola 1986, 1992, 1999, Koivunen 1994, Macey 1999)\(^9\). Secondly, in several religious doctrines sex and sexuality are made biological and they are perceived as belonging to the weakness of the flesh of a human being as distinct from the spiritual, which is perceived as valuable (Lundgren 1990, Farrell 1991, Koivunen 1994, Nenola 1999, Nissinen 1999. See also Räisänen 1991, 1996). Thirdly, in religious communities, the intimacy and confidentiality that is typically associated with family connections is emphasised, which can be seen, for example, in the terms *sister in faith* and *brother in faith*, even though the members of the community may know each other only very narrowly. Fourthly, the patriarchal interpretation of biblical texts maintains a very strong and dichotomic image of woman that builds on the metaphors of Madonna and whore, which is difficult to change (Farrell 1991, Koivunen 1994, Walker 1999, Sered 1999)\(^10\).

**Research material**

The data of the article is composed of interviews and written texts. The interviewee, who will be called Jaana in the article, is the victim of the event. Recorded interviews make up altogether five hours and 30 minutes and they have been recorded on four occasions. The interviews were confidential and they proceeded mainly on Jaana’s terms. Before the first interview, the interviewers received approximately 30 pages of Jaana’s written account of the event of harassment and its consequences. Unrecorded, complementary interviews and discussions amount to dozens of hours. In addition to the interviews, documents of the event written during the process by Jaana and Karisma, the harasser, as well as the

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8. According to Cairns (1997), the fragmentation of a woman’s self-esteem derives from the manner of the patriarchal culture to socialise a woman by underestimating and restricting what –questions instead of who- questions.
10. Hannele Koivunen has studied the ideal construction of Woman, and the polarisation between the immaculate asexual celestial Madonna and the sexual penitent whore in the Christian religion in more detail in her study of the myth of Mary Magdalene. The polarised images have been developed, continues Koivunen, according to the myths of the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene. Both Christian female figures are perceived in sexual terms, also influencing the religious archetypes of motherhood: the Good Mother and the Terrible Mother. Mary Magdalene, who has been deemed as a sinful woman, belongs to the latter group and the Virgin Mary to the former. (Koivunen 1994, 1995.)
high-ranking regional official of the church, Vartija, and the cathedral chapter have been used in the article.\textsuperscript{11}

The method of analysis of the data is located somewhere in the middle of a narrative analytic and discourse analytic approach. Firstly, this means that instead of cutting data into pieces typical of discourse analytic methods, the harassment was examined in the context of the event, and the story is also constructed from the event of harassment for the readers. One fundamental reason for this is that sexual harassment is defined as harassment particularly from its context. Secondly, special attention has been paid to how the different parties to the event and to the process following it argue about the issues. Both of these are typical of the narrative analysis. However, argumentation is also examined as a way to talk about issues and to influence the interpretations of the event, which is more typical of discourse analytic approaches. (Cf. Sunnari 1999.)

The case

Jaana is a 61 year old, former schoolteacher who is on early retirement. She is a former golf player who competed in the Finnish championships and a mother of one adult child. Her husband, who also was a teacher, died in the mid 1990’s. Karisma, the man who sexually harassed Jaana, is the husband of Jaana’s relative and approximately the same age as Jaana. Together with his academic day job outside the church, he has a locally significant confidential post in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church and does the layman pastoral care in a charismatic movement of the church.\textsuperscript{12} Karisma had told Jaana that he had been given the anointment in an international conference of the charismatic movement.

Jaana was left alone after the death of her husband as her daughter had just moved abroad. The disappearance of previous safety walls and networks made her seek solace in the Bible. She did find new hope in religion and confessed to a religious female friend \textsuperscript{13}. She was not a new member of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church because she had belonged to the church since her childhood, and taught religion for 35 years. Typical of Finns, religion did not have an important position in her earlier personal life. Jaana experienced her religious change as such an important matter that she let her relatives to know about it.\textsuperscript{14} One of the relatives she called was Kaisa. A couple of days later Kaisa called Jaana to let her know that her husband, Karisma, would visit Jaana on Thursday at her

\begin{itemize}
  \item There are many documents written by Jaana. That is because she used to process her encounters by writing about them immediately after the experiences. For Karisma’s part, two of his letters to Jaana and his account to the cathedral chapter have been used. And additionally, there are three letters to Jaana written by Vartija, and the reply of the cathedral chapter to Jaana’s request for investigation that are used.
  \item The so-called charismatic movement is influential in the Finnish Evangelical-Lutheran Church, mainly through the Neo-Pietism movement during the past few decades. In addition, the movement is influential among others in the Finnish Free Church and in the Pentecostal Movement.
  \item The confession is perceived as a part of the theology of penance. In the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, the confession is a sacrament that can be accepted only by the priest. In Lutheranism, the confession is not a sacrament so other members of the parish along with the pastor can accept it. Nevertheless, the confession is perceived as a sacred ceremony also in Lutheranism. The person who accepts the confession is seen as acting as a representative of God and as an intermediary. (Kettunen 1998.)
  \item As also A-M Hiltunen (1999) states, a religious change as well as other changes connected to the view of life often touches the whole identity of a person. It seems to have happened also in this case.
\end{itemize}
home and bring her religious material and “teach her in the matters of religion”. Jaana said that she would be in the sports hall on Thursday and asked if Karisma could leave the material in her mailbox. However, Karisma arrived at the sports hall, waited for the exercises run by Jaana to end, and drove after her to her home in his own car.

Jaana did not notice whether Karisma had in any way reacted to the fact that Jaana’s home was a house of mourning. He went straight to the living-room sofa and did not glance at the picture of Jaana’s deceased husband or the candles next to it. Jaana sat on an armchair a little way from the sofa and tried to start a conversation on a theme topical for her: the golf hobby. But Karisma’s code of behaviour was different. He put himself in the role of a religious leader by saying that at first they should pray and that Jaana should sit next to him on the sofa:

“(…) I wondered if this was the way how believers should sit. I looked at (…) the picture of my husband, (…) I felt anxiety and tried to move back to the armchair. Karisma appealed to God. He said that we could not pray properly if I do not sit next to him (side by side). I did not want to resist God, but I felt bad sitting next to Karisma. (…) Despite the fear I tried to convince myself that Karisma knows how to sit and how to pray because he has been religious for such a long time. (…) (Jaana 1997.)

The prayer lasted for 15–20 minutes. During the prayer Karisma tried to press Jaana’s head on his chest. This felt so uncomfortable to Jaana that she began to cry and tried to get up. Karisma stopped praying, took Jaana’s hand and said that next Jaana should confess all her sins to him. Jaana pointed out that she had already confessed. According to Karisma, the earlier confession was not sufficient because all the sins had not been addressed commandment by commandment. Jaana agreed to confess again thinking to prove Karisma that her faith was real and that she did not have secrets. Going through all the commandments she began to tell him things that she felt she had sinned. The First, the Second and the Third Commandment had become the most important ones for Jaana. She felt that she had disregarded them by being satisfied with her life, even though her relation to God had been distant. She did not have much to say about the Fourth Commandment or the Fifth, even though Karisma seemed to be waiting for something. So Jaana hurried to tell him that she felt she had disregarded the Sixth Commandment: She said that she had been unfaithful to her husband 29 years ago.

Karisma did not ask details of the issues connected to the first three Commandments, but he immediately seized up on sex. He started to question: “Where did it happen? How did it happen? With whom?” Jaana wondered if God wanted her to disclose the issue so accurately, and feeling confused, she started to answer questions trying to avoid intimate language. Jaana’s confusion grew because of the fact that Karisma held his mouth right by Jaana’s ear. Karisma, on the other hand, did not recognise the line of intimacy by his questions, and terrified, Jaana began to think that she was not in confession anymore. She slumped down to the arm of the sofa and began to cry. Karisma grabbed her and continued: Was it just screwing or was there something else?” Jaana felt that she was dying of the lack of oxygen but Karisma became more intense:

15. Karisma was rather strange to Jaana and her family. This can be seen, for example, from the fact that Karisma did not participate in the funeral of Jaana’s husband nor had he ever before been in Jaana’s home.

16. Karisma had said on the phone that as a result of receiving Christ Jaana should quit playing golf.
The confessional father (…) hissed: “Whore, I knew that You were a whore! I always know the sins of all women! (…) What do you think your daughter (…) will say if she learns that You are a whore!” I was paralysed with terror and along with crying I started to panic. I could not move but the cruel confessor shouted with both fists clenched: “You surely have been a bad mother!” I put my hand over my head to cover it and avoided his hand! (Jaana 1997, 2002a.)

The judgement of a whore paralysed Jaana, but being labelled a bad mother and blackmailing stirred up strong resistance in her. She decided that she should tell someone about what had happened so that she would be the last woman that Karisma tried to destroy. Karisma had announced that he would come to Jaana’s home in the role of the person who did pastoral care17 in his own parish, so Jaana thought that she could notify Karisma’s abuse to the vicar of Karisma’s parish. The ringing of the phone interrupted the situation. When Jaana was answering the phone Karisma pointed out that she should not tell anyone about the events of the evening. Jaana obeyed and kept quiet, although the caller, Jaana’s daughter, kept asking what was wrong with Jaana. After the phone call, Karisma continued talking about sexuality and sex. He, for example, described what kind of stories of sin connected to the Sixth Commandment he had heard from others who confessed and he stated that he had never sinned with sex, although it has sometimes been close.

After an hour-long confession that stopped at the Sixth Commandment, Karisma continued for three hours with “teachings” and, at the same time, he occasionally raged and flirted, as well as sexually harassed Jaana. The role of a merciless leader who placed himself as the intermediary of God and the role of a sex fanatic who treated women violently, alternated and intertwined in the behaviour of Karisma. He, for example, measured and commented sexually on Jaana’s body when she came back from the phone, and soon after he said that Jaana was carnal and he was spiritual. Jaana was distressed by the long looks directed at her body and she wondered if this was how those labelled whores were treated and if this was how she would be treated after this. She asked Karisma how she could become spiritual. Karisma answered by banging his fist on the table and roaring that Jaana had to die from herself and from the world, she cannot play golf, watch television, or order newspapers.

Jaana experienced the orders as spiritual violence and said to Karisma that her home had been a place of peace for her. Karisma reacted to the statement in the role of a spiritual leader by asking if Jaana’s home was blessed. When Jaana answered in the negative, Karisma got up from the chair and hurried to the bedroom and began his religious actions. He walked through the house evaluating the shape and price of the house, while going on with his actions. By the door of the bathroom, he grabbed Jaana, swung behind her and began to push her into the steam room in front of him, whispering in her ear that Jaana would bless the sauna with Karisma. Jaana jerked herself away and escaped under his arm. The man followed her asking where the next door led to. Jaana shouted: “Out”. The man did not seem to understand her. Without saying anything, Jaana went to the hall. But

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17. The pastors of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church, who want to work in the pastoral care, enter a two-year training through aptitude tests (Aalto et al. 1998). The training of the layman pastoral care lasts for one weekend at the minimum and anyone who thinks that they have a calling for layman pastoral care can enter the training. The persons doing the layman pastoral care will be blessed to carry out their work at the church altar. In the Finnish Evangelical-Lutheran Church layman pastoral care can be found mostly from the so-called Neo-Pietist movement.
Karisma still did not give up. By the coat rack he pressed Jaana against himself. Jaana got her hands in front of her and asked: “What are you going to do now?” Karisma did not let go but said that women bring impurities into his mind. With powerless pain and rage, Jaana burst into tears. Karisma waved crying aside by stating that Jaana could not grieve for her husband properly because she had the “encapsulated sin of unfaithfulness” on her conscience. To the question of how she should get rid of it, she got the answer that she should come to talk about it in a gathering of the Lutheran Christian organisation that Karisma represented.

This was the end of the four-hour visit of Karisma to Jaana’s house of mourning. Instead of solace and support, Karisma had turned sex, the sin of sex and uselessness into the main things in Jaana’s life.

From the security to the desert of insecurity, silencing, and victimisation

After the man left, Jaana slumped down on the floor of the hall. She felt that her world had shattered into pieces. She lay on the floor for hours and finally decided to end her life. She put her late husband's heart medicine on the bedside table and started to write a farewell letter to her daughter describing accurately what had happened during the evening. Moreover, she wrote about the events of her life 29 years earlier so that her daughter would hear of them from her instead of from Karisma, and so that her daughter would know what kind of blackmailing threat had driven Jaana to commit suicide. Writing gave her a relief – as it did many times later. It made her think about suicide from the perspective of her daughter and returned a thought in her mind: Karisma should be forbidden to carry out pastoral care, at least of women.

In the morning, Jaana’s intense anxiety continued and she felt as if she had been beaten. Despite her exhaustion, she decided to go to work and tell her fellow teachers about the events of the previous evening. Telling them about it proved to be harder than Jaana had imagined and it was especially difficult when it came to the part of the insults on physical dignity and integrity:

I managed to tell my colleagues something about it. I said that I was not a believer and that it was a totally crazy thought and that there had been a man visiting my home who said that I was completely useless. I did not get it out very clearly because I was ashamed. The only thing I managed to say about him making advances was that everything had collapsed. (…) (Jaana 2002a.)

In her own classroom, with the children, the distressing experiences were somewhat forgotten, but after the workday the intense anxiety returned. Jaana spent most of the weekend reading the Bible in agony over the idea why Karisma had come to her home. Due to her new religious perspective and a strong experience of God, she asked if God had led Karisma to harass her because of her sins, or had the reasons for the harassment been in Karisma. At those moments when she was convinced that God could not have anything to do with Karisma’s abuse she felt intense hatred, not only because of the violence she had
encountered, but also for the reason that despite everything, Karisma had put himself above Jaana.

Despite her pain – and connected with it – Jaana got in contact with her confessional mother, her daughter and Karisma during the weekend. Jaana was able to tell her confessional mother about Karisma’s visit more accurately than to her colleagues. “He is not well, leave him for what he is worth”, she replied. This comment from Jaana’s confessional mother pathologised Karisma’s abuse, which is common when explaining sexual harassment, but the explanation felt good for Jaana. It was a sign that others believed in her distressing experience. The idea that Jaana would inform the vicar of Karisma’s parish of the matter was met with opposition from the direction of her confessional mother, since the event was “so embarrassing for the reputation of the church”. In addition, Jaana informed her daughter of Karisma’s visit and the distressing quality of it, but she did not say anything about the blackmailing or its background. As a lawyer, Jaana’s daughter suggested that her mother called the police. The alternative did not seem good to Jaana since in her mind she was sure that the church would deal with it. She could not get in touch with Karisma, but she informed his wife, Kaisa, that Karisma’s visit was so terrible that he should not be allowed to visit women who are going through a difficult phase in their lives. Jaana did not reveal the details of Karisma’s visit because she did not want to hurt her relative’s feelings. Kaisa said that she had guessed from Karisma’s behaviour that his visit to Jaana had been special.

The following week, the confessional judgement “you surely have been a bad mother!” began to distress Jaana even when she was working with her pupils and she managed to do her work for only two days. On the third morning she had such a bad breathing attack that she was taken to see the doctor. There was nothing physically wrong with Jaana. After that she felt it necessary to tell the doctor that she had lost her faith and that she had been sexually harassed. She got an appointment with a therapist and a psychiatrist, as well as medicine to help her sleep. Jaana’s long sick leave began. She describes the early stages of her sick leave and sickness that was later diagnosed as depression in her account, which she wrote to the cathedral chapter in 1997:

18. Violence against women has often been interpreted as being caused by women being socially unable, provoking or too competent. In this way, violence is defined to be “otherness”, which does not touch us “normal” human beings (Husso 1995). The conventional liberal/psychological view of male violence adds to the list the sickness of the men who use violence. These kinds of explanations may be useful in understanding a few specific cases but these approaches do not hold when more general evidence is taken into account. These explanations do not explain, for example, why it is primarily men who are violent towards women. Contrary to the argument that such violence is only personal, it is profoundly cultural and political: both the reality and the threat of violence act as a form of social control because both of them compel and constrain women to behave or not to behave in certain ways. (Maynard & Winn 1997, Husso 1995, Thomas & Kitzinger 1997.)

19. Jaana had not sent her farewell letter to her daughter because she had not killed herself. Therefore, she chose not to tell her daughter about Karisma’s blackmailing threat and its background for almost a year, and the thought that Karisma would find her daughter’s address somewhere and tell her that Jaana was a whore rankled her mind very much. In the autumn of 1996 when Jaana’s daughter’s family moved back to Finland, Jaana forced herself to take the liberating step.

20. When Jaana noticed that Karisma still worked with pastoral care, she wrote to Kaisa three times during the following year asking for discussion among the three of them and help for her without getting any answer. Later on, Kaisa told Jaana that she had burnt the letters without taking any action, even though she was Jaana’s relative, and even though she had been blessed to do pastoral care.
“The worst thing was the lost of faith because I would have wanted to got to heaven after my death. The mental wounds, “whore” and “a bad mother” will probably never heal. There were also physical wounds. (…) at times I stopped eating. I tried to earn forgiveness from God for my sin, which had fallen upon me again after Karisma’s judgement. I did not play golf, read newspapers, and watch television and I did not want to see anyone. (…) I kept the curtains closed and disconnected the phone so that no one knew I was home. The judgement stuck on me like glue. I read the Bible in a windowless bathroom because in there I could keep the lights on without anyone coming to ask me how I was. (…)” (Jaana 1997.)

At the beginning of 1997 Jaana transferred to early retirement because her depression did not ease and she was too exhausted to teach. According to Jaana, the reason for her long-term depression was not mainly what Karisma did when he visited her, but what the reactions to her demands for investigation and the consequences were. At first, Jaana’s aim was (1) to make Karisma give reasons for his actions and (2) to give up his work in pastoral care. As Jaana’s religious anxiety grew stronger, it became important for her that Karisma (3) should revoke the judgement he had placed upon her and (4) apologise to her. In addition to these aims, Jaana had attempted to influence the Evangelical-Lutheran Church (5) to take a stand on Karisma’s actions, to make sure there were consequences and (6) to formulate instructions to prevent abuse, as well as (7) to construct a system to support and guide the victims of abuse. (See Jaana 1997, Jaana 2000.) In these matters, she had at various times contacted, for example, Karisma, the vicar of Karisma’s parish, the cathedral chapter, Vartija and many other employees of the church. Furthermore, she had approached the judicial system in this matter.

At the beginning of the process Jaana thought that she would use the operations model familiar to her from her work as a teacher. According to this model, everyone involved should be heard first in order to get a truthful picture of the event. After this, the guilty one should be punished and the repetition of similar cases should be prevented. The functioning of the model started to be questioned only after the first attempt. After the first problem – the difficulty to talk about the issue – eased, there were always new problems ahead. First of all, typical of a harasser, Karisma belittled what had happened. He informed Jaana that he thought the evening had gone well and that he did not have anything to talk about. Only when he was put under pressure, was he ready to discuss the issue21.

Before this happened, a year and three months had passed since the event. Secondly, there did not seem to be a person who would take responsibility for solving the issue as Jaana as a teacher had done. The vicar of Karisma’s parish was willing to call the first meeting on the issue only over a year after the event22. However, he did not take concrete action to

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21. The process was very difficult: At first, Jaana tried to get into discussions with Karisma. When it did not work, she asked the vicar of Karisma’s parish to organise the discussions. As Karisma did not consider it important to come to the meeting that the vicar had organised, Jaana went to a religious happening where she knew Karisma would be and demanded he discuss the issue with her and appealed to the biblical texts that Karisma should get a third party to take part in the discussion. The negotiations did not go as planned because the main theme was the content of the confession, on which the third party refused to take a stand. Jaana had to keep on pressuring by contacting the high-ranking regional official, Vartija. At this stage – a year and three months after Karisma’s visit – Jaana finally got the kind of discussion environment, which she considered was easy to arrange and which she was used to as a teacher.
end Karisma’s work in pastoral care. Neither did he take action to prevent sexual or other harassment that took place in religious connections.

Thirdly, there were only a few persons who helped her in taking the matter further. The closest listeners sympathised with Jaana, but instead of helping her or even supporting her in solving the matter, most of the listeners advised her to keep it to herself. The same advice was given by almost all the active members of the church with whom Jaana talked. The most common comment of those who advised her was that by making it public, the reputation of the church and the pastoral care would suffer. Furthermore, Jaana was reminded of kinship. Later on, the range of advice of the persons who belonged to the Evangelical-Lutheran Church or its charismatic movement with whom Jaana talked in religious circumstances, grew wider: Jaana should not use the arm of the flesh so that she would prevent the work of God, she should have a Christian mind and martyr spirit, she should leave all to God and concentrate on thanking Him, blessing and enjoying life, she should forget the conclusions of the rational mind. She was even advised to get used to the two-facedness of the employees of the church, as many other women have had to do according to the person who gave her this advice.

But Jaana was not only advised on the matter, she was accused and threatened and she was given promises if she kept quiet. The main promise was that God would fight for humans. In addition to this, Jaana was promised that God had great tasks for her and that she could even become a prophet if she suffered the advances made by Karisma. Threats and accusations were various: people claimed that Satan was in Jaana and that he was the one who made Jaana demand justice and an apology, and some saw that Satan was in her home. Moreover, they claimed that Jaana was the extinguisher of the Holy Spirit and that she had in her the spirit of revenge, bitterness and cynicism, as well as the spirit of female power. Furthermore, Jaana was told that God had sent a word that if Jaana told the police or Vartija of the violent pastoral care she would get hurt.

Fourthly, due to her religiousness Jaana tried to find out God’s will in the matter. She searched for this, as well as a way to proceed from the Bible, and that is exactly where she found them. Besides, Jaana felt that demands that were justified by biblical texts were more difficult to ignore. On the other hand, the fact that the Bible was the authority and the parish personnel as partners in conversation limited the focus of the discussions. It was legitimate to discuss, for example, the violations of the formula of the confession

22. Jaana got in contact with the vicar of Karisma’s parish for the first time immediately at the beginning of 1996 by asking him to organise discussion on the issue. Later on, she added to her proposal that Karisma should be asked to join in. The first meeting was arranged a year later after Jaana had reminded the vicar of it several times. Karisma did not join them but he joined the next discussion that the vicar organised. The content of the discussion has been explained in end note 27. Except for the apology, the consequences were not discussed in the meeting. Jaana was depressed by the discussion both because of Karisma’s reasons for his violent actions and because the vicar hardly interfered with them. Moreover, she felt depressed because no other consequences except the apology were even discussed. She called the vicar about her dissatisfaction saying that he should let Karisma know that he is not qualified for the pastoral care. The vicar did not see it necessary to do this himself. He claimed that Karisma would know to resign from his work of pastoral care.

23. One of the exceptions was a hospital pastor whom Jaana met by herself and by accident in 1997. This pastor was one of the persons who helped Jaana to find the will to live and the hope for the future.

24. In the Bible, Jaana found a suggestion that in problematic cases, the people involved should first try to settle the matter among themselves. If there is no reconciliation, the matter should be dealt with a third party – the shepherd of the parish.
and appeal to the Bible in the matter, but it was more difficult to discuss sexual harassment, even though Jaana appealed to the Bible in that matter as well.

Fifthly, when Jaana finally proceeded from the unofficial requests and attempts to solve the matter to the official ones, there did not seem to be anyone who could see the matter as belonging to their field of activities. The police department was of the opinion that the matter ought to be dealt with within the church, and the cathedral chapter and Vartija were of the opinion that it was a matter to be investigated by the police. The explanation by the police was typical: there were no signs of sexual violence on Jaana’s body, and the case did not have any outside witnesses. When it comes to religious matters, the police did not feel that it had the authority to investigate them. The arguments of Vartija will be further discussed in the following chapter.

As a result of unconcerned attitudes, Jaana seceded from the Church in 1998, even though she still believes in God, participates in services and reads the Bible. Nowadays, she has also begun studying theology. She completely gave up her golf hobby during the years of depression and “reconciliation of uselessness”.

Jaana’s case has twice been under consideration in the cathedral chapter. The first time, in 1997, the cathedral chapter decided not to consider the matter (see endnote 25). The second time, in 2000, the cathedral chapter stated with the order of two judges that Karisma was not qualified for pastoral care. Karisma was notified of the matter by word of mouth. There were no consequences. The Evangelical-Lutheran Church did not admit, at least not in front of Jaana, that there would be a need for instructions for harassment cases, as Jaana had requested.

“Was my mistake in truthfulness which was not surrounded by sufficient spirit of mercy” – Karisma argues the event

During the process, Jaana received two letters from Karisma. The first of them arrived in February 1997 and the second in April 1998. His first letter to Jaana was almost in its entirety a report of the principles of his religious activities. He ties the report to his visit by stating that he believes he acted according to those principles also at that

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25. Jaana sent the request for investigation to the cathedral chapter at the stage when the possibility to use the services of the judicial system was about to expire, and Jaana had to decide whether to take the matter to the police or whether to believe that the church will deal with it. She decided to believe that the church would deal with it. She thought that the cathedral chapter would either solve the matter or transfer it to those who would have the authority to do something about it. The original request for investigation is of 19 hand-written A4 size papers, and the specification that she was asked to write is 29 pages long. In her request for investigation, Jaana describes the events of the violent evening and the consequences of it. The answer from the cathedral chapter arrived after two months when the period within which an action must be brought to the police had already expired. The cathedral chapter states in the answer that the matter presented by Jaana does not belong to the jurisdiction of the cathedral chapter and that is the reason why it is not investigating the matter. The letter states the tasks of the cathedral chapter according to the church law: the tasks of church administration and activities, as well as legal issues connected to them, complaints and appeals connected to the work of church officials, personnel and confidential posts as well as disciplinary issues connected to the activities of the officials. According to the cathedral chapter, Jaana’s case was not about the church administration or activities. Karisma was not an official of the church nor did he belong to the personnel of the church, and he did not visit Jaana because the church asked him to. Thus, the cathedral chapter made the case private, even though (1) Karisma had been blessed to do the pastoral care by the church, and (2) along with pastoral care he holds various other confidential posts in the church, and (3) he still does pastoral care in the functions of the church. The cathedral chapter completely ignored the demand that Jaana made in her request for investigation that the church should make up instructions to help victims and to prevent other similar cases. In the year 2000, the cathedral chapter considered the matter again on its own initiative, but for the reason that there had been a report on the matter in a local newspaper.
time. The letter is of eight hand-written A4 size sheets and it is almost in its entirety the
two letters. In the first letter, Karisma gives a more concrete stand on his visit to Jaana’s home. In these lines, Karisma firstly states that what Jaana tells about the events corresponds very poorly to what he remembers of the evening in question. However, he does not state his own view of the events of the evening but he admits that the evening can be understood as problematic and failed from the perspective of the consequences. For that part – for the part of the consequences – he states that he has asked for and received forgiveness from God and apologised to Jaana as well. At the end of his letter, he wipes away the useless ballast: the issues that he had dealt with in his letter, as well as those he had not dealt with, by saying that Jesus had reconciled them both at the cross.

In his second letter, Karisma apologises to Jaana. However, he does not apologise for anything he has done but on a general level – despite the fact that he had earlier explained his late apology by saying that he does not know what to apologise for, and for that reason only had Jaana written a detailed letter to him about the insults she has experienced (Jaana 1998). As in his previous letter, he examines the matter explicitly from the perspective of the consequences, and not as a matter associated with the quality of his actions as such. Karisma expresses that Jaana’s weakness or emotionality caused his inexperience by saying that he had the tools of a workman with him, although he should have had the tools of a doctor. He based the name-calling on the Sermon on the Mount, and continues that it was Jaana’s own problem that she had interpreted him in a way that he meant to belittle Jaana. Thus, he does not deny that he belittled her. As regards the accusation of sexual advances, Karisma denies that the harassment ever happened. But, similar to the ending of his previous letter, he continues:

“However, for this part it is best that we are and want to be in the light and ask for our Lord to cleanse us, and on the other hand, to protect us from all evil.” (Karisma 1998.)

In his account to the cathedral chapter, dated April 24, 2000 – and which is more official than the letters he had sent to Jaana – Karisma writes differently about the events connected to his visit to Jaana’s home than in the letters described above. He gives to understand that it was Jaana who directed the meeting towards confession because of the

26. The processes described in end note 21 preceded the first letter. Between the two letters, Jaana had to contact the judicial system with a lawsuit in mind, she wrote a request for investigation to the cathedral chapter, contacted Vartija for the second time, and wrote a detailed letter to Karisma about the issues that she had experienced as insulting in the confession and pastoral care of Karisma. Jaana wrote the detailed letter because Karisma’s reason for not apologising was that he did not know what to apologise for. With the same letter, Jaana had sent a book “Seksi kielletyllä alueella. Naisten seksuaalinen hyväksikäyttö luottamussuhteissa” by Peter Rutter to Karisma, so that he would get a better idea that he had sexually harassed Jaana.

27. At the same time, the discussion organised by the vicar of Karisma’s parish took place. Jaana, the vicar and Karisma participated in the discussion. In this discussion, Karisma did not deny the events of the evening but he had religious explanations for his actions. He explained calling Jaana a whore and the violation of her privacy that took place in dealing with the Sixth Commandment by saying that he had to know if everything essential was said about the matter. He belittled the pain he had caused to Jaana when calling her a bad mother by saying that he does not know any women who think that they are good mothers. He said that he came to Jaana’s home because the spirit had suggested him to do so. The offensive physical contacts had represented the love of God except for the advances made in the hall. He explained this by saying that he is used to test with the sisters in faith how far he can go before impure thoughts enter his mind.
matter that worried her. He claims that he had tried to help Jaana with the matter, and had been absolutely satisfied because he had thought that he had succeeded in helping her. Thus, Karisma asks if his mistake had been in “truthfulness, which was not surrounded by sufficient spirit of mercy”.

The core of Karisma’s “truthfulness” was to name Jaana a whore and a useless mother based on the knowledge that 29 years earlier she had had a sexual contact with someone other than her husband. Karisma had not raised as a central issue – to the core of truthfulness – the fact that Jaana had said that she had become estranged from God, even though this was a more recent issue and of different length, and even though one would think that it was a more central issue when religion was in question. The “truthfulness” of Karisma is difficult to explain from the perspective of faith as such. His “truthfulness” better suits the aim to dominate and destroy Jaana’s self-esteem as a woman with the help of patriarchal and heterosexist behaviour and the interpretations of the Bible.

As for the apology, Karisma states that he has apologised for what he may have done wrong. The expression includes the message that he has nothing to apologise for in terms of his actions but that, possibly, there might be something to apologise for in terms of how he did what he did. In the same context, he states that he has dealt with the matter according to the principles of action of the parish. The principle that he presents in his account is the same that Jaana had used when demanding of Karisma that there should be a meeting to discuss the matter. In Jaana’s case, the principle was not applied on the initiative of Karisma but by the demands of Jaana, and Jaana had to search for the principle from the Bible in order to dare to proceed with the matter, even though she was advised to keep quiet. Karisma, for his part, acted for long as a brake on applying the principle by emphasising that he had nothing to discuss about the matter. By referring to the principle, Karisma obviously wanted to raise his status as a responsible agent of problematic situations, independent of the fact that it was in contradiction with the chain of events.

In the end of his account, Karisma makes a demand that he should have “normal freedom to act in the parish without anyone disturbing him”. He argues his demand with a God-given privilege by saying: “It is a great grace of God to serve Him like this in the place where he has called and calls” (Karisma 2000).

“I will bring it up with Karisma when a suitable time comes, that is all that is possible” – the high-ranking official of the church as the manager of Jaana’s case Vartija replied to Jaana’s requests for help with three letters altogether. In his first letter, he presents the problem as Jaana’s private problem by saying that everyone has the right to choose the person to do the pastoral care. Vartija promises to bring up the issue with Karisma when a suitable time comes29, adding that that is all that is possible. With regard to the apology, he states that waiting for it is vain and useless, and asks if Jaana does not have anything better to do. Vartija does not express that he would be willing or obliged to affect the arrival of the apology. He replies that the matter is in God’s hands when Jaana expresses her concern that Karisma continues to do the pastoral care. In his third letter, Vartija repeats the stand of the cathedral chapter according to which only the judicial sys-

28. The account includes some details of Karisma’s visit to Jaana’s home that are in contradiction with Jaana’s descriptions. For these parts, the chain of events described in the chapter “The Case” has been checked from third documents and/or from third parties.

29. When Karisma visited Jaana, he had said that Vartija was his sauna buddy.
tem has the authority to investigate what had happened in Jaana’s case, and to order the consequences (see endnote 25). In addition, Vartija repeats his view – already expressed in his previous letter – that Jaana has burdened her life for no reason and that she should not expect to receive an apology.

The violence that Jaana met with in a religious situation can be, on the basis of the comments of Vartija, interpreted as being such an insignificant matter that nobody should burden their lives with it. Vartija strengthened his view by saying that he would bring it up with Karisma “when a suitable time came”. It did not seem to matter that Jaana had had to “burden” her life with it for over two years already. The statement of Vartija that he does not have power over anything else is interesting. The officials of the church that are in a similar position to Vartija take a stand on various moral issues in their regions even in public. The fact that he limits his possibilities very narrowly in this matter has to be explained by other factors: for example, misogyny, the good brother –system, or disputes – very strong at that time – that deal with women’s position in the parishes and in the hierarchies of the church.

Eeva Lundgren who has studied the texts of men who use violence against women offers one model of explanation that is connected to the previous issues. She writes about violence against women that is justified by God’s will in those patriarchal communities, in which the image of woman is imbued with the dichotomy of whore and madonna and is, thus, misogynistic in practice. Lundgren’s thought is that even though the representatives of these kinds of communities judge violence on the level of principle, they turn a blind eye when the question is of the special field of women’s oppression and control, in other words, sexuality.

**Karisma’s visit as sexual harassment**

Karisma’s action as the person who accepts Jaana’s confession and as the person who does pastoral care included many acts that sexually harassed and distressed Jaana: encroaching on physical limits of privacy, long and evaluating looks directed at her body, calling her a whore. Karisma invaded Jaana’s privacy by entering the private area, the bedroom, of Jaana and her late husband, and demanding for details in a matter connected with sex. The events of the evening include both aspects that are in line with pro quo harassment, and aspects that represent hostile environment harassment. It is most likely that the harassment mainly represented the secondarisation of Jaana and an attempt to determine her life and its content from above. His satisfaction with his visit to Jaana’s home fits this picture. (Cf. Lundgren 1990.) But the evening also included, in the case of advances, attempts to abuse the authority adopted through God.

Jaana reacted to the harassment she experienced several times during the evening. She cried, tried to get further away from Karisma’s physical grasp, asked him what he was doing. One-sidedness and unexpectedness of Karisma’s harassing acts was very clear. In this matter, the very aggravating aspect is that the acts took place in a house of mourning.

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30. Vartija has been able to use the account of the events and the consequences that Jaana has written for the cathedral chapter (Jaana 1997).
and that they were directed at a person who was living through a phase of mourning. Another highly aggravating factor is that the person in question had recently found new hope for her life in God and believed in Him very strongly. With sexual and spiritual violence, Karisma deeply shook Jaana’s entire life. As he was the husband of Jaana’s relative, he could not have been unaware of Jaana’s situation. Some advisors interpreted this as a mitigating factor. However, this was not the case from any perspective. For Karisma’s part, the matter is clear. For Jaana’s part, kinship had the effect that she did not know to be on the alert. This is common in violent situations that women face: violence against women is largely implemented by men who know the victim, and the assaults often occur within the home (Lundgren 1990, 229, Heise 1997, Bachman & Saltzman 1995, 180, Heiskanen & Piispa 1998, 45, Kivivuori 1999).

Jaana was victimised in the process. But she was victimised perhaps not mainly for what happened in her home while Karisma was there, but because of the officials of the church – the main authority of her life at the time – dealt with it by silencing, belittling and delaying. The victimisation was made worse by the fact that God and the Bible, those things that Jaana felt had given her new hope after the death of her husband, were abused in silencing and belittling.

In Jaana’s case, the stand of the church officials on sexual harassment could have had a special political purpose: the attempt to prevent the surfacing of those themes that question male power and raise the position of women in the parishes and dioceses. Namely, the events are situated at the time when the ordination of women was debated in Finland. The decision to accept the ordination of women was made in the 1980’s, but there are still some representatives and officials of the church who do not accept the ordination of women. Particularly the revivalist movements – also the movement that Karisma represents – have had an especially strong view against the ordination of women. Moreover, Vartija of that time of Jaana’s diocese was against the ordination of women.

Reflections: Can we learn something from Jaana’s case?

Jaana’s case is not unique. It has points of contact with, for example, a harassment case that took place in a certain Finnish export company a few years earlier (Varsa 1996, see also e.g. Mankkinen 1999, Husu 2001, Sandler & Shoop 1997). The special aspect in Jaana’s case is that the harassment took place in a religious connection and that religion was dragged into the explanations of the harassment, and that it was covered with religious discourses. Another special aspect in this case is that the harassment not only violated her right of self-determination and her dignity, but also the whole base of her life at the time, in other words, faith.

Jaana and the family of her daughter, Jaana’s pupils and her employer paid a high price for Karisma’s pastoral care. Furthermore, the state is the one who pays (compare Heiskanen & Piispa 2000). At the same time, Karisma continues in his high position as if nothing has happened. The Evangelical-Lutheran Church, for its part, blesses this both as an individual case and as a more general phenomenon by not taking actions to change their culture of acting into a kind of culture that would prevent similar cases from happening.
To eliminate sexual harassment and to heal sexist cultures of actions, the recognition and admission of the problem, and the making up of efficient rules are needed both in the case of the victim and in general. The starting point is particularly the recognition and admission of the problem. In addition to this, more general ethical instructions are needed, and their supervision should be followed. Furthermore, instructions on how matters will be investigated and what the sanctions of sexual harassment are, are needed. Concrete and immediate help for the victim of harassment is also needed. Jaana’s case demonstrates in a sad way that delaying, belittling and silencing destroy the life of the victim. The victims should not be victimised further and it should not be their duty to find out how the matter can be solved and how it should be solved in order to be heard and to get justice in the matter.

Carelessness is not good either for the community in which the harassment takes place. In Jaana’s case, neither the vicar of Karisma’s parish, nor the high-ranking regional official of the church or the cathedral chapter, Vartija, saw it necessary to take action to prevent sexual harassment, even though the case was twice under the consideration of the cathedral chapter. Nevertheless, there has been some progress on a more general level. In July 2002, the instructions for the harassment cases in the work place were published. The instructions state, e.g., that:

- sexual harassment is reprehensible because with the help of it, the right of self-determination and dignity of a person are questioned
- the duty of each member of a work community is to avoid gendered harassment and the kind of behaviour that is usually seen as insulting
- the employer has the main responsibility to interfere with harassment but in addition, it is important that colleagues show by their actions that they do not approve of harassment
- harassment should be interfered with immediately
- negative consequences should be directed at the harasser, not at the harassed person
- because people are different and everyone experiences different things as insulting, everyone has to think carefully where the line of acceptable behaviour is.

The Church Negotiation Commission is one of the signatories of the instructions. (Hyvä käytös 2002.)

With judicial grounds, it is still possible to claim that the instructions cannot be used in the cases of layman pastoral care and confession. From a moral perspective, this kind of claim is highly questionable.

The data used in the study

Jaana’s texts written at the end of 1995 and at the beginning of 1996.
Jaana’s account of the matter, dated April 21, 2002, seven typed A4-size pages.
Jaana’s written general description of the matter, 11 A4-size pages.
Jaana’s hand-written account to the cathedral chapter, the account was received by the cathedral chapter October 30, 1997, a specification of 29 hand-written pages.


Gendered Power Relations among Students and Staff: Psychological Violence in the Area of Health Care

Pirkko Sandelin

Abstract

This article deals with the manifestations and consequences of gendered violence, and the concept of monoacculturation. In addition, I submit some preliminary results of my study of accounts by health care professionals and students of incidents of gendered psychological violence in situations which can be classified as formal. This study focuses on the status and coping of the victim and is part of the research project ‘Gendered power relations, monoacculturation and violence in educational institutions’ conducted by the Department of Education and Teacher Training at the University of Oulu. In my study, I attempt to answer three questions: how is gendered psychological violence expressed in the accounts; what kinds of meanings do the health care professionals and students assign to gendered psychological violence; and how do the writers describe their ways of coping.

The corpus of my research consists of written and oral accounts of health care professionals and students. The accounts are analysed using the method of holistic narrative analysis. The theoretical basis is rooted in the concept of monoacculturation. This refers to the phenomenon by which members of working and learning environments maintain and reproduce, either consciously or subconsciously, the values, norms and behavior which are dictated by people occupying positions of dominance. Monoacculturation refers to the processes by which the students and staff are made to embrace belief systems and to accept, as natural, the power relations which are both asymmetrical and favourable to those in positions of dominance.

My preliminary analysis shows that the accounts reveal some similarities and can be categorised according to certain common plots: surviving humiliating rituals for newcomers as a precondition to full membership of the working community; distancing senior employees from the work community; keeping interested and enthusiastic employees in their place, hindering the career development of employees with post graduate studies; endless pseudo development projects causing psychological violence. All the narrators described the initial acts of psychological violence as surprising, unexpected and sudden. The introductory part was inevitably accompanied by the narrators’ questions, such as what is this all about? or, what is happening? The middle part of the process consisted of psychological violence which was either direct or indirect. The accounts end in the employee leaving either physically or in a kind of ‘psychological or spiritual’ leave of absence.
The material suggests that health care institutions operate on values which rather come closer to ‘masculinist’ rather than female values and orientations. As many studies show, male values are characterized by such key values and behavioral codes as competitiveness, hierarchy, individual rights over group responsibility, etc. In contrast, women as a group express a different set of values, they emphasize cooperation and collaboration, heeding others’ needs, non-hierarchical relations based on mutuality and interdependence.

**Background**

This article deals with the manifestations and consequences of gendered psychological violence, and with the concept of monoacculturation. In addition, I submit some preliminary results of my research on the accounts of health care professionals and students regarding gendered psychological violence in situations of interaction which can be classified as official work environments. This research focuses on the status and coping of the victim using relevant theory.

In my research, I attempt to answer three questions: how is gendered psychological violence expressed in the participants’ accounts; how do the health care professionals and students understand gendered psychological violence; and how do the writers describe their ways of coping. The study is multidisciplinary (nursing science, gender studies).  

The corpus of my research consists of written and oral accounts of health care professionals and students. The accounts are analyzed using the method of holistic narrative analysis. (Saaleby 1999, Vuokila-Oikkonen 2001).

Due to their particular line of work and training, health care professionals can be expected to be more aware of the nature of psychological violence and its manifestations in human interaction, which partly justifies the focus of my research. In addition, health care professionals are, at least theoretically, committed to equality, justice, and generally to advancing and respecting what is considered good for human beings. However, studies on psychological violence show that there is psychological violence in health care institutions, both in relationships between the patient and the professionals and among the staff members themselves. The reasons given are the system itself, professional insecurity, a ‘justified’ need to control, pressure and coercion as a means of punishment and the position of the patient internalised in a system which considers them inferior. (Whittington & Wykes 1996, Jewkes, & Abrahamson 1998, Kerschner 1998, Keckman-Koivuniemi 1999.)

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1. This study is part of one of Dr. Kailo’s projects entitled Gendered power relations, monoacculturation and violence in educational institutions going on in the Department of Education and Teacher Training at Oulu University. I wish to thank Sirpa Janhonen, Kaarina Kailo and Yappu Sunnari for their help in finishing this article. I also want to thank the Academy of Finland for funding a five month leave of absence which has enabled me to complete this study.
Gendered power and psychological violence

The exercise of gendered power or psychological violence can be seen as a consequence of monoaccluration. Monoaccluration refers to the phenomenon by which members of work and study environments maintain and reproduce, consciously or subconsciously, functions which are dictated by people occupying positions of dominance and which characteristically accommodate the members to systems of belief and power relations which are both asymmetrical and favourable to those in positions of dominance. The dominant relations, the accompanying belief systems and the asymmetrical power relations enable the dominating subjects to name and identify themselves as subjects and to set up the others correspondingly as objects – deviant, anonymous, invisible and impersonal. (Kailo 2000.)

The strategies of psychological violence include negligence, silence, ordering and redefining the other person’s reality and making it invisible. Despite the context, psychological violence is always unscrupulous in nature: it is a violation of the other person’s rights and a limitation of their actions. The strategies of humiliation and subordination include oppression, bullying, mockery, scorn, threats, control, taunting, name-calling and isolation. (Thylefors 1987.)

Scholars have studied the consequences of psychological violence both at home and in the workplace. These studies show that the consequences are always negative as far as the victim is concerned: the victims blame themselves, they rarely seek help or even talk about the consequences of the violence. The role of the defenceless victim can be played for decades. The most common consequences, however, are sadness, guilt, fatigue, depression and helplessness or an inability to defend oneself. (Kilpatrick et al. 1985.)

By isolating the victim from social interaction in the workplace, the victim is denied both the support of the working community and the opportunity to share his/her feelings, experiences and problems. In addition, social isolation often prevents the victim from obtaining the information needed in everyday work. Isolation is one of the most effective forms of psychological violence. Mockery, criticism, denigration and tongue lashing make it more difficult for the victim to maintain his/her esteem in the work community. (Vartia & Perkka-Jortikka 1996.)

Losing face and self-esteem in the workplace lowers the victim’s self-confidence and sense of self worth. Their self-esteem drops and eventually disappears. This may eventually lead to the victim leaving his/her work or student community. The departure can be in the form of resignation, sick leave, handing in their notice or sometimes even suicide. Some victims find help for their somatic symptoms in the health care system. Psychological violence is costly, because it affects the victim’s health, it can be the cause of sick leave and early retirement, suicides and general incapacity in the work community. (Vartia & Perkka-Jortikka 1996.) Victims and victimisation are forgotten issues both in research and in practices related to violence (Ronkainen 1998).
Research into gendered violence and psychological violence

In a survey of the nurses’ trade union (1999), about a third of the respondents gave evidence of psychological violence in their workplace over a timeframe of two years. The violence was endured both by colleagues and patients. (Keckman-Koivuniemi 1999.)

There are also some studies on psychological violence in educational institutions in Finland. The University of Oulu, for example, conducted a survey (1999) among students which showed that both the students and the staff often behave in an inappropriate and impolite way. The forms of mistreatment were contempt, humiliation, bullying, and sexual discrimination and harassment. Generally speaking, the staff humiliated and were dismissive of women more than men. The most dismissive and least respectful staff members were professors, senior lecturers, lecturers and other teaching staff. Of the rest of the staff, nurses and office staff were also singled out. In answers to open questions, women mentioned being overshadowed and treated worse than men, often with sexual innuendo. There was an increase in incidents of sexual harassment and discrimination for both men and women as their studies advanced. (Rautia et al. 1999.)

According to the equality barometer produced by the Council for Equality and Statistics Centre (1998), one in three female students in a higher education institution feels that the noise made by the members of the other sex disturb their studies. For male students the figure is one in every four. 44 percent of female students and only every third male student felt that some teachers give a more positive assessment of the accomplishments of the other sex. In the workplace and organizations, women report gender disputes and belittlement from the opposite sex more often than men. The same tendency is visible in educational institutions. According to women’s experiences, the belittlement is more common in male-dominated and mixed fields. In addition, young women are more likely to notice differences of opinion between sexes than middle-aged or older women. All in all, men notice these differences more seldom than women. (Melkas 1998.)

Accounts of gendered power relations and psychological violence in health care work and study environments

The accounts were categorised as follows: humiliating rituals for newcomers as a precondition to full membership in the work community; distancing senior female employees from the work community; putting a damper on interested and enthusiastic employees; hindering the career development of employees who have pursued post graduate studies; and continuous pseudo development projects which cause psychological violence.

All the narrators were surprised when the psychological violence began. It was unexpected and sudden. The introduction was characterized by questions from the narrators: what is this all about? what is happening? The middle part of the process consisted of direct or indirect psychological violence. The accounts end in either the physical or spiritual departure of the employee.
The term newcomer refers to recently graduated health care professionals, students and temporary employees. The term senior staff member refers to employees who were close to retirement and had worked in the wards for a long time. Enthusiastic staff members are those who felt very interested in their work and in developing it. For example, many health care professionals were involved in post-graduate programs. The narrators who were studying felt that their studies were not taken into account in the work community. In addition, their careers had not advanced despite their studies and increasing competence. In fact, it was quite the contrary, the post-graduate studies were seen as a hindrance to career aspirations in their current workplaces. As the resources become fewer because of this development, employees develop their own contingency work processes. According to the narrators, this pseudo development does not improve nursing nor the teaching of nursing, but instead takes time and psychological resources away from the actual patient work.

All the narrators felt that the psychological violence was sudden and unexpected. The newcomers entered their new workplace with positive expectations, but were soon disappointed. So-called temp work and substitutions were mentioned as reasons for psychological violence. In addition, the discovery of aspects about personal lives, such as marriage, single-parenting, divorce, difficulties or successes in family or personal relationships, could lead to violence. The narrators felt that the reasons for violence were connected to the imagined inferiority of the victim in the workplace or the imagined superiority in both work and personal life. Issues of organization and hierarchy were also mentioned as reasons for violence. Earlier studies (Eeronheimo 1995, Sandelin 1995) have shown that students of nursing and health care are often afraid of becoming members of the work community, which may force them to choose the passive and submissive role of an outside observer. This role is often adopted in response to unspoken messages.

There was a continuous spying and complaining that this and that is not done like that, but like this. It was tiring because each adviser did things in a slightly different manner and felt that their way was the right way. I got the feeling that they were expecting mistakes so that they could complain. (n. 10)

The surgeon yelled at everyone about anything, often without any reason whatsoever. (n. 4)

Senior narrators and interviewees claimed that the violence always started from an incident in the work community or in society in general. One incident could be, for example, the effects of the recession of the 90s in health care organisations. These effects include changes such as combining wards, shutting down hospitals and laying off nursing and teaching staff. Thus the tightening of economic conditions had an adverse effect on the health care professionals and brought about changes to their workplace. As a consequence, the employees had to compete for their jobs and the competition lead to tension and conflicts among the members of the working community.

It all began when a hospital was completely shut down. In the course of events, two wards were combined and transferred to another hospital.(n. 3)
For ten years I have been teaching on six month appointments. And when the downsizing began, you knew who were the first to leave. It wasn’t really encouraging. (n.5)

According to the narrators, the psychological violence exerted control on behavior, personality, outlook, family life, even sexuality. For example, the immediate superior, that is, the head nurse, could be the object of control during the processes of change. The control affected personality, behaviour, work, actions and even personal life. The results were reported to the management. The narrators felt that they were systematically uninformed about issues of which they should have been aware due to their position. More specifically, their opinions were openly criticised at meetings, they were interrupted and their opinions ignored. The narrators felt guilty, because the management claimed that their negative feelings were reflected among the other staff members. As the process advanced, cliques emerged. The roles within these cliques ranged from passive followers to active doers.

Enthusiastic employees felt that enthusiasm and willingness to develop the work community can be a stimulus for psychological violence. Post-graduate students felt that studies were of no use for them in their personal careers, as their studies and the increased competence were usually not put to benefit in the work community. On the contrary, they were belittled and nullified. The narrators found continuous pseudo development of work processes to be a cause for violence, especially if the staff did not find the development projects important for their work, and thus were not interested in them. In addition, no extra resources were allocated to these development projects, but instead had to be done during free time.

Yes, I have a master’s degree in nursing and health care administration. We have had vacancies for head nurse and assistant head nurse and I applied for these positions but I didn’t get any of them. I am still a nurse in the same ward as before. (n. 7)

Our head nurse is interested in so-called development. We are always in the middle of some development project or another. These projects are not always sensible. And they take time away from patient work. If you do not wish to take part in these projects, you will soon notice that you are in a minority and will be ignored. (n. 1)

**Forms of psychological violence and their meaning to the narrators**

Psychological violence can be either direct or indirect by nature. Direct psychological violence consisted of lashing out, shouting, humiliation, insinuations, threats and Kafkaesque trials. Lashing out and shouting could occur in any situation, often in the presence of patients, students and other staff members. Humiliation resulted from the efforts to trivialize the professional skills of the narrator. The insinuations were directed at personal characteristics, lifestyle or even sexuality. Indirect psychological violence consisted of oppression, gossiping, talking behind other people’s backs, denigration, stigmatization and calling so-called meetings which included all the other staff members except the per-
son who was the topic of conversation. The psychological violence followed the narrators home as well, as some narrators also mentioned receiving odd phone calls and letters.

Psychological violence resulted in an initial sense of numbness and loss of control. In addition, feelings of shame and disgrace were common among the narrators. They felt guilty and analysed their own part in the course of events. The psychological violence was frustrating and reduced the narrators’ motivation. Different kinds of fears crept into the narrators’ lives. The feeling of terror was expressed in many accounts.

The narrators had various physical ailments, such as stomach aches, gastric disorders and headaches, in particular. Psychophysical pains included nausea, lumps in the throat and lack of appetite. The narrators suffered from various emotional symptoms but the symptom most often mentioned was anxiety. In developmental terms, the narrators felt in regression. This was connected to a feeling of loss of control over one’s own life. All the narrators talked of withdrawal and isolation from their social circle. This isolation was an attempt to protect themselves and their close ones. Cognitive symptoms included, for example, forgetfulness about everyday chores. Psychological violence also caused financial loss in the form of long sick leave, medication and treatment with different types of therapies.

Coping with psychological violence

The narrators coped with psychological violence both on their own and together with family and close friends; they also got professional help, which included different types of medication and therapy. Some narrators mentioned that they are in fact now helping other victims of psychological violence. In addition, the process of narrators, their experience of violence and increasing awareness of mechanisms of power helped in the healing process. All the narrators and interviewees were of the opinion that their immediate superiors were incompetent and incapable of diffusing conflicts causing psychological violence in the workplace.

Acting on one’s own and together with others is a coping strategy. Coping strategies aim at responding to the situation of being a victim of psychological violence. There are several categorizations of coping strategies depending on the aim of the coping. Lazarus & Folkman (1984) define coping as attempts to think and act so that one can control, tolerate or lessen the kinds of external or internal requirements, which have a draining effect on the individual’s resources.

There is no situation which by itself causes the need for coping. Instead the experience resulting from processes of reasoning and evaluation is crucial. The experiences are evaluated in two phases. In the first phase, the situation is examined in relation to one’s own well-being and the psychological violence can be seen as unimportant or negative. In the second phase, the victim seeks alternative solutions, which can be directed at either oneself or one’s surroundings. Strong emotions may prevent cognitive action, which is why the individual’s coping with his/her emotions should be supported by going through the emotions caused by the psychological violence. Emotion-oriented and problem-oriented coping usually co-exist and complement each other. (Lazarus & Folkman 1984.)
Monoacculturation as the basis of narrative analysis

Are monoacculturated modes of operation prevalent in health care work and study environments? At least, the hierarchical and bureaucratic organisations of health care institutions constitute a framework which enables monoacculturation. Monoacculturation is a phenomenon by which power, predictability and stability of phenomena become the central objectives of interaction. The modes of operation in the public sector are good examples of this. Monoacculturation in a public forum clearly differs from private forums. At home one is allowed to express emotions, become excited or committed or show signs of vulnerability. In the everyday practices of health care – nursing and learning to nurse – monoacculturation manifests itself in many ways. Emotions, enthusiasm and vulnerability must be left out of the public role: they are the domain of home and women, and are expressions of naiveté. (Liehu 1998.)

Monoacculturation is affected by competition and individual objectives. The surrounding world is full of potential enemies, communicated by asperity, cruelty and power. Power, for its part, can be seen in many parts of health care and health care education activity. Most of it is hidden behind complex structures and not revealed until diligent and unprejudiced analysis draws it out and highlights it, so as to enable a conscious change of practices. (Ketola et al. 1995.)

Health care and health care education consists of many situations in which the exercise of power is brought to extremes yet the situations are seen as natural, normal and acceptable in many ways. Theoretical and practical authority provides a possibility for exercising power in situations in which the authority has the right to give orders which the others should obey. In addition, the presence of commitment and rational argumentation can be viewed in relation to power and autonomy. The other party can be made to act as desired by relying on contracts and promises. (Ketola et al. 1995.)

Traditions burden current health care work and studies. These traditions include a sense of obedience, humility and self-sacrifice, which are connected with health care professionals and students (Hentinen 1992). In addition, education pushes the requirement for conformity. These demands for conformity are connected to monoacculturation and they emphasize the central characteristics of the stereotypical health care professional. The reinforcement happens by favouring the student who fits the ‘feminine’ image of a health care professional: humble, kind, invisible, passive and submissive. (Eeronheimo 1995, Sandelin 1995.)

Although health care is a female-dominated profession, health care education and practice does not have a female perspective. Instead, it has a subconscious and unspoken male perspective. In the hierarchical and bureaucratic constructions of health care, submission means the conceptual existence of only one gender in a political sense, and thus the power of only one gender and the significance of only one perspective. When the perspectives of equality, justice and accepting difference exist only in theory – not in real life – the submissive modes of operation, as well as the realization of equality according to the gender pact, appear natural, normal and rightful. But as current facts and research on health care show, equality, justice and an attempt to promote the good of human beings are not realized naturally but require a conscious deconstruction of the natural and monoaccultural constructions in health care. (Liehu 1998.)
Therefore, we are justified in asking why do we not recognise or admit that health care operates according to masculine values. Only by becoming fully conscious of concealed gender contracts and the subtle gendered mechanisms and processes of power, can we begin to transform this harmful environment from the field of health care.

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Chapter 3: Heteronormativities and Sexual Violence
Heteronormativity and Name-Calling – Constructing Boundaries for Students’ Genders and Sexualities

Jukka Lehtonen

Abstract

I will analyse bullying, harassment and name-calling which are linked to gender and sexuality. I concentrate mainly on homophobic name-calling which is very common at Finnish schools. I explore the multiple ways of using the word "homo" in the school context and I analyse what significations are given for it in different situations. I research also its gendered use and what it might mean for girls and boys, for non-heterosexual and heterosexual persons. Homophobic name-calling is mainly targeted towards boys by boys. Girls are named and called differently in various situations. I analyse similarities and differences between the use of words such as "homo", "whore" and "lesbian/lesbo". Homophobic and heteronormative reactions are not limited to student interaction only. I am mainly interested in analysing what heteronormativity has to do with these types of interactions.

Introduction

Sexuality and gender have been and are an essential part of school practices from the very first school day at primary school. The importance or meaning placed on them varies depending on practice, situation, school class and school (see Gordon et al. 2000a, Gordon et al. 2000b, Tolonen 2001). Gender and sexuality are often connected with building of boundaries and hierarchies, as well as the usage of power. Correspondingly, in the school community, the distributions of power and the building of hierarchies, as well as bullying and name-calling, are generally gendered and sexualised. In this article, I will discuss themes connected to bullying, harassment and name-calling from the point of view of heteronormativity. I will analyse these themes in the relationships between students. The article is based both on my own doctoral thesis in sociology, in which I dis-
cuss the sexuality and gender of young people at school, as well as on the interviews of non-heterosexual young people.

I chose non-heterosexual young people to be interviewed in my study because my assumption was that they, rather than other young people, might have had more experiences in which they might have felt the pressure of heteronormativity or in which they might have questioned it. As a method, theme interviews function well in collecting the school experiences of non-heterosexual young people. In all I interviewed 30 non-heterosexual young people, of whom all except two were between the ages of 15 and 20. 16 of the interviewees were women and 14 were men. Nearly two thirds of them lived in the metropolitan area of Helsinki, Finland, or in the vicinity of it. Some of them had lived part of their school years elsewhere. I reached the interviewees mainly through the young people’s groups and information circulation of SETA, a Finnish National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights Organisation. The experiences and memories that were conveyed to me in the interviews are related to the very situation of the interview and cannot be identified with the actual classroom situation. I analysed the interviews theme by theme with the intention of looking for practices, in which heteronormativity is maintained and questioned. I interpreted multilayered and often contradictory memories of school experiences, the starting point assumption being that heteronormativity is often both challenged and produced in the same situation. Young people often have a critical view on the occurrences at school and are more generally the active agents without whom there would not be cultures within schools. I use the terms of student and young person instead of pupil and school children since they sound more independent and active. Thus, I want to emphasise the possibilities of young people and children in making choices at school. (See Lehtonen 2002.)

Gender and sexuality are intertwined; they can be perceived as the reverse sides of the same issue. Judith Butler (1990, 151) uses the concept of heterosexual matrix in describing the hegemonic discursive model of understanding gender that supposes the body to be whole and understandable – providing that the static “biological” sex can be associated with the body. This appears as a static “social” gender, in other words, as the right kind of masculinity with biological men and as the right kind of femininity with biological women. Therefore, this heterosexual matrix produces genders. Heterosexual matrix offers two possibilities for gender. The man is perceived as more valuable: he desires the woman, and his body, biologically defined as male, is the basis of maleness and heterosexual desire. The woman, on the other hand, is perceived as less valuable: she desires the man, or at least to be the object of male desire, and her body, biologically defined as female, is the basis of femaleness and heterosexual desire.

Gender is the repeated “stylisation” of the body, it is a set of repeated acts (see Butler 1990, 33). In simpler terms, when people constantly and often enough repeat the certain acts connected with our gender thinking, the image of a “right kind” of gender, bound to the body, takes shape in the minds of the people themselves and those that they interact with (Lehtonen 2002). Name-calling, bullying, harassment, and the maintaining of hierarchies are connected with these performative acts, which, when repeated, create an idea of what gender and sexuality are. Thus, the thinking described above is the basis for the intertwining of sexuality and gender. It is also the theoretical framework of my article. I use the concept of heteronormativity in describing this heterosexual matrix.
It is often thought that people are either heterosexual or homosexual, and occasionally, it is also remembered that some are bisexual. This dichotomy or trichotomy is rather typical nowadays when sexual orientation is pondered or when the relationships between people of the same sex are discussed. According to heteronormative thinking, categories can be seen as opposites or exclusive so that something in the gendered (biological) body or gender leads to a certain kind of desire – heterosexual or other. I strive towards breaking the strengthening of the traditional homosexual and heterosexual categories by using the concepts of non-heterosexuality and heterosexuality in a manner that does not exclude the other. I primarily use the concept of non-heterosexuality to describe people who have sexual feelings towards (fantasies, dreams, hopes and wishes, crushes, love) and/or sexual experiences with people of the same sex, and/or who define themselves or their sexuality with terms that are, in our culture, connected with non-heterosexuality (lesbian, bisexual, homosexual, non-heterosexual). Correspondingly, in my study, heterosexuality is an adjective that I use to describe people who have sexual feelings towards and/or sexual experience with people of different sex, and/or who define themselves or their sexuality by terms that, in our culture, are connected with heterosexuality (heterosexual, normal, ordinary, I am not gay). A person’s selfhood is a construction. In other words, a person constructs a picture of him/herself as self.

Non-heterosexuality and heterosexuality are not exclusive concepts. In practice, they can be overlapping. Furthermore, they do not cover everything: a person can be neither. (See Lehtonen 1998.) The starting point of my article is the understanding of sexuality of young people – whether they are non-heterosexual and/or heterosexual – as an idea that is continuously maintained and under a possible and continuous change. This idea takes shape in the cultural and social interaction of today, with respect to past interaction. The sexuality of a young person is not a ready made package that he or she can absorb from the surrounding culture, but rather a sum of different parts, as well as the joining of discourses and absence of them. Young persons do not involuntarily assimilate everything or any discourse in a certain way, but the outcome of their sexuality is affected by their past experiences with feelings and acts, as well as their understanding. The maintaining of sexuality and gender is situational, and therefore, bound to time and place. The stability typical of sexuality and gender or the image of stability is based on past experiences and continuous performative repetition in which the “familiar” heteronormative ways of thinking – that are part of a culture – are cited. (See Lehtonen 2002.)

Heteronormativity and bullying at school

Some of the young people that I interviewed told me that they had been bullied or participated in bullying. Others told me that they had not taken part in bullying or did not remember whether they had bullied or not. Some of the interviewees said that there was hardly any bullying in their school or classroom and that the students or teachers interfered immediately if there was any. There are many forms of bullying and they are not necessarily connected to homosexuality, sexuality or gender. In the interviews, the students stated that boys bullied more often than girls, but that the objects of bullying could
be girls as well as boys. The bullying that occurs among girls is not noticed as often as the more visible bullying of boys.

Those characteristics that were not perceived as masculine enough were often mentioned as the reason for bullying among boys (compare Epstein & Johnson 1994, 204). One of my interviewees, Teemu (20 years old), had ended up as an object of bullying in his new school for various reasons. As a new student he had to fight for his place. In addition, he was not like the active boys of his school.

Teemu (20): When I moved to another town and went to a new school I was seen to be different. So I didn’t go out to bars, didn’t drink booze and spent all my nights at home and I was seen as a nerd. So I was easily picked on. I was a new face.

The reasons for bullying are often the differences between students. Many of these were in connection with lines of action, background and issues to do with the body. Often the reasons were, at the same time, the things that could be seen in some way as unmanly, such as being nerdy, quiet or not using alcohol. On the other hand, one of the interviewees, Simo (15), named his girlishness as the reason for him being bullied.

It is also the question of strengthening the hierarchy among boys. Bullying that takes place in a group of boys often includes constant bickering and taunting that has to do with demonstration of masculinity (Holland et al. 1993, 12–13, Tolonen 2001, 196–202). At the same time, the notion of real heterosexual masculinity, from which homosexuality and femininity are excluded, is constructed within a group. Persons who cannot fight back properly as well as those who in one way or another have characteristics that are not associated with the ideal model of man, are often chosen as the objects of bullying. For the most part, bullying appears to be the control of normative behaviour depending on gender and age group.

Girls can be bullied due to being boyish, which is also often associated with appearance, clothing, hobbies and particularly the length of hair. Similarly, boys are bullied due to girlishness and hobbies that are perceived as girlish. Usu recalled that she had been bullied for being boyish. Furthermore, she talks about the effects of bullying and about the pressure towards heterosexual femininity.

Usu (16): I was bullied quite a lot because I was perhaps more boyish than the others. In fact, quite a lot, but I didn’t understand it when they started bullying me. And the bullying continued in secondary school and because of that I changed schools. All of a sudden, I have later thought, they kind of made me like a hetero, because they didn’t let me be what I am, a tomboy. I was bullied, in secondary school it happened that I was afraid to talk to people anymore.

The situations of bullying often include the maintaining of existing hierarchies, and therefore, it is often difficult to interfere. It would mean challenging the entire hierarchy. Petteri (19) told me that the same boy had bullied both him and his brother, but that they could not discuss the issue even between themselves: “It would probably have been a sign of weakness if we’d talked about it”. Being bullied was experienced as shameful or as an issue so difficult that they could not talk about it, even with a person they trusted in other matters.

The student cultures of schools and the rules connected to them can guarantee that bullying is not possible. Mikko (20) told me that if someone in their class tried to bully...
someone even slightly, “they were booed to the far end of the world so that they wouldn’t dare to do it again”. Nevertheless, bullying is often possible and even common at some schools. Juho (20) told me that he might have resisted bullying more actively had he been more stronger, but that he could not do anything except be passive. He recalled that not even the teachers helped (compare Saarikoski 2001, 221, 250). In addition, Juho said that he had visited the rector once when the situation had “really pissed him off”. He recalled that the rector had said that “big boys don’t cry”. Furthermore, bullying of boys is not interfered with because, perhaps, certain kinds of quarrelling and fighting are perceived as belonging to the growth and development of boys (see Saarikoski 2001, 253–254, Tolonen 1998, 4–18). Telling and crying are not always allowed for boys (compare Mac An Ghaill 1994, 1). On the one hand, bullying among girls is interfered with more easily because it is not seen as appropriate feminine behaviour. On the other hand, it is not always interfered with because, generally, it is not as visible as bullying among boys, as has also been stated in other research literature (see Gordon et al. 2000a).

**Different variations of homophobic name-calling**

Queer (in Finland the typical word is “homo”) is a word that is generally used when calling someone names. All young people do not even associate it with sexuality. Most of the girls and boys attending secondary school have a negative attitude towards homosexuality (Kontula 1987, 113–114). Name-calling, discrimination and other negative experiences connected with homosexuality manifested themselves in studies that have examined the school experiences of homosexual and bisexual people (see Lehtonen 1995, 161). The majority of homosexual and bisexual men have heard negative stories that are connected with homosexuality from their school friends. The ones that tell these stories are often boys who call other boys queer or “homo” and use the words as swearwords. Girls do not use it as often and the word lesbian is not generally used to the same extent or as a swearword with a similar meaning. (Lehtonen 1995, 129, 139–144.) Jan Löfström has suggested that, in Finland, homophobic name-calling did not appear in everyday usage as a more common phenomenon until the 1970’s and 1980’s (Löfström 1999, 220).

The starting point of many international studies (Harbeck 1991, Douglas et al. 1997) has been that the objects of homophobic name-calling are homosexual and bisexual boys, in particular. However, on the basis of my data, this does not seem to be the case in today’s Finland. Homophobic name-calling is part of a wider culture of boys at school and it does not even reveal the attitudes of the name-caller (see also Lehtonen 2002). British researchers, Anoop Nayak and Mary Kehily (1997, 156–158), have concluded that homophobic comments cannot be interpreted straightforwardly because they and their motivations are various. At times they can be used, for example, for interrupting classroom situations, gaining attention, humour, questioning the authority of the teacher, constructing masculinity, as well as despising some students or teachers (see Lahelma 1996, 478–488). What is more, Nayak and Kehily suggest that students who make homophobic remarks are difficult to define as strictly homophobic. The reasons for making such remarks are so multiple that, on their basis, it is difficult to interpret what the actual attitude of the students towards homosexuality is.
Many of the young people I interviewed told me that homophobic name-calling was typical and almost like a routine. Juho (20) said that every other word at school is “fucking queer”. On the basis of the data, the phrase does not suggest anything to do with homosexuality but rather it is used as a general swear word or a word to call someone names. What is more, the phrase is used particularly by certain boys of other boys, even though it can also be a way for the girls to react to the negative behaviour of boys, such as sexual harassment (see Gordon et al. 2000a, 134). It is more typical to use the word queer (“homo”) as a swear word or as a way of gaining attention. However, it is often connected with certain situations. If someone gets upset in a fight, the word queer is used as a way to call them names. The word queer is also a sign or a signal of maintaining or crossing any sort of boundaries: the boundary between the right and the wrong kind of gender and sexuality, between stupid and wise, between immature and mature. In any case, this is often connected with a value judgement.

The word faggot is often used with the word fuck: fucking faggot. This phrase “fucking faggot” can be looked at as a combination of two strong words. The combination of the female genitals and unmanly faggot acts as a reflecting surface in male socialisation when heterosexual masculinity is constructed in relation to femininity, femaleness and homosexuality (see Mac An Ghaill 1994, 96–97). Homophobic name-calling is often linked with the connotation of effeminacy or girlishness in boys. For example, Leo (19) recalled that “surely there were those faggot and sissy shouts”. The wrong kind of masculinity is punished by homophobic name-calling. The gendered nature of homophobic name-calling is obvious from the fact that even if it is used as a synonym for stupid, it is generally not used of girls or if it is used it might be interpreted as a mistake.

JL: Who has been called a faggot?
Henna (19): No one in particular, in a way. It has just been thrown in the air if someone has wanted to say to someone else that you are a real idiot, so they might have said that you are really faggot.
JL: In your opinion, do boys and girls use it as often?
Henna: Maybe boys use it more, but also girls use it.
JL: Are girls called faggots, too?
Henna: As a matter fact, sometimes, yes. I had a mate who sometimes used to say that she is a real faggot. I don’t know why that word is also used of girls.

The homosexuality in homophobic name-calling is typically understood as weirdness, unconventionality or girlishness connected to the man or manliness (Rofes 1993/1994, 38). If teachers interfere with homophobic name-calling, the students may argue that they do not mean anything by it. This prevents interference with the phenomenon. When “fucking faggot” is understood to be one of the everyday swearwords used in the school, interfering may seem unnecessary.

1. Translator’s note. The Finnish phrase “vitun homo”, used by Lehtonen in his original text, cannot be translated literally since the literal translation does not make any sense (“cunt’s faggot”). Accordingly, the Finnish phrase refers to the female genitals in a degrading manner as Lehtonen analyses but in English this idea cannot be conveyed.
Because anyone, particularly any of the boys, can be chosen as the object of homophobic name-calling, questioning it requires a special kind of courage. It is difficult to interfere with homophobic name-calling or remarks, even if one does not agree with that sort of talk, because one could lose one’s reputation by objecting to them. The situations of homophobic name-calling were often connected with the regulation of hierarchy in a classroom and with the aim of strengthening one’s own position. Whoever was chosen as the object, depended partly on group dynamics, friendships and the control conducted by teachers. The dynamics of homophobic name-calling are emphatically linked with relationship networks: a group can protect from homophobic name-calling or at least set the limits for it: who can do it and to whom. On the other hand, homophobic name-calling might not be used at all with some sensitive students because they might not be able to take it in a casual enough manner. What is more, homophobic name-calling can act as a way of strengthening friendship: as a sign that the other is such a good friend that one can call him a faggot.

Janne (15): They will not go and shout at a stranger. So if someone pushes someone like “bloody faggot”. When there is an insider gang they shout at each other and sometimes at others. I guess it is different with the ones that know each other well.

The word faggot in homophobic name-calling obtains new meanings. Mira (18) recalled that someone at school said that “I was pissed off like a faggot”. Accordingly, the word may also be used as a general word that strengthens the expression (like word “fucking” is often used, for example: “It was fucking great!”).

Anoop Nayak and Mary Kehily (1997, 138–140) examine the gendered dynamics connected to homophobia with the help of their ethnographic school data, and they perceive these as multiple processes, in which young men have invested a great deal. They analyse that the internal maintaining of homophobic practices and the externalisation of them in student culture is an attempt to negotiate a coherent masculine identity. They emphasise the difficulty of constructing and maintaining masculinity. It requires a continuous homophobic performance with which the image of one’s inner self is protected. At the same time, it is used to produce a boundary between self and others. These others are women, homosexuals and other victims of homophobia, whose role is to be the objects of violent reactions caused by the fears connected with masculinity. Nearly all of the interviewees had perceived homophobic name-calling as in some way negative. When a person has feelings towards another person of the same sex, he or she might need to take homophobic name-calling more personally than in other cases. I understand the making of homophobic remarks mainly as a gender performance, in which the young men participating in it perform on two levels: externally, as part of a group, in which the comments are made and internally – in relation to one’s own self (see Butler 1993, 238). As a result of homophobic culture and homophobic name-calling the boys learn not to express their feelings and weakness (Griffin 1995, 55) as well as to avoid intimate relationships or intimacy with other boys or friendships with girls (Cahill & Theilheimer 1999, 41).
A non-heterosexual young person as an object of homophobic name-calling

Homophobic name-calling is often not about “really seeing” someone as a homosexual, but the word faggot is used in an otherwise degrading way. Situations in which the object of name-calling or bullying, who is known or suspected to be a homosexual, can be examined as a nearly separate phenomenon. Often in secondary school, young people do not tell others that they are sexually interested in a person of the same sex or that they have sexual experiences with persons of the same sex (Lehtonen 1999a, 210–224). Two interviewees of mine, Teemu and Joni, had been labelled homosexual. With the help of their stories I will discuss the bullying of non-heterosexual young people and the possible labelling which develops as a process in the school community. Teemu talks about being labelled homosexual.

JL: This Håkan thing, how did it start? Do you remember how it got started?
Teemu (20): I remember when Håkan [a gay television character, JL] appeared on tv and one girl had seen it and the next day in the cafeteria which was full of 13 to 16 year-old kids, so she said that you talk just like Håkan, the faggot. And everyone was like oh yeah. That’s where it started.
JL: What did you think about the girl saying that?
Teemu: It was really horrible. It was so that I didn’t want to be different. But then later in the spring I knew that certain teachers liked me and kind of protected me so that no one should mess with me and it was like this balance of fear. I can be a pretty bitchy person if needed. I got a nickname from it and it was sometimes like he’s sort of a faggot …With that determination I got through it when I knew that next spring I would move away from home, I wouldn’t stay here.

Television series and the images of gays and lesbians created by the media have a particularly noticeable role in creating the image of homosexuality due to the lack of other information and imagery. Teemu was also bullied physically. His mother interfered with bullying and the situation was eased. Despite the fact that during the period of bullying Teemu was dating a girl, he was perceived as a homosexual. Even though a student said that he or she is heterosexual, he or she might still be called names and labelled homosexual.

Teemu (20): At the time I was dating a girl and I got a new hobby I started…
JL: Did it not have any effect?
Teemu: Well, we were regarded as quite a weird couple…
JL: So no one believed you.
Teemu: Well, they all thought I was a faggot. Once a faggot, always a faggot. And then I got a new hobby. I started to ride horses for real and everyone else was like into mopeds and I was in the stables all day and I’m not interested in motor vehicles except that I cared only about getting from one place to another with them. I was a weird boy.

Anoop Nayak and Mary Kehily (1997, 155) argue that the boys who have homophobic reactions are not scared of homosexuals as such, but rather are internally scared of losing control and “turning into” homosexuals. The bullied ones may often feel that they are to
blame for being bullied or they explain bullying with their own theories as my inter-
viewee, Teemu, did (compare Saarikoski 2001, 251–252).

Teemu (20): But the boys were sort of scared of it in themselves so that if it
sometimes came out, they were scared of their homosexuality and they have been
watching themselves enough to have noticed that it might be quite neat. It is a fact
that the guys that beat up homosexuals are the ones that have sometimes tried to be
homosexual and they like it too much so they are afraid of it in themselves and
they resist it by thinking that they are cool if they beat up a homosexual.

Joni (16) had been bullied because he is a homosexual. He had revealed his sexuality to
some of his classmates and apparently they had spread the information. His best friend
had left him and labelled homosexuality as an illness after Joni had told him about his
sexuality. Persons hanging around with a person who has been labelled homosexual
might be “polluted” themselves (see Nayak & Kehily 1997, 147).

Joni (16): So he somehow thinks that it’s an illness. He doesn’t approve of it. I
have always thought of him as a sissy because he’s girlish, digs birds and is a sort
of nature lover.

JL: Do you think that he was afraid of being labelled himself?

Joni: Yeah or the first thought that came to my mind was that he thinks I try to
make a pass at him or something like that. It’s ridiculous. At the moment I don’t
have a best friend. I have a lot of other friends.

Furthermore, Joni had been left alone by other boys. The boys of his own class shouted at
Joni. Joni explained this by the need to show other boys that they have the courage to call
someone a faggot: “you have to show other guys that you’re tough”. The boys who called
Joni a faggot at school might treat him friendly outside the school. This clearly demon-
strates that what is central in bullying is not insulting an individual, in particular, but rath-
er group dynamics: the one that bullies expresses his or her place and role within the
group by putting down another student.

Joni (16): But then when you meet the same guy that has called you a faggot and
you see him outside of school without his friends so then he is like yeah nice to see
you. Then when you go to the school the next day he is like fuck you.

Nevertheless, Joni told me that not all of the boys took part in homophobic name-calling.
Especially those boys who were labelled as nerds did not bully Joni. It seems that the
dominant and visible opposite side for the boys who had chosen the traditional role of
“heterosexual” men was formed of the “nerds”, who were interested in computers, and
who had gained visibility as their own group also in the media. Joni recalls that he has
also been bullied physically, but that he had found ways to fight against it. If he is bullied
physically, he tells the teachers about it immediately but does not care to report “mere”
name-calling. According to Joni, this has had the effect that the boys do not dare to bully
him for fear of punishment, and he hears about the opinions of the boys mostly from the
girls.

Homosexuality of a classmate might be too threatening to face so people refuse to
believe it. When Simo (15) was called a faggot and he admitted to being homosexual, the
name-caller stopped and turned it other way around by saying that he is not serious. Even
though homophobic name-calling is common at schools, people are generally not ready to
cope with real gays or lesbians (compare Nayak & Kehily 1997, 154). Self-conscious sexuality might be experienced as threatening or disturbing, especially if one’s own sexuality is vague. However, not everyone had experienced negative behaviour or rejection after having told someone about their homo- or bisexuality, or if someone had found some proof of this.

On the basis of the interviews alone it is impossible to say anything too general about how much non-heterosexual boys and girls are bullied at school or whether they are called queer more or less than other students. Because non-heterosexual young men do not necessarily perceive the traditional role of the heterosexual man as suitable for them, I assume that they have more room for flexibility and motivation to choose hobbies or ways of behaving and dressing that are perceived as unmanly. This can increase their chances of ending up as a victim of bullying due to gender discipline, in particular. A similar situation can be found among non-heterosexual girls. If some young person is suspected or known to be homo- or bisexual, it can be claimed, based on my data, that this person is in a greater risk of ending up as the object of bullying – merely in the light of the known attitudinal climate – than other young people. Homophobic name-calling and bullying linked with gender control are, nevertheless, a part of the lives of young people at today’s schools. Some of the non-heterosexual young people have better abilities to analyse it and can, therefore, take distance from it. The ones that are in trouble are those young men who desperately want to be like “the real men” but are not very sure of their ability to do so. The vulnerability of heterosexual masculinity – which Anoop Nayak and Mary Kehily (1997, 157) have discussed – is most visible in them, and participation in masculinity rituals as a helper of the one who bullies can be most motivating.

**Calling girls a lesbian and a whore**

The word lesbian is not used as a word to call someone names in a similar manner to faggot. The word faggot can be used of anyone, whereas the word lesbian is used solely of females. Sometimes even girls are called a faggot despite the fact that this does not always work since faggot is seen to be a masculine word.

Miska (15): At primary school guys were like “faggot faggot” to a girl, and the girls said that “I can’t be”. Then later, one can be that but a different name is used for it.

One of the youngest interviewees, Simo (15), told me that people are sometimes called lesbian, and that he has also heard boys being called that. He believes that people did not even know the meaning of the word. Lesbianism is not as negative a label as homosexuality, but at the same time, it often remains more invisible (see Mac An Ghaill 1994, 94). The ones that call someone a lesbian are more often boys than girls. The girls I interviewed said that certain girls rather than just anyone were called lesbian. The word lesbian is more strongly connected with being a lesbian than the word faggot with homosexuality or being homosexual. Veera (18) says that “girls are called a lesbian if they really are that”. The word lesbian is used neither as a general word to call someone names nor as a synonym for stupid. Essi told me that lesbianism was connected to those characteristics
of appearance that questioned the known gender expectations (compare Butler 1993, 238).

Essi (18): People of that age somehow, they can’t even think that someone is a lesbian or that a lesbian is someone who has short hair. They do not have any thoughts, especially the boys, about lesbians. But fag was sort of, it wasn’t even used to mean that someone is a fag, it was the same as damn or bugger.

Mira (18) told me that she had been bullied for being a lesbian and because people suspected that she was a lesbian. In comprehensive school, she had talked about homosexuality in the assembly and had given out leaflets on the same theme. She said that the leaflets she had put on the notice board had often been “smudged with the words fucking dyke”. She thought that the writers were the boys of the seventh and ninth grades. She had not been bullied physically but she was occasionally called names: “boys shouted prick teasing whore and that SETA-lesbian when I walked by” (compare Saarikoski 2001, 114–117, Honkatukia 1998, 163). Mira told me that she had not actually feared the violence but that “psychologically” the bullying “hurt”.

Mira (18): It didn’t hurt me that they called me names, it hurt me that a good cause was called names, that even though I had tried to do a lot to change those things so anyway SETA-lesbian was a word that was used to call people names as well as faggot was.

Calling someone a whore and other forms of labelling and name-calling connected with femaleness are more common and familiar than calling someone a lesbian.

Miska (15): The word lesbian is not used, the word whore is used a lot more or then something like cow. The girls are not called names really.

The word faggot can be easily used in many different conversations, whereas it is a particular girl that is called or labelled a whore. Calling someone a whore might be experienced as a stronger insult on an individual level, partly because it is used more seldom and is often directed at certain types of girls. Janne (15) thinks that “whore is the worst word that you can think of a person”. Ville (19) recalled a situation, in which he had responded to a homophobic remark directed at him by calling someone a whore. This example reveals the partial parallelism of calling someone a faggot and a whore, even though the person that was called a whore lost. Helena Saarikoski (2001, 98–99, 230–231) states that the girls who end up being called a whore and the boys who end up being called a faggot may defend their reputation even by fighting. In her study, Päivi Honkatukia brings into focus that the girl who has been called a whore might worsen her position by breaking the assumption of her femininity by fighting (see Honkatukia 1998, 235).

Calling someone a whore might be directed at a girl who causes irritation or acts in a wrong way, for example, by behaving “manly”, or who sends out signals of “excessive femaleness” with her behaviour and dressing, as Helena Saarikoski has also analysed (see Saarikoski 2001, 99, see also Gordon et al. 2000a, 175, Honkatukia 1998, 163–167).

Aleksi (17): There is a whore-call with a certain emphasis, which was always directed towards a certain person… It didn’t mean any harm.

Aleksi recalled that the person in question was a young woman who wore short skirts and make up. She was rather popular in the class, but she was put in her place once in a while.
In the case of Aleksi, calling someone a whore was directed at one particular girl who dressed more colourfully than the others (compare Saarikoski 2001, 238). According to Teemu (20), “a whore is to a hillbillyheterogirl the lowest thing in the world”. I understand that what Teemu meant was that girls of a certain type (for example, the girls who emphasise being ordinary as well as femininity and heterosexuality) experience being called a whore in a different manner than others do.

Being a foreigner or having an ethnic background are occasionally connected to being called a whore. Especially those immigrants from Eastern Europe or countries outside of Europe might be called a whore in a “Russian whore”-manner. One of the girls (who has a non-Finnish background) had been bullied and called names by using the name of her ethnic background with the word whore. She analysed that the reason for the situation was that she “was seen as a threat to their boyfriends or something like she is now gonna steal our boyfriends”. She was called a whore and bullied by other girls (compare Gordon et al. 2000a, 133). She said that the name-calling had been interfered with at the school and, as a result, it had stopped. It is easier to interfere with bullying that is in connection with ethnic discrimination, partly because it has been discussed more than sexual harassment.

Calling someone a whore or a lesbian are not the only ways to question a sexual reputation of a girl.

JL: Was the word whore used at your school?
Veera (18): I don’t know. Those are the unimaginative abuse words that weren’t use at my school. The most compelling one that I have ever heard, but it wasn’t an abuse but rather a sort of name, was when someone said that some girl is someone’s piece of meat.

JL: That is tough. Was the girl really happy about being someone’s piece of meat? It doesn’t sound like she could even be a human being.

Veera: In my opinion, it is compelling because of its extremity, gross! And then there’s another one, a word that has really neatly been adapted from technical vocabulary, distributing box.

A whore as well as other sexual derogatory names (such as distributing box) include a supposition of the object’s heterosexuality. By calling someone a whore the reputation of a female is connected to the idea whether or not she “spreads her legs too easily”. On the other hand, a girl that is seen as masculine or that does not want to have a sexual relationship with a boy, might be called a “prick teasing whore” (Honkatukia 1998, 163). Calling someone a lesbian is not emphasised in the processes of gender socialisation as strongly as being called a faggot. If women are directed towards the right kind of heterosexual femaleness by warning them of the label “whore”, the boys are intimidated by homosexuality or being labelled “a faggot”. Even though calling someone a lesbian, a whore or a faggot include a clear association to sexuality, the power of them refers to gender: what sort of maleness or femaleness is expected from the objects of the name-calling and from those who witness the incident (compare Saarikoski 2001, 226). In principle, every female student is at risk of being labelled a whore just as every male student is a potential “faggot”.

Mairtin Mac An Ghaill (1994, 89–109, 179) has also studied the construction of heterosexual masculinity at school. He suggests that male students learn to be men with the
help of three central strategies. These are compulsory heterosexuality, the hatred of women, in other words misogyny, and homophobia. With the help of these strategies, a young man gradually constructs an extremely vulnerable heterosexual masculinity towards a more stable and unified category, which he adopts as a part of his self image.

Female students use different strategies to construct heterosexual femaleness (see Mac An Ghaill 1994, 110–152, Holland et al. 1998, 171–179). Calling someone a whore acts partly as a corresponding phenomenon of calling someone a faggot (see Saarikoski 2001, 98, Honkatukia 1998, 171). Both the relationships to other women and especially to men are central in constructing femaleness, whereas maleness is constructed, at least in comprehensive school, rather in relation to other boys. What the boys consider important, is mainly what the other boys think of them. In contrast, the girls are interested in the views of both other girls, as well as boys. Even though the views of the boys did not interest them, they would have to comment on these views because the boys actively comment on girls and their behaviour.

Gender and order

The hierarchies and groupings between the students and their teachers of a school, different forms of name-calling and violence, as well as the attitudes to them, construct and control the possibilities connected to gender and sexuality. Through them and with their help, young people perceive an image of the right kind of maleness, femaleness and sexuality, which is heterosexual. Young people create an image of their own sexuality by mirroring it with the practices of the school culture. They either strive towards realising the “right” models or question them but, nevertheless, these models act as building material. They offer the only possibility to cite gender, as Judith Butler has suggested (1990, 33).

Boys construct the idea of their own masculinity, as well as the masculinity of others, by using femininity and homosexuality, connected to both women and men, as the antithesis. Degrading attitudes towards women, the femininity, masculinity and sexuality of women, and negative attitudes towards homosexuality and the femininity of men construct an image of the position of both men and women. Boys maintain more actively and visibly the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour – or at least some of them do. Some boys control the possibilities of both other boys and girls.

Girls construct their femaleness and their heterosexual femininity in relation to other girls, but also to boys. The label of a whore and pressure towards obedient heterosexuality is directed more strongly at girls than at boys. On the other hand, one should not be too much of a nerd or too obedient. Girls are more active in questioning the acts of calling someone a faggot or a whore, as well as bullying. Girls, who construct boundaries for the right kind of sexuality and gender, do not necessarily call someone names or beat them up as some boys do, but rather behave more discreetly by isolating, evading and implying. However, the same methods are used by many boys.

Non-heterosexual boys and girls take part in these practices of school culture. They participate in the practices: some by questioning, some by watching from the distance and some by eagerly strengthening heteronormative practices. “The evil other”, which no one wants to be, is often left as the position for the breaking of non-heterosexuality and gen-
nder boundaries. The name of the wrong gender is homosexuality or a heterosexual whore. Providing that the non-heterosexual young people realise their “real” gender well enough, they will not have to face bullying and name-calling as a result of their gender and sexuality. If they do not obey the rules regarding gender, they are threatened by possible violence, isolation and problems. Young people balance between the repetition and deconstruction of gender (see Butler 1990, 136–140).

Violence connected to gender and sexuality is a problem for young people, in particular. Young men and boys are the most active in bashing homosexuals and people that are suspected of being homosexual (Lehtonen 1999b). The targets are often other young men and boys who do not conform to the idea of the right kind of masculinity. In the context of school, bullying, name-calling and isolation, as well as other methods with which the self-esteem and humanity of some young people are abused or, on the other hand, constructed, leave a mark on people (compare Butler 1997, 159). Some leave school, change school or class, suffer immediately or later on of depression, self-destructiveness, eating or sleeping disorders, troubles in their relationships or sex lives, as well as a broken image of their own sexuality, gender and body (see Herdt & Boxer 1993, 206–230, Saarikoski 2001, 222).

Bullying at school is quite widely discussed in the media. However, the multilayered questions of gender and sex are often disregarded. On the basis of the evaluations and memories of the interviewees, neither schools nor teachers often notice or interfere with name-calling or bullying, particularly when their sexualised or gendered nature is in question. Gendered bullying is sometimes seen and explained as a natural or normal part of development. Interfering with it and the change of practices may be difficult, and teachers and the school administration often avoid responsibility. Explicitly, the responsibility of school staff is in question when the factors affecting school safety are evaluated.

References


Sexually Dichotomised Culture in the Lives of Bisexual Youth in School Context

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Abstract

Sexuality is heavily dichotomised in western culture, and sexual identities are usually defined either homo- or heterosexual. Nevertheless, the bisexual identities of young Finnish bisexuals tend to be strong. They take advantage of prejudices and use them to define the concept of bisexuality and to construct their bisexual identity. They are certain above what bisexuality means to them, but try not to generalise their experiences and thoughts on other bisexuals.

I have interviewed 30 persons born between 1970 and 1981 to obtain data. My aim is to ponder what kind of experiences young Finnish bisexuals have at school and how school strengthens sexual dichotomy.

Bisexual youth face prejudices and denial in sexually dichotomised western culture. The prejudices and myths of bisexuality are linked to the dichotomous sexual system, which divides people into men and women, gay and straight. A dichotomous sexual system can be seen as structural violence which affects bisexual youth both at school and in society as a whole. Bisexual youth say that they have not gained knowledge about bisexuality at school but on their own. In their opinion the sexual education at school seems to reinforce the traditional division of homo- and heterosexuality and of masculinity and femininity.

Introduction

Finnish bisexual youth are living in a culture which is characterised by sexual dichotomies, heterosexism and heteronormativity – general traits of western sexual culture. However, their society is also one of the most emancipated societies in the world considering the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender rights.
Although the society is quickly changing its legislation, norms and regulations to non-heterosexist and liberating, the general culture is still quite heterosexist and sexually dichotomised. At school the heterosexist and dichotomised culture still seems to be prevalent.

Young people construct their sexualities during the period, when they spend most of their time at school. Therefore the role of the school is crucial when considering the issue of maintaining and reproducing the heterosexist and dichotomous culture.

My aim in this article is to ponder what kind of experiences young Finnish bisexuals have at school and how does school strengthen sexual dichotomy. The paper is partially based on my master’s thesis which I wrote on cultural models of bisexuality in Finland. The master's thesis concentrated on how Finnish bisexuals define the concept "bisexuality". The interviewees talked about their memories and experiences of being bisexual in Finland. In the master's thesis I did not discuss their school experiences very deeply. For this article I collected their school memories from the interviews for interpretation.

First I will define the concept of sexual dichotomy, which is the central theoretical concept in my article. Then I will describe how this sexual dichotomy can be seen in Finnish sexual culture on a more practical level. After that I will interpret my data further and tell about the experiences of young, Finnish bisexuals at school.

**Dichotomous sexual system**

Basically sexual dichotomy – or dichotomous sexual system – means that sexuality is considered binary. Sexuality is divided into opposite halves: male sexuality and female sexuality, homosexuality and heterosexuality, wrong sexuality and right sexuality. Sexual dichotomies limit sexualities to rigid categories which exist only when opposing each other: male sexuality does not exist without female sexuality, homosexuality without heterosexuality and the norms of right and wrong sexuality define the borderlines in between. A dichotomous sexual system itself is very complex and different dichotomies are deeply entwined. Sexual dichotomies deny and marginalise the existence of transgender-identities and bisexuality, but also limit the experiences of those people who actually do fit into the categories.

According to Jeffrey Weeks (1995), western thinking about sexuality derives from the Man-Woman dichotomy. In western thinking sexuality and gender are entwined. Sexuality itself is defined with gender opposities: Man and Woman are opposities and sexuality is something that happens between them.

The Man-Woman dichotomy is explained by reproduction. Reproduction is seen as a reason for the existence of sexuality (Weeks 1995, 19–41). However, reproduction is not an exhaustive explanation: most of the things defined as sexual have nothing to do with reproduction, for example kissing, hugging, caressing, flirting, masturbation, etc. Sexuality is not limited to reproductive actions or between men and women. Seeing reproduction as a function of sexuality is part of the dichotomous sexual system.

In western thinking, it is usual to emphasise the differences between men and women – not the similarities. Also the sexualities of men and women are divided into two different phenomena. Anatomic differences create an assumption of the differences of sexuality,
and biological differences are seen as essential and sufficient explanations for sexuality. (Weeks 1995, 45–66.)

Judith Butler (1990, 1993) has developed a very handy concept, namely heterosexual hegemony. She says that assuming heterosexuality as natural and normal, keeps the Man-Woman dichotomy stable. The coherence between the categories of cultural Man and cultural Woman requires heterosexuality. Institutionalised heterosexuality, heterosexual hegemony in Butler’s terms, both produces gender categories and demands their existence. The gender categories contain a causality from anatomic body to gender and desire and the claim that desire describes gender and gender describes desire.

Therefore a baby born with a vagina and ovaries is considered a girl, a woman, and women are considered to desire men. Desire for men is seen to describe womanhood and femininity; to desire women means to question womanhood and femininity. Women who desire women are excluded from the cultural category of the Woman, which is stabilised in this way. However, persons desiring both men and women – or questioning the categories altogether – seem to threaten the dichotomous system.

**Gender belief – the Sacred Order of dichotomy**

Binary, heterosexist thinking is pervasive also in Finnish sexual culture. Sari Charpentier developed a concept of gender belief to describe general Finnish attitudes towards gender. Gender belief means a belief that the basis of the society is the gender difference, which is manifested in heterosexual marriage. Charpentier has studied the debate of lesbian and gay marriages that was going on in the last years of the 1990’s in Finnish newspapers. (Charpentier 2001.)

The debate had clear heterosexist and violent tones. Although the debate consisted of both positive and negative arguments towards lesbian and gay marriages, the negative arguments were more visible. The debate on newspapers developed into demonstrations for and against the partnership law. After a registered partnership for same sex couples was legislated, fundamental Christian groups demonstrated even outside the city and municipal registries where the first same sex couples were registered.

In gender belief, heterosexual marriage is seen as sacred, and lesbian and gay marriages – and homosexuality overall – is seen as a threat to the sacredness of heterosexual marriage. Heterosexual marriage is the basis of society, and any attempt to change its position in society is threatening. The heterosexual marriage is grounded on gender difference. Therefore the gay and lesbian marriage is not threatening itself, but in the way it blurs the gender difference. Charpentier calls the heterosexual order of genders The Sacred Order. The maintenance of this order is seen as necessary for the maintenance of Finnish society – and even for the independence of state. (Charpentier 2001, 81–92.)

The Sacred Order of gender belief is not based solely on Christianity but on the belief of essential gender difference, which is a mixture of Christian, teleological and pseudopsychological beliefs. Charpentier identified different discourses in the debate of lesbian and gay marriages that pinpoint the gender belief. The discourses are Christian, psychological and natural discourse. These discourses justify the gender belief by describing
homosexuality as sinful, sick and/or unnatural and sanctify the heterosexuality and gender difference. (Charpentier 2001, 46–67.)

Charpentier studied mainly newspaper debates, but interestingly the same heterosexist undertows and discourses could be found in the legislative documents (Charpentier 2001, 107–113, Suomen Eduskunta 2001). Since March 2002 it has been possible for couples of the same gender to register a partnership in Finland. This is a great step towards a more equal and diverse society, but still some traits of the law can be described as heterosexist. For example same sex couples are not allowed to take the same surname through the registration like different sex couples are. If same sex couples want the same surname, they have to request it from the local District Court and pay for it. Also adoption, even inside the family, is forbidden for people in a registered partnership – even though adoption is possible for single people.

The development of the dichotomous sexual system in Finland

How has this situation developed? After all, Finnish sexual culture has changed drastically during the last hundred years, as has sexual culture in the western countries in general.

Finland has changed from an agrarian society to a highly industrialised urban society in a very short time period, about thirty years. In the agrarian culture, homosexuality was not considered interesting or important – there are very few stories or jokes about homosexuality – or sexuality between the persons of same gender – in Finnish folklore and tradition. Homosexuality has become an issue in Finland only after the Second World War, and the concept itself has not been familiar to most of people before the 60s. Only in the recent thirty years has homosexuality became a center of interest in Finland and now so common homophobic name-calling became common in the 80s and 90s. The use of the word 'homo' as an insult reflects the position of homosexuality in Finnish sexual culture. (Löfström 1999a, 218–221, 1999b, 9–24.)

According to Jan Löfström (1999a, 196–199, 1999b, 9–24) the gender difference was not as rigid in the Finnish agrarian culture in the 19th century as it was in the middle class and Middle-European industrialised culture in the 19th century, and in Finnish culture today. In the peasant culture, the roles and spaces of the genders were overlapping, and although a gender based labour division existed, the gender was not essentialised. The gender difference was based more on tradition and labour division than sexuality and body. The gender system divided people into men and women, but it also allowed the existence of feminine men and masculine women – the last mentioned was even admired. Men were more appreciated and had more power, but manhood was linked to the ability to do hard work and be responsible for one's actions, not for sexuality. The symbolic difference between man and boy was more important than the symbolic difference between woman and man. Therefore two hardworking men living together could be highly appreciated and their sexualities were not an issue.

If in the agrarian community the gender boundaries were flexible, the gender system in the Finnish bourgeois class at the end of the 19th century was quite similar to the bourgeois gender system in Middle Europe. The gender division was rigid, and this polarisation started to spread to the gender system of the whole society during the first few
decades of the 20th century. The intermediators of these values were, for example, the media (first literature and newspapers, later also cinema), medical science, legislation and school. The values and discourses of the middle class became dominant in Finnish culture. During the 1960s, the gender system was already very polarised compared to the traditional agrarian gender system. (Löfström 1999a, 196–199, 234–246.)

According to Löfström, there is a link between a gender system that is based on polarised gender differences and the separation of homosexuality from normative heterosexuality. Heterosexist culture needs both gender division and homosexuality that guards the boundaries of genders. (Löfström 1999a, 196–199, 234–246.)

Therefore homosexuality was not seen as important or interesting before it could be used to define the borderlines of acceptable Man and Woman. Homosexuality is not important culturally as a phenomenon itself, but as a means to define masculinity and femininity. Non-acceptably behaving men and women can be defined as homosexuals which keeps the categories of real, normative and acceptable Woman and Man pure. The rigid borderlines between Men and Women have developed along the development of urbanised culture, in which the roles and positions of men and women approach each other. (Löfström 1999a, 196–199, 234–246.)

Elina Haavio-Mannila and Osmo Kontula (1993, 1995, 1997, 2001) have carried out two quite large statistical studies, one of which is based on sexual biographies in Finnish sexuality. They gathered data in the 1990s and could also compare the data to data gathered in 1971. Although their research has been criticised for both their research methods and for being heteronormative and heterosexist, they have gained some interesting knowledge about the change in Finnish sexual culture in the latter half of the 20th century. Their data does not cover the changes from agrarian sexuality to modern sexuality, that Löfström described.

Haavio-Mannila and Kontula divide their human data into three sexual generations. The first generation was born between 1917 and 1936 and it is called the "Generation of continence", the second, born between 1937–1956 is called the "Generation of sexual revolution" and the third, born between 1957–1980 is called the "Generation of equalising". The year limits of the generations might be disputed, but the main point is that Finnish society has developed from a highly prudent society of the 1920s and the 1930s to a society of the 21st century that considers sexuality as a normal, positive part of life. The development has gone through a so called 'revolution' that includes the decriminalisation of pre- and extra-marital sex, to sexual relationships between persons of the same sex, the rise of the feminist and gay movement, the development of birth control and media coverage of sexuality as an issue. Compared to Löfström's study, this revolution means also a polarisation of genders and categorisation of homosexuality.

Seen from a heterosexual (and heterosexist) perspective, sexuality at the start of the 21st century is more satisfying, more visible and a more positive thing in Finland than it has ever been before. The Finnish society of today seems to take up a very positive and open attitude towards sexuality. Sexuality is seen as a healthy, enjoyable, normal and happy part of human life, related to individual tastes, not dictated to by the norms of society. Young people start having sexual relationships earlier than before and are generally more satisfied with their sex lives than earlier generations. Cohabitation outside (and before) marriage is usual and accepted. Sexuality is seen as essential for the satisfaction of relationships according to both men and women. People trust their sexual skills and
their sexual attractiveness more than before. People are ready to seek new sexual experiences and do not condemn any consensual form of sex. Women have better possibilities to be active in sexual relationships and to have several partners without the fear of social sanctions as in previous times. (Haavio-Mannila & Kontula 2001.)

However, we should ask what does this sexual emancipation mean. Does it really mean happier, healthier sex lives for everyone – as the general discourse on sexual emancipation seems to claim? Or does so-called sexual emancipation, liberating sexuality just reflect individualised consumer culture in which sexualities are just products that can be sold, bought and traded? Sexuality has become more and more consumerised and the consumerism creates new oppressed classes. Non-heterosexualities are accepted as long as they are hip and trendy and spice up the heterosexist culture but the ideological heterosexist system is changed reluctantly.

Despite all the above, the general attitude towards non-heterosexualities in Finland is quite positive. Although there are some small – usually fundamental Christian – groups that claim very strongly that non-heterosexuality is sinful and unnatural, most Finns have quite neutral opinions on non-heterosexualities – or at least do not present heterosexist attitudes openly. Compared to the situation in Russia and the United States, Finland may seem like a haven for non-heterosexual people. Haavio-Mannila's and Kontula's study showed that Finnish attitudes towards non-heterosexualities have become more and more accepting during the past few decades. The new partnership law proves that the Finnish government is also ready to acknowledge the non-heterosexual population. However, 'sexuality' in Finland is still mainly heterosexuality – non-heterosexual sexualities are considered an exception, and maybe an abomination.

School as a special area for maintaining a dichotomous sexual system

School is one of the special areas where heterosexist culture is reinforced. Other areas are, for example, the media, academia, medicine, government and religion. School is not an isolated area in society, but it reflects the general values and beliefs of the society – as well as maintaining and reproducing them.

Transferring the value system of the culture is at least as important a purpose for school as giving children basic education. In general, this is a good thing: school gives pupils certain approved behaviour norms and teaches them to adjust to the culture they are living in. But when the culture has negative and oppressive traits, as heterosexism, racism and misogyny, the school should be the first institution to start getting rid of them – and not the first one to reinforce them. At worst, the negative traits can prevent pupils from learning anything at all (eg. Owens 1998).

According to research on the Finnish school system (eg. Lehtonen 1995), heterosexism is an essential part of the school culture. Furthermore, educational organisations maintain and reproduce heterosexist culture. Teachers tend to allow, and even continue heterosexist discourses and even bullying.

Heterosexist practices at school are often regarded as normal everyday routine, so common that teachers either are not even aware of them, and may continue them themselves or ignore them, if they perceive them. These practices include heterosexist bully-
ing, excluding non-heterosexual students and teachers, and heterosexist teaching. Boys and young men especially are allowed to show their heterosexist attitudes openly – racist remarks may be sanctioned but heterosexist remarks rarely are. It can even be said that heterosexism is the norm for boys and young men. Therefore heterosexist bullying may be ignored or the victims may even be blamed for being bullied. (Kehily & Nayak 1996, Owens 1998, 83–99.)

According to various studies (eg. Kangasvuoto 2001, Lehtonen 1995, Owens 1998, Epstein 1997) non-heterosexual pupils do not feel comfortable at school which is highly heterosexist. It is self-evident that heterosexism at school discriminates, belittles and oppresses non-heterosexual pupils. In heterosexist environments, non-heterosexual pupils do not get enough information – or no information at all – about non-heterosexualities or relevant sexuality education. In general, they get bullied more than heterosexual kids and also suffer more problems with their sexual identity.

Heterosexism also oppresses heterosexual pupils. Heterosexism creates stereotypical categories of men and women and forces girls and boys into these categories, whether they are suitable or not. This limits the individuality and achievement of each pupil at school – be they non-heterosexual or heterosexual, girl, boy, transgender. The boys and girls who are not or do not behave like the culturally acceptable Woman and Man may especially encounter problems. Not being or behaving like the culturally acceptable Woman and Man may result in shyness, silence, good grades, insignificance, non-violence and non-physical interests for boys and hyper-activity, loudness, physical interests, sexual activity and rebellion for girls. Any behaviour and traits that differ from the stereotypical masculinity or femininity may cause heterosexist remarks from other pupils. (Kehily & Nayak 1996.)

Being too good at school as a reason for heterosexist bullying is interesting. In this particular case, heterosexism is undeniably influencing the school achievement of the pupil, even if in other cases the influence on school achievement may not be so straightforward. When pupils’ underachievement is under consideration, heterosexism should be too, because it is clearly a factor in school achievement (Epstein 1997).

Mary Jane Kehily and Anoop Nayak see heterosexism and homophobia as a way to construct heterosexual male identity. Heterosexual masculinity is manifested by heterosexist practices, such as bullying, name-calling and remarks during teaching. Boys dissociate themselves from femininity to reinforce their masculinity – and what is perceived as feminine in a boy is associated with homosexuality. Therefore heterosexism is more about gender than sexuality in the school environment. Heterosexism and homophobia can be seen as rituals of gender which draw lines between masculinity and femininity. (Kehily & Nayak 1996). Debbie Epstein (1997) also argues that heterosexism and gender division are deeply linked and sexism and misogyny cannot be erased from school without considering heterosexism closely. A strong division of genders and heterosexism are linked, as mentioned before.
Interviews of Finnish bisexuals

In general, bisexuality means an ability to feel sexual, romantic and emotional feelings towards different genders – or people regardless of gender. For my master’s thesis, I interviewed 40 self-defined bisexuals of different ages. In my study, I let the interviewees define the term ‘bisexuality’, but most of my interviewees defined bisexuality as described above. I found it relevant that my interviewees were self-defined and self-identified bisexuals,– that meant the definition was not made by me or anyone else other than the interviewees themselves. The great majority of my interviewees were young and female. I had only one male informant who was born before 1970.

I advertised my study in five Finnish newspapers, the mailing lists of Seta’ and in Z-magazine, which is published by Seta. I also asked some of my friends to be interviewed and used the so-called snow ball method to gather informants. About 50 persons contacted me and volunteered to be interviewed and I planned to interview all of them. For geographical and time limitations some interviews were impossible. Therefore my selection of the data was quite reactive: I was ready to interview everyone who bothered to contact me about this study.

I chose 30 interviews of young interviewees born between 1970 and 1981 to consider their school experiences especially. 26 of them were born in the 1970s and 4 in the 1980s, and 7 were male. Their school experiences date from the 1980s and the 1990s.

I must point out that the informants described their school experiences from hindsight and several years later. Therefore their descriptions of their experiences are re-interpreted reflections of actual experiences. Most of my informants have thought about their youth a lot during their identity process, and their experiences take on a whole different meaning as part of a narrated history, rather than from current experience.

The experiences my informants described can be divided into two groups. The first grouped their experiences and thoughts about teaching, education, and the other group collected their experiences and thoughts about school as a social environment. The interviewees talked mostly about experiences at school as a social environment, the teaching was not usually discussed in depth, but just in passing. One reason for this was that I asked more questions about their experiences at school as a social environment – another might be the lack of visibility of bisexuality in teaching and therefore the lack of the interviewees’ experience of bisexuality in teaching.

Forming Bisexual Identity at School

My informants said that they had usually known they were 'different' at a very young age, even at five or six, though they had not a suitable term to describe this 'difference'. Usually they knew something about homosexuality, the insulting word 'homo' (puff, fag) at least, but they did not have information on bisexuality. Later, in their teens they usually knew there were gays and straights, and tried to categorise themselves as either. For example Saija (born 1971) thought that she was heterosexual through her teens and started to define herself as a bisexual in her twenties.
I did not understand that, I did not know that it [bisexuality] even existed... I have memories of being interested in girls when I was very young, but because I was also interested in boys I thought that all right, I must be heterosexual... (Saija, 1971).

Some of my female interviewees described, how they thought that they were lesbian, when they were in their teens. The division between lesbians and heterosexual women was so strong that they felt that a desire for other girls meant that they must be lesbian. A strong crush or relationship with another girl steered their identity towards a lesbian identity, which was felt to be the only possible identity when dating other girls.

I liked boys because that was a habit [among girls at school], but I did not like them really... at the upper level of comprehensive school I thought I was a lesbian, because I did not know that bisexuels exist, and thought that if I like girls, then I must be a lesbian... (Mira, 1976.)

Therefore my informants usually had quite a long identity crisis, longer than gays and straights. Most of them had undergone their identity crisis in their late teens, or in their early twenties. This means that most of them were quite confused about their sexuality during their school years. They could not form either a coherent lesbian or gay identity, or a coherent straight identity because of their feelings towards different genders. Though some of my informants did have easy identity processes and could identify their bisexuality at school, most of them had some kind of difficulties.

Ilkka (1970) said that he tried to handle his sexual difference by denying it and being as perfect a pupil as possible.

At sixteen I thought with my own brains for the very first time, until then I was the most perfect person in the school, I was the best in my class, I was the ideal son of every parent, I did everything perfectly, I was so bloody perfect, and then I thought that if I continue like this I will still be perfect at 28, but at the same time [I'll be a serial killer] (Ilkka, 1970.)

Referring to being a serial killer, Ilkka meant that if he had denied his bisexuality, he would have gone completely crazy – and according to him, being as perfect as possible during his teens, was also pathological in nature.

Elisa (1979) said that she did not act like girls were supposed to act in lower secondary school, which lead her into trouble sometimes. She behaved both in girlish and boyish ways – both dressed as a princess and played with toyguns, for instance. Later, she was bullied in upper secondary school, partly because of her non-feminine behaviour.

At the start of lower secondary school I was a nice pupil with good grades, but from third to sixth grade I was not so nice. I got good grades and did not disturb in class, but I drew caricatures and comics of other pupils and teachers with two other girls. I also remember we had a shooting contest in which we aimed at a poster of New Kids on the Block, an idolised popband of that time. Other girls were furious and we were amused. (Elisa, 1979.)

Discovering the term bisexual was important for most of my informants. They said that through that word they could find their place between the categories of gays and straights.
It was a relief to find some term and explanation for why I felt and thought like this when I was seven, because I realised then that I was not like other kids... so the problems have been about that [finding a name for feelings] (Johanna, 1980.)

Teaching – a means of constructing bisexual identity?

The teaching at Finnish school seemed to be very heteronormative, as the research of Jukka Lehtonen has also shown (Lehtonen, 1995). Teemu Laajasalo's study (2001) on textbooks in Finnish high schools show that heteronormativity is a general rule in teaching.

Sexuality education is obligatory in the Finnish school curriculum, but it concentrates mostly on puberty, venereal diseases and birth control. Almost all of my informants said that they had not received any information or even references to bisexuality at school. The sexuality education mainly focused on health education about contraception, puberty and venereal diseases. Homosexuality was usually mentioned – but just mentioned, nothing more. When sexual minorities came up in teaching, in a way or another, the attitude was dismissive.

I don't remember teachers talking about gays and straights at school at all, it [sexuality education] was more like health education, like this is a boy and this is a girl, go to school first, then have children... I don't think [that the education] was very broad-minded, but not very uptight either, the thing [sexuality] was just passed over in silence... (Anna, 1976.)

At school there was no kind of education [on bisexuality] at any time... maybe the word 'gay' was mentioned and then everybody giggled and that was all... (Mira, 1976.)

In small town and village schools, talking about sexual minorities was not considered relevant at all. My informants said that the teachers seemed to think that there are no people belonging to sexual minorities in their environment – and especially not in the school they were teaching.

I have been at school in [small northern town]... there they did not even think bisexuals or lesbians and gays really exist... they just thought that queers live somewhere else, in some big city... (Terhi 1970.)

School seemed to reinforce the heterosexuality-homosexuality dichotomy in teaching also when sexual minorities were actually discussed. Usually gay men were presented as the quintessential example of sexual minorities – lesbians, let alone bisexuals, transgender people or SM-people, were not discussed at all.

At school they talk only about heterosexuality, and then somebody from Seta\(^1\) comes and talks about gays and lesbians, and bisexuality is just avoided, it just

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1. Seta, Seksualilinen Tasavertaisuus ry. (in English: Sexual Equality Association) is the national Finnish lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender association which works with government and legislation system, organises information campaigns for example for schools and provides a social space for lgbt-people by organising discussion groups, clubs and parties.
does not exist... this way some kind of illusion of extreme dichotomy does emerge very easily... (Venla 1977.)

However, there were some exceptions, when the teaching was experienced to be specially informative and enlightening.

I was in second grade of high school when I first heard about bisexuality, I was 17 then. We had a course on ethics in religion, and a very lovely, long-haired bi-woman from Seta told us about sexual minorities. It was the first time I heard the word bisexuality. Hearing the word and the concept and the definition was really liberating. I had thought for some time that gender does not matter if you fall in love, and when someone gave a name to that phenomenon, it was like someone just turned on the light in my world, completely. (Heli 1979.)

Most of my informants said that it would be important to talk about sexual minorities at school in an objective and realistic way – they did not get much sexuality education at home, so school as a place for sexuality education was significant. They pointed out that all sexual minorities must be considered in sexuality education – not only gay men.

Kids should be told more about sexual minorities, and these people could come to school and tell about their experiences, so kids could see that homosexuality is not sick or something, and anyway the attitudes should be more tolerant... I mean that these issues should not be over-emphasised, but if some kids want more information they should get it... there's a lot to improve at school... (Johanna, 1980.)

As my interviewees' experience prove, the lack of information on bisexuality at school did not necessarily mean that their identity process would suffer. The interviewees got information on bisexuality elsewhere. Some of the informants had strong opinions on how homosexuality was presented in teaching and how same sex love and interest was belittled and brushed aside. For them commenting on heterosexist teaching and prejudices was one way to consider and construct their sexual identity. But the question is whether it is better to construct sexual identity by confronting prejudices and myths or by getting support and gaining knowledge.

**School as a social environment for bisexual youth**

However, school as a social environment seemed to have a more important influence on my interviewees than the teaching aspect. The social structure of the school reinforced the sexual dichotomy. Children were divided into groups of boys and girls at a very young age and social pressure that keeps the boundaries between boys and girls is very strong. Boys and girls themselves guard the boundaries between genders. Jukka Lehtonen, a sociologist, claims in his article elsewhere in this book that heterosexist bullying and homophobic name-calling, is one of the social strategies to construct gender and sexuality in the school context.

When I was not at school, and in the first grade, all of my best friend were boys, but at some stage a gender division emerged... girls had female friends and boys
had male friends... then I had only girls as friends, because it was socially strange [to have boys as friends]... that division was kept up till upper secondary school, even till the end of high school... after that I got rid of this school habit [of gender division] and had friends without dividing them into boys and girls... (Pirkko 1970.)

The gender division at secondary school was reinforced especially with heterosexist bullying, but also with heterosexist humour, crushes and pretend love affairs, in which non-heterosexually feeling kids could not participate whole-heartedly. Crushes and pretend love affairs were an important part of girls' social activity at school. These pretend love affairs can be seen as a means of constructing institutionalised heterosexuality – but also as a means of constructing heterosexual identity on an individual level. Therefore these pretend love affairs help construct straight kids' identities but hinder constructing queer kids' identities, at the same time.

For girls it is usual to have crushes on boys from their first grade, crushes are part of normal social activity, the crushes and boys are talked about at school with girl friends... I had crushes on boys, but there was no social place for crushes on girls... later, when I realised I am bisexual I started to think about my childhood and realised that I did have crushes on girls too, but did not have any word for it... (Pirkko 1970.)

I had always known that there is something wrong [with having crushes on girls], even before I was at school, and I did not talk about it with anyone... not like I talked about boys, like having love affairs with boys, those cute ten-year-old children's love affairs... (Johanna 1980.)

In school context crushes on people of the same gender were not possible, they did not exist. My informants said that they actually discriminated against themselves and repressed their feelings towards the same sex during their school years. Those, who actually had crushes on people of the same gender, felt strongly about it.

I realised I had a small crush on my [girl] friend, and it was a totally awful thing at that time, I thought that no-one else is like me... [it felt] odd, creepy, perverse... (Mira 1976.)

The social pressure to keep pupils in certain gender and sexuality categories is strong, and the categories can be broken only if the pupils have support, usually from a friend or a lover.

Sometimes the term 'bisexual' was used as a part of the bullying. Using the word 'homo', 'gay' is of course more usual in Finnish school, which Jukka Lehtonen has been researching, and using the term ‘bi’ as an insult was more a curiosity during more general heteronormative bullying.

It was a joke at a break, I don't actually remember... of course someone was called homo at first, and then the word and the thought were played with, and this funny word [bisexual] was found... the word did not have much meaning then, it was just laughed at... (Veli 1975.)

Usually sexual minorities were not considered a suitable issue to talk about with friends in any other than a joking way. Bisexual youngsters – or homosexuals – could not share their feelings and experiences with other youngsters without fear of being bullied.
I did not talk about my friends about it [different sexualities], it was not visible, it was covered up and totally outside the society, not outcast, but something really freaky... (Mira 1976.)

My interviewees experienced denial at school, if they constructed their bisexual identity at school age and decided to be open about their bisexuality. The denial and belittling happened especially when young people spoke about their bisexuality at school. Usually those who questioned the bisexual identity of the informants, were fellow pupils. This caused a digression in their identity process.

In upper secondary school I told some of my friends that I am bisexual, but they did not take it seriously, but thought that’s okay, she's just decided that or something... (Mira 1976.)

Kaisa gave her experience of coming out as bisexual at school:

She [a friend] came to me and said: you are bisexual just to be original, and I thought that’s all right, a small straight screams help inside me... (Kaisa, 1973.)

Elisa said that she was fifteen when she told her friends about her bisexuality. They did not take her bisexuality seriously.

They said you’re just trying to be trendy or something [...] like it's something weird or something, I think they were really mean... (Elisa 1979.)

Although bisexual youth face denial and belittling at school, school can also be a place where queer youth meet. Other queer young people may be very important persons when constructing a sexual identity. Some of my female informants had constructed a lesbian identity during their school time after a relationship or love affair with another girl. Often the girls supported each other's identity process and sometimes became very active in promoting lesbian rights at school. Although the lesbian identity changed later to bisexual identity, spending time with other queer girls at school was emancipating and empowering. Mikko tells about a similar experience with him and another boy.

There was this guy who was in a parallel class in the upper secondary school with me, we didn't know each other then, but when we started high school we were the only ones that knew each other and started to be friends. It came out that he was gay, and that had a great influence on me, suddenly it was possible to talk about sexuality with someone... (Mikko 1976.)

For Aino, special music school provided a space where it was possible to present different sexualities freely. Her experience proves that non-heterosexist and tolerant school environments can be created if desired.

I have grown up in an environment that is very tolerant, I have been at a special high school where the system was like... people, all people had relationships with everyone else and so on... so it [bisexuality] was not odd to me at all. (Aino, 1975.)

With support from other youngsters, school could actually be transformed into an empowering environment, in which queer pupils could act politically and try to make school more tolerant – and sometimes even succeed.
Conclusion

Bisexual youth face prejudices and denial in sexually dichotomised western cultures and at school. The prejudices and denial of bisexuality are linked to the dichotomous sexual system, which divides people into men and women, gay and straight. A dichotomous sexual system can be seen as a structural violence which affects bisexual youth both at school and in society as a whole. Bisexual youth say that they have not received information about bisexuality at school but from their own sources. In their opinion, the education and especially the social environment at school seems to reinforce the traditional divisions of homo- and heterosexuality and of masculinity and femininity. Therefore, bisexuality and young bisexuals are very invisible at school and do not get help in constructing their sexual identity.

However, some of the informants’ experience show that there is a lot of hope. There are special schools which provide a tolerant area for forming one's sexual identity – and in intolerant schools, queer kids could group together to try and change the school atmosphere. Therefore bisexual youth at school were not merely victims of heterosexist and sexually dichotomous school culture, but could also be active agents who fought against intolerance and heterosexism – if not openly, then in their thoughts at least.

But what does bisexuality mean for the Finnish sexual culture? Are bisexual youths just exceptions or are they a sign of something else? If we recall Jan Löfström's (1999) idea that there is a link between a gender system based on polarised gender differences and the separation of homosexuality from normative heterosexuality, I would claim that young people who identify as bisexuals are a sign of change in our sexual culture.

Young bisexual people are in a difficult situation: they struggle with a dichotomous sexual system in which they cannot find a place to be. At the same time, they may be part of a new, emerging sexual system. School is an area that has the options to accept and progress with the change, or try to hinder it at the expense of non-heterosexual pupils, or simply to ignore it. Another entirely separate question is, how would this new, non-dichotomous and non-heterosexist sexual culture be. That has yet to be seen.

References

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Growing-Up at School for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Students: An UK Perspective

Ian Rivers

Abstract

This article reports the findings from a series of interviews which were conducted as part of a three-year study focusing on the experiences of a sample of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people in the UK who were victimized by their peers at school because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation. Using Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) Grounded Theory Technique, participants’ responses were categorized according to the themes and issues that emerged. Responses suggested that participants had been sensitised to others’ attitudes towards homosexuality/bisexuality from a very early age, and they had been particularly sensitised to the negativity of popular stereotypes of lesbians and gay men at the time. The fear of being discovered led to participants going through periods of denial in which they tried to disguise any behavioural traits or mannerisms they felt would alert peers to them. Coupled with the daily exclusion by peers from recreational activities, participants also perceived that they had been barred from gaining access to the social (i.e. friendship) and sexual (i.e. dating) resources (i.e. skills base) usually associated with adolescence, which perhaps left them unprepared for adulthood. The implications of these findings are discussed.

Introduction

In the United Kingdom (UK) in 2000, the introduction of Section 104 of the Local Government Act provided, for the first time, clear guidance to head teachers, teachers and school governors about the unacceptability of homophobic bullying in English and Welsh schools. The section, which was entitled ‘Prohibition on promoting homosexuality: bullying’ was in fact an amendment to Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act which prohibited local authorities from ‘promoting homosexuality as a pretended family relationship’ in schools in England and Wales (Rivers and Duncan, 2002). In its amended version, Section 28 read:
The following section shall be inserted after section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986 –

prohibition of political publicity

2A -(1) A local authority shall not:
(a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality
(b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.

(2) Nothing in subsection (1) above shall be taken to prohibit the doing of anything for the purpose of treating or preventing the spread of disease;

or (b) prevent the head teacher or governing body of a maintained school, or a teacher employed by a maintained school, from taking steps to prevent any form of bullying.

(3) In any proceedings in connection with the application of this section a court shall draw such inferences as to the intention of the local authority as may be reasonably drawn from the evidence before it.

(Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 as amended by Section 104 of the Local Government Act 2000)

This amendment which follows almost a decade of research on homophobia in schools and its long-term effects is, in its guarded way, a landmark, wherein those most opposed to the discussion of homosexuality in schools, were forced by the weight of public opinion and empirical research to make a concession recognising that Section 28 had restricted schools from taking steps to combat all forms of bullying.

Research on homophobia and homophobic bullying

In 1984 the Inner London Education Authority sponsored a series of booklets, written by Lorraine Trenchard and Hugh Warren, focusing upon the experienced and needs of lesbian and gay youth (Trenchard 1984, Trenchard & Warren 1984, Warren 1984). According to Warren (1984), of the 416 young lesbians and gay men he and Lorraine Trenchard surveyed, one third reported having being bullied or otherwise harassed in school because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation. By way of contrast, at the Pennsylvania State University, D’Augelli and his colleagues (Hershberger & D’Augelli 1995, Pilkington & D’Augelli 1995) reported that in their study of 192 lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) youths, 35 per cent of young lesbian and bisexual women and 30 per cent of young gay and bisexual men reported being harassed both at school and in their local communities (some were also abused in their homes by family members). D’Augelli and his colleagues also found that, among their group of LGB youth, 42 per cent reported having attempted suicide on at least on occasion, a figure far greater than that reported by Warren a decade ear-
lier who reported that approximately one in five (20 per cent) of his sample had contemplated or attempted to self harm or take their own lives (Warren 1984).

While Warren and D’Augelli and his colleagues could not make a direct link between experiences of violence or harassment at school and suicidal thoughts or behaviours, Hershberger and D’Augelli (1995) suggested that even those youths who received support from their families and friends, and had high levels of self-esteem also experienced some mental health problems. In effect, both the UK and US studies concurred that LGB youth represent a vulnerable minority both in our schools and in our local communities, however, it is in our schools that young LGBs seem to be particularly vulnerable.

It is with the above research in mind that the present study was conducted between 1994 and 1997 in the UK. Using retrospective reports, its aim was to develop further our understanding of the impact of homophobic bullying, focusing particularly upon the way in which it manifests itself within the school environment and how it affects the social and sexual development of lesbian, gay and bisexual students.

Method

The study consisted of three related investigations of the nature and long-term correlates of bullying at school following a pilot investigation which was conducted in 1994 (see Rivers 1996). Investigation 1 consisted of a survey of the experiences of 189 LGBs’ and 1 transgender participant’s experiences of bullying at school. The second investigation was a study of the psycho-social correlates and long-term implications of bullying with a sub-sample of 119 LGBs. The third investigation consisted of interviews with a sub-set of 16 participants from diverse backgrounds representing the make-up of investigation 2. Results from the third study are presented in this article.

The interviews were conducted between 1996 and 1997, following a pilot in 1995. The interview schedule consisted of open-ended questions covering a range of issues encapsulating their early years. Participants were asked about their childhood and/or adolescence from the point when they first suspected there was something ‘different’ about them. They were asked whether or not they thought their parents, teachers or friends had noticed anything ‘different’; and what sort of feelings they experienced as they began to recognise that this ‘difference’ may have been related to their sexual orientation. They were then asked to estimate how old they were when they were first bullied at school and then recount an episode of bullying which stood out in their mind. Subsequent questions focused upon whether or not the episode they had described held particular significance, and what sort of feelings they associated with this recollection.

Moving on from the discussion of bullying, the conversation then turned to whether or not participants had ever tried to hurt themselves.1

1. I would now like to ask you a very difficult question which you may find uncomfortable. Please try to answer this question as truthfully as possible. Some people I have been talking to about being bullied at school said that they attempted to escape from their feelings and hurt by attempting to take their own lives. Thinking again about the feelings and emotions you had when you were being bullied, did you ever, even for a second, think about hurting yourself or taking your own life? (pause). Did you try to hurt yourself or take your own life? (If ‘yes’) would you be willing to tell me what you did and what happened to you?
Where participants were willing to discuss issues relating to self-harm or suicide, no prompts or additional questions were included other than for points of clarification. This section closed with the participants being thanked for their honesty and being asked two general questions about their perceptions of school today.2

Participants were then asked about their recreational activities, hobbies and friends during their teenage years. Again, sensitive questions such as first sexual experiences were addressed using both reflection, paraphrasing and open questioning, thus allowing participants to decide upon what they considered to be their first sexual experience (heterosexual and/or homosexual).3

Where their first sexual experience did not involve genital contact with a member of the same sex, they were asked about the first sexual experience with another male/female which involved genital contact.4

Subsequently, participants were asked whether or not they felt this experience had a particular significance in their determination of their sexual orientation, or whether it may have been simply a case of adolescent experimentation.

Transcripts were analysed using grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Participants were 13 gay and bisexual men and three lesbian or bisexual women. In analyzing the transcripts, the author searched for common themes and issues raised by participants which were then clustered together to provide an overall picture of the issues raised by the participants. Graphic representations of the clusters identified by the researcher are provided together with textual extracts below.

Results: school experiences

Participants’ recollections of school produced 289 extracts from the text which reflected their feelings/emotions about their experiences at school. From the analysis, recollections of school revolved around two specific contexts: other’s attitudes towards lesbians, gay men and bisexual men and women and individual responses. Both contexts suggested that participants perceived school as being a place where they were constantly reacting against the homophobia they encountered. At one level such homophobia was expressed in terms of the actions of others (e.g. intolerance or harassment). At a second level, reactions were very much internalised, consisting of feelings of guilt and shame, resulting in attempts to evade school or other pupils.

2. OK, you have been very honest with me, and I appreciate that. Now I would like to ask you about your perceptions of schools today. Do you think that schools and education in general present any more of a tolerant attitude towards lesbians and gay men than they have in the past and why?

What do you think we should be doing to help young people who are coming to terms with their sexuality? Is there anything you would like to see change within the education system?

3. You said earlier that you knew you were gay at about...years of age. Now, I’d like to talk a little about your first sexual experience with a man/woman or boy/girl. I will leave it up to you to define what I mean by ‘first sexual experience’. First of all, how old were you when you had what you consider to be your first sexual experience with another male/female? Would you mind telling me about it?

4. OK, now I want you to think about the first time you had a sexual experience with another male/female which involved genital contact. How old were you when this happened? Would you mind telling me about it?
Other’s attitudes towards lesbians, gay men and bisexual men and women

Participants generally reported that they had lived or continued to live in an environment which they perceived to be antagonistic to the existence of lesbians, gay men and bisexual men and women. Primary observations related to the way in which ‘the school’ (personified by the head teacher/principal and her/his staff) reacted towards participants, their parents or indeed the general issue of bullying when approached for support or guidance. For example, several participants reported that when they approached their teacher or head teacher for support, at the time they were being bullied, the response(s) they received did little to alleviate the problem. As the following extracts illustrate, even when confronted by parents or, indeed, by colleagues, some head teachers were recalled as being unwilling to take action or as being dismissive of such behaviour, regarding it as either a non-issue or as something they could not tackle effectively. In addition, as one young man (Paul) pointed out (below), in some cases the issue of young men and women being bullied on the grounds of their actual or perceived sexual orientation never came to the fore because anti-lesbian/gay/bisexual attitudes were reinforced by teachers.

I do remember one time with him [Sports Teacher]. It was in the hall, we were doing gym and he asked me the time and I responded like...I don’t know...‘quarter to ten’ or something and I heard the other kids laugh...and I was in another room because I wasn’t taking Sports so I was just calling. I didn’t hear what he said but I just heard the other kids laugh and then he asked me again, and then he made me come out to say the time and every time I said the time, he repeated it but did a kind of John Inman act.5 (Endnote 5) I just used...I just had to stand there and keep repeating it while he did ‘puffy’ interpretations and the class fell about...and it affects me more now as an adult to think that that man was in authority and he did this and the school did nothing about it. (Paul, aged 27).

As Paul (above) demonstrated, the issue of gender stereotyping was one which was often reinforced through media images and personalities. Participants recalled being criticised openly by both teachers and fellow pupils because their behaviour did not reflect that of their same-sex peers, and as Paul demonstrated further, even when teachers did not comment upon a pupil directly, their disapproval still seemed to be apparent.

An incident of bullying that particularly sticks in my mind is actually one that was perpetrated by a member of staff. I think this is why it does stick in my mind because it was when a figure of authority turned on me and I had been brought up to respect authority. This was an English teacher and one day I came into class with my clarinet case and he latched onto the case and proclaimed it in front of the class as being the ‘typically puffy case’ that he would expect. He...he then began this play on words around the word ‘puff’ and started teaching the class about sentences such as ‘The snow puffed against the...against the window’. This was obviously meant to refer to me. (Mark, aged 22).

5. John Inman – actor known for his stereotypically ‘camp’ or ‘affected’ portrayal of Mr. Humphries, a gay character in the TV comedy ‘Are you Being Served’ in the 1970’s and early 1980’s.
There was often an acknowledgement that one of the difficulties teachers faced when attempting to deal with sensitive issues such as homosexuality was the lack of objective information available to them. Participants suggested that young people should be able to discuss issues such as human sexuality openly and have an opportunity to talk to someone (a teacher or school counsellor) in confidence and without fear of judgement.

I think the thing that was certainly missing when I was at school was that none of the teachers responded negatively to telling them – to me telling them I was gay, but nor were they supportive in the sense that they had no advice, no information, no where to offer. I wasn’t necessarily expecting them to solve my problems, but has they – any of them – told me there was anything like a gay switchboard or a gay support group, or anything like that would have been an enormous help. (Susan, aged 30).

Participants also acknowledged that schools exist within a context that is filled with stereotypes and images drawn from the media, cultural attitudes, belief systems and peer group attitudes. As both Paul and Mark have highlighted in their recollections of the way in which teachers treated them in school, participants argued that the media’s portrayal of gay men as ‘camp’ or ‘effeminate’ only reinforced gender based stereotypes and further alienated those pupils who did not conform. Furthermore, when homosexuality was discussed in the media, participants recalled that it was rarely portrayed in a favourable or objective light. However, they also acknowledged that much more information is available today through the media in terms of help or advice lines than was ever available to them via the school.

It gets up people’s backs if they think you’re trying to promote homosexuality and in fact you see the major critics on TV...they say we go around flaunting ourselves and promoting ourselves when I don’t think it’s possible because I don’t think it’s a choice. So it’d be hard to go around sort of coming out with a positive image without, to a degree, being...like...sort of saying, ‘Well, hey, you can choose to be it if you want to, there’s nothing wrong with it’. It’s just a case of everyone is who they are. Whether you’re gay, straight, bi...you’re not hurting anyone else, there’s nothing wrong with it. (Alex, aged 19).

The importance of cultural beliefs surrounding homosexuality and bisexuality was a consistent feature of the interviews. Some participants said that the antagonism expressed towards lesbians, gay men and bisexual men and women was similar in both aetiology and nature to that of other forms of prejudice, whether it was based upon religion, race or gender; while others argued that the issue of conformity was central to determining whether or not society accepted or rejected people from ‘minority’ groups.

Up until about a year and a half ago, I did really think that homosexuality was not in the Indian culture at all. and then I just...I did little bits and bobs of research – just purely for my own...just purely for myself and then found that it was! Homosexuality was around in ancient Indian culture, and I thought to myself well, there shouldn’t really be a problem now, you know, in theory. But, it’s a...it’s a generation thing as well too because my parents are from Indian and are from a strict background. They’ve come over to England, and obviously no matter how
long they’ve been here in the country, they’re still going to carry their own morals and ideals with them. (Suresh, aged 22).

Concerns about family reactions to a son/daughter or brother/sister being bullied as a result of their actual or perceived sexual orientation were generally reported as negative, and demonstrated the emotional pressure placed upon a young person to remain ‘closed’.

She [mother] wants me to dress more feminine too so I don’t get as much hassle at school. (Tessa, aged 16).

Perhaps one of the strongest sentiments to emerge from a discussion of participants’ experiences of bullying at school was the fear of being rejected by peers. Some recalled how they attempted to hide any mannerisms of behavioural indices relating to their perceived homosexuality or bisexuality by altering the way in which they talked, walked or acted among friends. Others recalled that they tended to spend a great deal of recreational time with peers who were also considered ‘different’ in some way, thus negating the need to hide.

I didn’t mix too well with the...the ‘lads’ if you like. The fact that I hung around with a...perhaps a couple of other people who were deemed different. (Marcus, aged 31).

Individual responses

Participants’ recollections were infused with a range of coping strategies, they used to evade their tormentors, and the emotional impact being bullied at school had upon them. In addition, they reflected upon the ‘type’ of child/adolescent they thought they were, and thus offered a valuable insight into their view of themselves at school.

One of the most interesting insights to emerge from this study related to the coping strategies participants recalled employing in order to stop the bullying. It was apparent that they used two types of coping strategy: one which focused primarily upon attempts to evade their aggressors; and the other which was an attempt to demonstrate their heterosexuality (particularly among gay and bisexual men). For example, some recalled a general feeling of wanting to disappear, others tried to physically hide themselves away during lunch- and break-times, while others tried not to stand out in class (in some cases this was attained by under-achieving academically at school).

For almost a year of my school life I spent every break and every dinner break sitting in the back of the...of the toilet area reading because I knew I was safe there, that I was isolated, and no one would give me any hassle. (Paul, aged 27).

For gay and bisexual men, one common recollection relating to their time at school focused upon their attempts to prove their heterosexuality either by fighting other boys or by taking girlfriends in the hope that it would allay questions or suspicions by peers about their sexual orientation.

I started to go though a little bit of a period of denial, you know...had a girlfriend and then it was just really a question to conform because, at the time,
everyone...everyone had girlfriends and people – my friends – were saying to me, ‘Oh Suresh, why haven’t you got a girlfriend?’ and just to get them off my back I had a girlfriend. (Suresh, aged 22).

From the interviews it was apparent that participants experienced a number of emotional reactions when they were being bullied. Both lesbian and bisexual women as well as gay and bisexual men recalled the anger they experienced when they were being bullied at school. The focus of their anger was not so much upon their aggressor(s), but at the lack of action taken by teachers – both within and without the classroom.

I just get angry because I’m pointed at and people will say things about me in the classroom. (Tessa, aged 16).

Combined with feelings of anger, all of the participants interviewed recalled being frightened about going to school because they knew they would obtain very little support from their teachers. Again, such fear was not just apparent in the schoolyard during lunch- or break-times, or before and after school; some participants recalled the fear of being bullied within the building itself, including in the classroom when a teacher was present.

I can identify the emotions that I was feeling at the time because the things you experience – the emotions – that you have quite readily, and other things, and it was a real feeling of absolute panic...that things would suddenly get out of hand somehow. (Tom, aged 32).

In addition to feelings of anger and fear, participants also reported an over-riding sense of helplessness when they were at school. Even when they attempted to fight back, very little changed because they were unable to challenge constantly the label of ‘lesbian’ or ‘gay’.

I tried fighting back, but it was useless. (Nathan, aged 19).

Related to recollections of helplessness, were recollections of constant vulnerability. In the absence of support from family members, teachers or friends, participants remembered how they had been forced to rely upon their own counsel in order to continue through school, and the isolation they felt as a result.

I didn’t feel very secure there and that...as a consequence I kept myself to myself. (Tom, aged 32).

Several participants recalled experiencing a profound sense of humiliation when they were at school. This feeling was a result of the combination of being bullied and their own discomfort at being lesbian, gay or bisexual. There seemed to be two distinct facets to this conceptual category: the first related to the humiliation participants felt as a result of their sexual orientation; while the second reflected the fact that some felt guilty because they had never actively challenged their aggressors.

I don’t think anyone who isn’t gay can ever understand the complete 100% humiliation you feel because all you know is you are yourself. You have no other way of expressing yourself because its simply you. (Paul, aged 27).

It was evident from the discussions with participants that few had experienced conventional childhoods in terms of peer interaction. Participants fell into three basic subcategories: (i) those who preferred their own company to that of other children; (ii) those who did not emulate their brothers or sisters in terms of sporting or other traditional male/
female recreational activities; and (iii) those who preferred the company of children of the opposite sex.

I’m a tomboy and had short hair. I didn’t wear make-up. I didn’t go out with girls I just hung out with boys all the time. (Tessa, aged 16).

In terms of their ability to make friends, participants generally recalled having few friends at school. As above, their recollections could be divided into two distinct subcategories: those who did not have any close friends at school and tended to be shy or retiring; and those whose friendships existed entirely outside school.

It was a bit odd actually because I didn’t have any friends at school. All my friends were not associated with school at all, they were all people I grew up with when I was younger. (Tom, aged 32).

Participants’ recollections of the isolation they felt from the world of the adolescent were particularly stark, and their desire for peer affirmation and approval was clearly in evidence throughout the interviews.

I think I would have...I would...now this is a bit strange but I think deep down probably I longed for that actually...the acceptance...I don’t think I would have had as many hang ups. I wouldn’t have the problem of being very wary when I’m in a new situation. (James, aged 30).

For many participants adolescence represented a period of considerable emotional conflict. Combined with a desire to be ‘open’ and to disclose their sexual orientation to others, they also recalled their fear of being ‘found out’ and being alienated further by those around them, including their families.

I’d say start to go on the scene i.e. to bars or whatever, I’d always be looking over my shoulder thinking, ‘Oh God’, you know, ‘what if I bump into a friend or relative and they’ll come back to my family’, and you know I’ve got...got a large...not immediate, but I’ve got a large family as a whole, and the grapevine would work a treat, it really would. And, I’ve also had...had a relative, he was married and then it was found out that he was gay, and he basically got ostracised, you know, ‘we [the family] do not want to know you at all’. I suppose that’ll always be in the back of my mind. (Suresh, aged 22).

At the heart of many of the difficulties participants faced as they grew up was the fact that they were alienated from the fellow peers in terms of key developmental experiences. In the absence of any form of information about sex or indeed intimate relationships for young men and women who were attracted to members of the same-sex, romantic and sexual experiences were tinged with feelings of guilt and fear of the repercussions.

I think I was frightened about what I’d done. (Alex, aged 19).

Ultimately, in later life, participants described how they wish they had not had to fight what may be described as a ‘hidden battle’ to be accepted as different, and some described the weariness such battles brought, and the need to tell others about their sexual orientation.

I spent too long fighting what I was...wasted too much energy on it. And I think just...think just giving it a positive...it’s OK to be different, instead of showing it as
the most extreme – we are all perverted basically – and there’s nothing wrong with you really, it’s just your orientation is different. (Steve, aged 30).

In the end all sixteen participants reported that their ability to admit to themselves that they were lesbian, gay or bisexual was a significant turning point in their lives. For the three lesbian and bisexual women this was achieved quite early on during adolescence, however, for the thirteen gay and bisexual men self-acceptance was a much more heterogeneous experience. Nevertheless, when the moment arrived, for the majority the admission of one’s homosexuality or bisexuality was not a traumatic or necessarily negative experience.

I knew that I was gay and I had said for quite a while I was gay, and there was no doubt in my mind that I was prepared to have a homosexual relationship. (Liam, aged 16).

Discussion

Based upon the analysis of the transcripts, it was very clear that, from an early age, participants were sensitised to others’ attitudes towards homosexuality/bisexuality, particularly the negativity of popular stereotypes of lesbians and gay men at the time (e.g. John Inman). The level of sensitivity to social and cultural stereotypes that existed when participants were at school, aptly demonstrates the force with which we attempt to imbue young people with a developmental framework that rarely takes into account social or, indeed, cultural variations, and takes as its starting point the presumption that all young people are heterosexual or desire to be heterosexual. As the various extracts of text contained within the article have illustrated, the perpetuation of such a presumption has significant ramifications for those young people who, for whatever reason, are or choose not to identify themselves as heterosexual. Homonegative language or abuse often goes unchallenged and sometimes can involve the active collaboration teachers as well as pupils. Furthermore, it seems that names such as ‘poof’, ‘gay’, ‘lessie’ and ‘dyke’ were not considered to be as serious as other abusive terms (e.g. racist name calling).

Indeed, one of the reasons why homonegative names have been ignored or perceived as being less threatening relates to the fact that such language has been used both in male banter, and in attempts by some teachers to motivate pupils – a commonly cited example is one of a sports teacher who describes a class of boys as ‘sissies’ (or some other gender atypical term) because they are not performing as well as they should. Yet, why should a sexual name be less hurtful than a racist name? It would seem that in a world that is both racially and culturally sensitive, the racist has been replaced by the homophobe and homosexuality has been substituted as the catalyst that threatens the fabric of our communities, and the very existence of our families. What merit can there be in perpetuating homosexuality as shameful, allowing an individual to feel unwanted – even by her/his own family?

‘Even my brothers and sisters were ashamed because I was such a puff [sic]’.

Against a backdrop of community and cultural stigmatisation, participants described the fear of being found out, and times when they attempted to deny their true selves disgui-
sing any behavioural traits or mannerisms they felt would alert peers to their sexual orientation. Yet, despite their best efforts to hide, bullying often continued unchecked because participants’ sexuality had become a matter of public knowledge or debate within their schools. Peer hostility produced a wealth of emotional reactions including anger, fear, a feeling of helplessness and of vulnerability, and a deep sense of humiliation. Feelings of anger were directed particularly at the school, and the fact that bullying sometimes had taken place in the classroom or with the aid of a teacher. While very little continues to be known about the rate of bullying perpetrated by teachers who appraise homosexuality negatively, or, indeed, the level of support lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils receive from members of staff at school, as mentioned above, anecdotal evidence has suggested that some teachers have actively colluded with pupils in victimizing or harassing another pupil who was perceived to be lesbian, gay or bisexual.

Coupled with the daily exclusion by peers from recreational activities, participants were keenly aware of the fact that they had been barred from gaining access to the social (i.e. friendship) and sexual (i.e. dating) resources (i.e. skills base) usually associated with adolescence, which perhaps left them unprepared for adulthood. Friendships, where they existed, were often formed and maintained independent of the school with other young people who lived close by. Inclusion and acceptance were the goals participants aspired to, yet it seems to achieve such goals, a denial of self and the adoption of a guise of outward heterosexuality were required. Yet such denial was often at odds with individual self-esteem. Those who were not open from an early age (16 years or under), recalled their fear at being ‘found out’. While one young man felt that western societies were generally becoming more tolerant, this was not always the case:

I’ve also had...a relative, he was married and then it was found out that he was gay, and he basically got ostracised, you know, ‘we [the family] do not want to know you at all’. I suppose that’ll always be in the back of my mind. (Suresh, aged 22).

Although this study had not concerned itself particularly with the sexual development of participants when they were at school, they were, of course, important features of their life histories. From the outset it was clear that, for some participants, the desire to experience a relationship featured significantly, and the interviews presented an opportunity to explore in greater detail early sexual experiences and their importance in the formation of lesbian, gay and bisexual identities. Yet, in the presence of cultural and societal condemnation and, indeed, self-criticism, it was surprising to find that participants regarded the process of recognising their homosexuality/bisexuality as being less traumatic than they had expected. For the three lesbian or bisexual women who were interviewed, the decision to ‘come out’ had been taken relatively early when they were still at school. For the remaining gay or bisexual men, although experiences had varied considerably, the process of self-acceptance was generally a positive one.

The above analyses suggest that growing up lesbian, gay or bisexual is marked by feelings of isolation, fear, shame and self-denial. It brings with it a sense of missing out – of not exploring the nature of adolescence and all the social, sexual and romantic tensions that mark our departure from childhood. At school, it is marked by ignorance, omission and by prejudice. It is rarely acknowledged and, when it is, the methods used to address the issue vary greatly. For the 16 participants in this study, school was not a foundation for learning and understanding, it invoked fear and perpetuated feelings of loneli-
ness. It seems imperative that we do not allow this perception of education and of our schools to perpetuate.

References

Experiencing School: Stories from Gays

John Guiney

A journey

In 2002, I completed my Master of Education research project at Brock University (Guiney, 2002)1) "A research project is an effort to remedy the ignorance that exists about something" (Glesne, 1999, 24). Using stories from my own experiences as a gay student and gay teacher, as well as the stories of two other participants, also a gay student and a gay teacher, I took a critical look at what gays experience in school. In January of the same year I was sharing with a colleague some of the stories I had recalled and written about in the study. “How hostile,” she said, as a tremor ran through her body. Her verbal and physical response to what I had shared was a reminder to me of what school often is for gays, an unwelcoming and unsafe space, a place of hostility and violence.

As I write this I feel a conflict. Both as a student and as a teacher I was respected, and many of my memories of both those roles include pleasant experiences. How then could I call schools sites of violence? This article is a brief glimpse at some of the experiences shared in my study and some of the stories of the two other participants. This article is not intended to be a complete account of what gays experience in school. Rather, it is specific and limited to time and to place, the time of writing, as I reflect on the stories related, and the Canadian schools and education systems that were the learning and teaching communities for me and the other two participants. This article is also limited in that I write about a study that included three males who identified as gay. Others, whether sexual minorities or not, may find resonance in the stories told, but they too have their own stories from which we can all learn. This is what postmodernism has to offer us, "a focus on the narrative of the individual and the acknowledgement of the situated, partial nature of

1. John J. Guiney and his partner Gary live with their pets in Brampton, Ontario. John wishes to thank his advisor, Dr. W. Richard Bond, as well as Dr. Carmen Shields and Dr. Susan Drake for their advice and support during his Master of Education research.
knowledge claims within the context of the shifting and often contradictory nature of identity" (Packwood & Sikes, 1996, 337).

It should also be noted that the use of I in this article, and throughout my Master of Education program, is deliberate. This is my account of stories remembered and stories told. Some would suggest that this is too subjective. I hold that no work is without subjectivity. Qualitative researchers do not pretend to present an objective view of reality. We seek to interpret reality, and in doing so we hold a mirror and a window to the readers, a mirror in which they may see their own stories, their own lives, and a window through which they may look to see the storied lives of others.

My methodology: Narrative inquiry/critical theory

The methodology used in my study was narrative. "Narrative as a research method...is less a matter of application of a scholarly technique to understanding phenomena than it is a matter of 'entering into' the phenomena and partaking of them" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991, 260). The phenomena in my study included my own stories and the stories of two other participants. Stories were used because, like others, I believe that the "richness and nuances of meaning in human affairs...cannot be expressed in definitions, statements of fact, or abstract propositions. It can only be demonstrated or evoked through story" (Carter, 1993, 6). Stories enable both the writer and the reader to engage in reflection. "One of the purposes of narrative research is to have other readers raise questions about their practices, their ways of knowing.... The intent is to foster reflection, storytelling, and restorying for readers" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991, 277). A story will inevitably remind people "of ones just like it" (Bruner, 1996, 134). This, essentially, is the gift of story. "A story, once told, no longer belongs solely to the storyteller. It has existence independently of his will, intentions, or analysis. It is an object accessible to others. Others can see in it what the storyteller does not" (Novak, 1975, 199). As one great educator said, the “most important attitude that can be formed is that of the desire to go on learning” (Dewey, 1938, 48). Stories create this desire, in the researcher as well as in the reader.

My study was also not intended to be a detached view of school life for gays. Rather, I took a critical approach. Critical research is “a transformative endeavour unembarrassed by the label ‘political’ and unafraid to consummate a relationship with an emancipatory consciousness” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994, 140.) bell hooks holds that “education is a political issue for exploited and oppressed people” (hooks, 1989, 98). hooks also writes about critical theorists speaking and writing from the margins. It is from the margins that one is able to see and critique. This is not "a marginality one wishes to lose – to give up or surrender as part of moving into the center – but rather a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers one the possibility from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds” (hooks, 1990, 149–150).
My methods

I used a personal journal as a way to find, and reflect on, some of my own stories. As well, I searched through pieces of my own writing, pictures, gifts given and received, and anything I could find to recover the stories from my life as student and as teacher. Interviewing was the primary method I used to access the stories of the other two participants in my study. A qualitative interview is “a construction site of knowledge” (Kvale, 1996, 42). With the other two participants I engaged in the construction of knowledge as I listened to their stories and reflected on the meaning they held for them and for me, and on the potential meaning they held for future readers of the final research text that I would eventually produce.

I also asked the participants to write a letter unsent. This letter was addressed to one of the participant's elementary school teachers. The student participant in my study wrote a moving letter to one of his elementary teachers who had been a significant figure in his life. "My life was probably drastically changed and my self-esteem boosted by all the encouragement and support that you gave me. You made me believe that I could do anything I set my mind to, and you made me self-confident. That certainly came in handy when I came out to all my friends and family over a year ago" (Guiney, 2002, 114). The student participant in my study came out while in secondary school and was still in secondary school at the time I was interviewing him.

Context

The systems in which I studied and taught were, and largely still are, systems wherein homophobia and heterosexism are daily realities. They are also places where male and female differences remain clearly defined and, often through social pressure, enforced. The manifestations of homophobia and heterosexism, and the sexual dichotomies evident in schools, are often experienced as hostility and violence by gays and other marginalized groups who are members of the education community. Although Canada has a Charter of Rights and Freedoms that includes sexual orientation as an analogous ground for protection of its citizens, as well as National, Provincial, and Territorial Human Rights Codes, “Canadian public schools continue to discriminate against homosexual educators” (Clarke, 1999, 58). That discrimination also extends to sexual minority students and parents.

Three masks of control

Homophobia is the fear or hatred of individuals or groups who do not identify as heterosexual. Homophobia is also the fear or hatred of behaviour, thoughts, or feelings that do not fit on the heterosexual menu. In this sense, homophobia is also something felt by those who are themselves homosexual. In this instance it is called internalized homophobia.
Heterosexism is the belief that heterosexuality is a superior sexual orientation. Heterosexism is also an attitude that renders anything other than heterosexuality invisible and silent by acknowledging or referencing only behaviour or values, or individual and collective realities, which are clearly heterosexual. Words such as people, society, and culture are used as if the only people, or at least the only people worthy of mention, are heterosexuals, that society is homogeneous and that there are no cultures beyond heterosexual culture. In fact, the idea of a heterosexual culture is not even perceived because, in order to understand heterosexual beliefs and behaviour as part of a culture, one must acknowledge that other cultures, non-heterosexual cultures, exist, and that heterosexuality is part of a diversity of cultures. “Detecting silence opens us to an institution’s injustices, distortions, and missed opportunities” (Peshkin, 2001, 250). Detecting those silences also reveals an institution’s, a system’s, or a society’s forms of violence.

Sexual dichotomies refers to the opposing definitions of what it is to be a boy or a girl, a woman or a man. The term opposite sex suggests that what is female is not male and what is male is not female. This is quite preposterous when one takes even a cursory look at the thoughts, feelings, behaviour, and the bodies, of people. While different in many ways, we are certainly not opposite. I prefer to use the term other sex.

Homophobia, heterosexism, and sexual dichotomies are used to maintain power and privilege. Those with the power and privilege either do not recognize or will not acknowledge that they have both, and they often deny or trivialize the realities of homophobia, heterosexism, and sexual dichotomies. Unless one uses a mirror, one cannot see the mask one is wearing. Those who do not hold power and privilege either adopt the three masks of homophobia, heterosexism, and sexual dichotomies, as attempts at fitting in, or they fight those masks from the margins to reveal the power and privilege they represent.

The Stories: What they told

Name-calling was a significant experience in the stories shared. I remembered experiences of being called queer in elementary school. Jeff, (a pseudonym), a gay teacher, told of being called faggot as early as grade six. Donnee, (a pseudonym), an out gay secondary school student, related an event from elementary school where homosexuality was introduced in class as part of a unit of study. Donnee reported that the teacher “made an effort to kill some of the homophobia that might have been in the room.” He also recalled that “there were kids that laughed when that chapter was read...” (Guiney, 2002, 11–12). Name-calling is a daily reality for many sexual minority youths. A considerable majority of male teenagers in one study identified being called gay as the most upsetting type of harassment (D’Augelli, 1996). This speaks of the hatred and fear of homosexuality among youth and in society in general.

While some would say that name-calling is simply part of growing up, one writer cited in my study said that the victimization by peers often went “beyond mere teasing...to outright verbal abuse that was harassing and sometimes extremely destructive to a sense of self. The abuse was occasionally physically expressed and always had emotional and self-image consequences” (Savin-Williams, 1998, 30). Although he experienced very positive reactions to being out in his secondary school, Donnee felt that he would not be safe in
some other schools in the same city. When asked to further explain what he felt, Donnee said that, "I would be more afraid. Because there definitely are bullies in those schools that would take some kind of action...physical violent action." Donnee said that he would be worried about "making it home in the same condition" that he went to school in. (Guiney, 2002, 60). Studies in the United States (Fontaine, 1998 and D’Augelli, 1996) demonstrate that homosexual students are both hated and rejected by their peers. Environments where such attitudes persist are places of hostility and places where violence against gays flourishes.

A Quebec researcher writes about young gay men who have attempted or committed suicide because of the harassment they experienced in school (Dorais, 2000). Dorais cites various studies that put the rate of suicide of gay youth up to 14 times higher than that of their heterosexual counterparts. American studies show similar disturbing results. Between 25% and 40% of individuals with homoerotic attractions report that they have seriously considered or attempted suicide (Savin-Williams, 1998). I shared a story about how the suicide of one young man changed how I lived my life as an educator. Following months of harassment after coming out in secondary school, the 17-year old ended his life. The silence and denial that surrounded his death disturbed me greatly. I wondered about what was standing between my own students and death. I resolved to be more visible and audible as a gay teacher (Guiney, 2002, 94–95).

Students who self-identify as gay often find school, or their entire adolescent experience, a painful existence. One young man, still in secondary school, in a recently released Canadian film, described being young and gay as being “like a lamb tied to a stake” (Johnson & Padgett 2001). This lonely, powerless, and violent image is a disturbing one, and one that demands a response from the guardians of education.

Once someone has self-identified, the next step in the process is coming out. While both Jeff and I talked about our coming out process, neither of us, like Donnee, was out in secondary school. Donnee said that he “wanted to date people and wanted to talk about it but I couldn’t because I was terrified of the reaction that my friends might have. You shouldn’t be terrified like that. You shouldn’t be terrified about the dating process. It’s supposed to be a fun thing to do” (Guiney 2002, 55). Coming out is both a personal and political act (Henderson 1998). The time between self-identifying as gay and coming out varies considerably. In some cases it is simultaneous or the person is outed, that is their sexual orientation, or perceived sexual orientation, is disclosed by someone else. This often happens to gender-nonconforming youth.

The two teachers in my study, Jeff and myself, talked about the layers of homophobia and heterosexism that keep gay teachers in the closet, or return them to it, where they become invisible and silent. This silence and invisibility makes them not only incapable of being positive role models for sexual minority youth, but it also prevents them from fully challenging the myths and stereotypes that heterosexual youth hold about those who are different from them. In my own case, even though I had been an out gay teacher for most of my teaching career, I wrote about students continuing to ask me if I was gay as if the possibility of a gay teacher was inconceivable (Guiney 2002, 78). Jeff, who has not been out for most of his teaching career, talked about how he fabricated identities for himself and his partner [They were both teaching at the same school.] and the constant stress of maintaining those fabricated identities (Guiney 2002, 83).
Barriers: Threats to freedom for all

As well as being masks, homophobia, heterosexism, and sexual dichotomies are barriers. Those barriers often kept me and the other two participants in my study from exploring and expressing who we were. While the barriers were sometimes broken through, one had to be ready for the consequences on the other side. Masks are not easily removed and barriers erected to keep people in their place, for the oppressed a place of silence and invisibility, are often systemically maintained and are not easily broken down. But break them down we must if we are to live full and authentic lives as members of the education community, whatever role that membership takes.

Discovery and transformation

Readers often look for the conclusions and the generalizability of a study, and researchers are frequently tempted, and many give in, to feed this desire. My study offered no conclusions and no generalizations. What the stories, the interpretations, did lead to were discoveries. I discovered that, as a student, I had experienced a highly homophobic and heterosexist environment, an environment where my realities were seen as sinful, sick, and criminal, an environment where I learned to internalize those beliefs. I had, perhaps miraculously, survived it. Just over a decade later, I would return to the education community as a teacher. There I discovered that while laws and policies had changed, the perceptions of my realities and those of my sexual minority students, colleagues, and parents continued to exclude and marginalize us from full participation in our respective learning and teaching communities. I discovered that I had been telling and living cover stories (Clandinin & Connelly 1991), stories that "presented what I was supposed to be doing and experiencing, but that hid much of my reality. The cover stories were intended for me and for others" (Guiney 2002, 37).

The discoveries led to transformation. I changed the stories I was telling and living. I stopped hiding the pain and loneliness behind my strength and determination. Believing that schools were not safe places for gays, and feeling that I could lose myself if I stayed, I realized that I would soon need to leave teaching. What originally was intended as a study about "sexual minority youth to give voice to their experiences in school" (Guiney, 2002, 4) changed to be "about education, my education and the education of anyone who wishes to bring to and take from the stories" (Guiney, 2002, 113). I stopped trying to give voice to others because voice is like power. "Power is not given; it must be taken. But it can also be shared" (Rebick 2002, 36). Through sharing my voice as a gay student and gay teacher, I shared my power. The power I shared is the power of story.
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Cultural Myths in Femininity, Masculinity and Sexuality in Incest Experience

Merja Laitinen

Abstract

This article deals with incest, child sexual abuse, inside families, from the victim’s perspective. The article examines what people, who have been sexually abused in their childhood, tell us about the prevailing sexual culture, the gender system, of femininity and masculinity, and sexuality following their experience of incest. What dimensions and meanings are revealed in their stories? The article is based both on literature and on empirical research.

Incest is seen as a multidimensional, socially constructed phenomenon affected by several factors at different levels, reflected in the values and attitudes of a certain time and culture. It is a process bound to its context, in which one significant dimension is power between genders and generations. In incest, violence, gender, and sexuality are apparent on cultural, structural and functional levels. The central issues are sexuality, the gender system of masculinity and femininity and their effect on the social, cultural and historical dimensions.

Understanding and explaining incest is connected to the cultural and historical development of society. Cultural concepts and attitudes affect how incest and incest victims are handled in public, how incest is approached and how the different sex victims are treated differently.

Introduction

My aim is to show how a phenomenon in a private environment can have so much meaning in the public and social contexts of people’s experiences. Cultural values, norms and beliefs in part contribute to the incest experience. For example, they influence how incest is spoken about, how people react to it as a phenomenon and how the different genders are treated as victims of incest. An incest experience has a place in both the social order and cultural memory, and defines the victim and his/her experiences through the prevailing time and place (cf. Bardy 1996, 23). The context bound meaning of incest influences the solutions offered by society (Ronkainen 1998, 22).
Sexuality has been taboo for a long time in Finnish society, and deviant sexuality even more so. Incest is outside most people’s realm of experience – few of us have firsthand experience of it. For this reason, simplistic mythical concepts and beliefs have for a long time masqueraded as knowledge, when talking about incest. This has complicated the lives of incest victims and efficiently upheld the wall of silence built around the phenomenon. With this article I want to give a voice to the 21 women and men who have been victims of incest in their childhood.

Incest as a form of child sexual abuse

Sexual oppression is an upper concept when talking about child sexual abuse (CSA). It refers to acts against a child’s sexual integrity that can by nature be different in level and form. It can take the form of a rape, or exposing the child to a sexual stimulus unsuitable for their age and level of development (looking at porn magazines or films, witnessing intercourse). Sexual exploitation also includes exploiting the child for obscene purposes (publications, events, direction towards prostitution). (Taskinen 1994, 5–6) For example, photographs taken in everyday situations can end up on the Internet paedophile networks. Sexual oppression can also be discovered in a more general attitude towards children in a community or society, in many developing countries poor families sell their girls into prostitution.

Child sexual abuse has many forms. Sexual oppression can be found, in the relation between the child and the abuser or abusers. This relation is defined by the inequality of positions, power and the gratification of sexual needs without taking the child’s needs into consideration. The abuser can be known or unknown to the child. One form that came out into the open in the 1980s is ritualistic sexual abuse, international literature started to pay more attention to it in the 1990s. (e.g. Yapko 1993, La Fontaine 1998, Scott 2001). This involves organized, group action connected to devil worship, witchcraft or black magic. The victims are usually children. Their sexual abuse, sometimes ending in murder, takes place during different rituals. There has been no public discussion in Finland of the matter.

Incest refers to child sexual abuse inside the family. The child is subjugated to sexual oppression in an interdependency, usually perceived as safe and trusted as protective. The internal relations in a family, that is the relations between the child and the parents and the other siblings, are seen in society as fundamental pillars to a child’s safe and healthy development. In cases of incest, these relations are turned around and challenged (Laiti- nen 2002, 78–79.) Sexual abuse has many forms, it can be sexual intercourse, or attempted intercourse, sexual violence, the touching of genitals or abuse of the child in some other way for sexual gratification.

A central concept in studying incest is gendered violence. In incest, violence, gender and sexuality are connected to each other culturally, structurally and on the operator level. An incestuous relationship produces and uses the cultural meanings of both masculinity and femininity. Incest is also gender based violence: most of the abused children are girls and most of the abusers are men: fathers, stepfathers, brothers. Men are also the main abusers in cases where the victim is a boy. It is a violence that has particular characteris-
tics in the ever-changing power relations between genders and generations. (Ronkainen 1998, 2–3, Jokinen 2000, 25–26.)

Material and Method

My article is based on stories from people who were victims of incest in their childhood, these stories are part of a larger study. The sensitive research topic influenced the collection of the material. The study subjects have become part of the study through various ways: part of them through the victims' association, called “Finnish Delfins”, partly through newspaper advertisements, partly by contacting me as they heard about the study, and partly through acquaintances. People I have already interviewed have been of significance importance, as they in turn have told others about my research and thus helped to reach new study subjects. Thanks to them, my study would eventually have had more participants than I was able to include in the study considering the chosen approach and methods. There would have been an endless number of subjective experiences. The collection of material just had to end at some point.

That is how twenty-one remarkable people, seventeen women and four men, were chosen for my study. The oldest participant is a man born in 1936 and the youngest is a woman born in 1978. Two things unite these two individuals: sexual abuse experienced in childhood and the abuser was a close member of the family. In twenty cases, the abuser was male (father, stepfather, brother, other male living in the family). In one of these cases, the abuser was female, the mother. In one of these cases, the abuser was female, the mother. Some of the people also tell of sexual abuse other than incest. I have left these out of the study.

The form of abuse varies in the stories from sexual intercourse, to sadistic sexual violence, touching of genitals or forcing the child to satisfy the abuser’s sexual desires in some way. In most cases, the abuse started before school age or at school age and lasted for several years, usually until puberty. Reasons for ending the abuse are several: the child’s development into an adult when s(he) does not “interest” the abuser as such, the child moving away from home, pregnancy due to abuse or disclosure of the abuse. The families in the stories, their internal relationships and relationships with outside, the structure, living environment, financial and social status and cultural value base and religious background vary in all the cases.

My primary research material is based on in-depth interviews (Morgan 1995, 81, Chirban 1996). The interviewees were interviewed between two to five times. After one year, I held backup interviews, prior to which I posted everyone the transcripts of the first interviews. This way the people had the possibility to get acquainted with the material, inspect it and decide if they wanted it to be used in the study. The interviews also made it possible for both sides to clarify matters and go over the situation. The secondary research material came from observation material, personal letters and letters addressed to the researcher, diaries, therapy memos, drawings and poetry, and records and documents by various authorities. Most of this is so-called natural material that existed independently of my research.

In this article I have used interviews, letters, and diary material. I have used material also in other articles (Hurtig & Laitinen 2000, Laitinen 2002). My text is built from sto-
ries which create a total story, where aspects can be viewed from different dimensions. The people who have taken part in my study find a voice through the material and they also operate as illustrators of my interpretations.

**Sexual culture as a definer of incest**

The roots of the diversification of the sexual culture in Finland can be traced to the start of the 20th century. The change became visible gradually throughout the 20th century. The people I interviewed bring their experiences from five different decades. The changes that have happened in the sexual culture during those times are illustrated in the stories of people born in different decades. The stories span times of sexual continence ruled by marriage, to a more equal atmosphere which is no longer ruled by Christian marriage but by pleasure and several, casual relationships as part of modern sexual life (cf. Konttula & Haavio-Mannila 1997).

Okay, so let’s say, that just in that social class and in that way, so many double moral – morals existed – sexual things in any case, even though normal, were talked about, on the outside. (Male, interview, born 1936)

Sexuality was never talked about at all. But, during the night I would listen to mom and dad grunting. It wasn’t talked about. I remember, when I wasn’t in school yet, that I found a condom and tried to blow it up. So dad gave me a beating and didn’t tell me what it was or why I wasn’t supposed to take it – that was sexuality. (Female, interview, born 1945)

Age 17 and the wild single life big city style in full swing: men, drugs and money... what else can you hope for? Besides, one night (and weekend) stands are the big thing! (...) In a month the unnecessary end of a new life. (Female, diary note, born 1976)

These quotes illustrate the two extremes of a gradual change. The repressive culture of denial and silence – that arises in the first two citations – has the almost opposite situation in the life of a young woman born in 1976 with the possibility for almost unlimited sexual experience. She does not feel that she is defined as deviant compared to others but rather feels that she is leading a fashionable life with casual sexual relations and a shallow way of life as the building blocks of sexuality. These days we can no longer talk about a common sexual morality, but of individual persons’ and groups’ sexual morals. The society no longer controls or strictly defines sexual desire, the feelings or actions connected to it (Ronkainen et al. 1994, 36.)

David Finkelhor (1984, 8–9) discusses the meaning of the change in sexual culture with regard to child sexual abuse. Change includes the eroticism of culture which includes childhood and youth as an idealized stage of life and value of the human body in the adult world too. Connected to this, we can ask, does the unification of images of childhood, youth and sexuality break the traditional barriers, the cultural outlines? Has the breakdown of the cultural control any effect on the manifestation of acts against the sexual integrity of children, such as child pornography and prostitution?
The change in the sexual culture also involves the strengthening of the controlling elements. One of the most central controlling elements in an incest situation is sexuality education, that teaches the norms of sexuality and the forms of acceptable and non-acceptable sexuality. To a small child, incest can be an everyday, normal matter. She has never been allowed to live in any other kind of environment. The child has to learn that incest is a violation against her/his bodily integrity and thus realize that it is ethically, morally and legally wrong. Understanding that incest is wrong and forbidden is the prerequisite for the child to talk about her/his experiences to outsiders.

Even though sexuality education and counselling have increased, sexual abuse inside families has been paid little attention. All the people I have interviewed thought that their sexual upbringing was inadequate, in most homes talking about sexuality was almost completely forbidden. They did not feel that school provided them with enough appropriate information either. Normal sexuality was discussed at school, but deviant sexuality was not talked about. The danger of paedophiles could well be discussed, but the possibility that danger to the child’s integrity would come from inside the family was either not realized or acknowledged. Sexual abuse was also masked as sexual education. Often incest started early on, before anyone thought that sexual education was relevant. Prevention can only happen once the child has got information about what is acceptable sexuality, and what is not.

Sexual culture defines how, and of what kind of, sexuality is allowed for discussion. In the stories, the suppression or limitation of sexuality is significant. The unwritten rules of talking about sexuality are mirrored in the stories: 1) do not talk, 2) if you have to talk, avoid direct and clear discussion and be vague, 3) never express your view on anything involving your personal sexual matter or problem (Levine 1992, 6). These “rules” make the bringing out in the open one’s incest experiences difficult, often even impossible.

Everything was in secret and they weren’t talked about. At least I felt like it was something to be ashamed of. (Female, interview, born 1945)

Maybe I should have told mom, but then again I know that it was totally impossible. It was such a difficult thing. (Female, interview, born 1956)

When disclosing incest, the themes repeated in the stories are secrecy, disgrace, self-blame, filth and abnormality. The child defines her/himself in her/his thoughts as filthy, bad and deviant from others. She is ashamed of the abuse and feels guilty. She is the other among people, she is so deviant that she cannot reveal the secret even to the closest persons, to someone she maybe trusts and is there for her/him. The secret means an overpowering loneliness: there is no-one with whom to share the bad feeling.

The difficulty of disclosure reflects the social attitude towards deviant sexuality, and incest. Even in cases where attitudes towards sexuality are more liberal, matters concerning deviant sexuality have been hushed up – still today even, child welfare professionals have trouble talking about it (Hurtig & Laitinen 2000). This was confirmed by the fact that the people I interviewed had kept their dark secret for years, and even decades.

Next I will discuss, from the viewpoints of femininity and masculinity, the gender system connected to sexual culture and its changes. From the girl’s experiences in the stories, we can focus on appearances and roles within the families, which define femaleness through sexuality as well as the blame connected to it. However, from the men’s incest
experiences, the focus is more on the meaning of masculine norms based on mythical conceptions.

**Girl as the victim of incest**

Norms defining femaleness are kindness, unselfishness, friendliness, resilience, modesty and conscientiousness. Helping and supporting others are qualifiers of a good girl and a good woman. Being a woman is achieved by identifying and learning these cultural expectations directed toward femaleness. The place of a woman and a girl has been structured in relation to others, mainly men and children. Nurturing and the gratification of the needs of others are jobs for women. It is through these jobs that it is suitable to try to achieve praise, affection and acceptance. Girls learn this at a young age (e.g. Ehrnhardt 2000). It becomes evident from the women’s stories how the norms of femininity act as significant factors in incest. Through them it is easy for the abuser to subjugate the girl – a good girl does not question her father’s will.

I was well... protector to the children... protector to the children and then probably also to that man a wife substitute and... provider for the family in the sense that, like this kind of provider. I cleaned and did the laundry, took care of my brothers and sisters. I was quite responsible for everything... since I was young... (Female, interview, born 1948)

I was as protective a bigger sister as I could. I remember that I put different kinds of things in front of the door, so that in the evening if the door opened I could hear, so I would be able to see in a way, that nothing happened to my sister. (Female, interview, born 1976)

I have been kind, timid, quiet and nice. (Female, interview, born 1944)

The roles of the women I interviewed had many forms in their childhood families. They have taken care of and satisfied the needs of the other family members and protected the younger sisters from abuse by sacrificing themselves. They have been central to the family in many ways, but still invisible in their whole being. Others have defined them, their job and their place in the family community.

The stories have conveyed how femaleness has been defined through sexuality. Questions of honour, moral and decency have been raised. The church and Christianity (men) have been significant definers of woman’s sexuality. A woman has been seen as either good and asexual mother, suitable for marriage or as a sexual being for the man, not good enough to be a mother or for a lasting relationship. This basic approach that makes up woman’s sexuality has made it possible for the double standards prevailing in the Western society. There are different sets of moral norms for women and men: what is allowed and natural for a man stigmatises the woman as filthy and worthless. (Niklander 1985, 60, Nenola 1986, 166, Koivunen 1995, 9–10.) The woman is harshly judged if she breaks the sexual morals. She suffers scorn, loses her place in society and in her marriage. For men, sexual relations before and after marriage have been considered as proper, rather than reprehensible. Double standards have caused women to be divided into two groups:
women who are suitable for family life and are respected, and prostitutes who are held in contempt. (Nieminen 1951, 90–91.)

Accusing women is behind many of the early theories of incest and sexual abuse of children. They look for the blame in the child (girl) and her mother. This has been so especially in incest cases (Kinberg et al. 1943). The almost black and white division between madonna-whore extremes, appears in the stories of the women I interviewed.

Yes of course these people in the village knew, who have been part of it, of course, that it would definitely come out, and I discovered that I wasn’t accepted like earlier, before all of this happened. I was specifically abandoned by everyone and pointed at then. And worst of all, my own sisters, I happened to hear them talking, when they call some woman names, that’s how they were calling me. (...) Well most of these people belonged to this conservative Laestadian revivalist movement where they have really strict norms and limits. And not like this loving, warm, merciful but totally the opposite... so that even though they were really adults and people of faith and should be according to the word of the Bible loving, they were very strict in their opinions and condemning that it was the wrong thing to do and was a bad person; and they don’t understand that it is a child, not an adult. A child who has been trapped like a target. (Female, interview, born 1949)

This illustrates the double standards of the environment towards the woman after the incest had been brought into the open, even though she was only a child. The girl did not fit the role of the Madonna, as she lost her virginity and innocence. A public sign of wrong is pregnancy at the age of 14, and then birth. A young single mother is a whore in the eyes of the community. What has been considered as sin in the religious morality also brands the victim. Even though the parties of the events have been known to all in the community, they could not identify and separate the abuser from the victim. Religious values, ideals and norms define the victim’s place outside the community. Defining femaleness by comparing her to, on the one hand, a supernatural asexual Madonna and, on the other hand, to a sexual but repentant whore runs deep in the base structure of Christian culture (Koivunen 1995, 10). According to Aili Nenola (1986, 168) the beliefs upheld by Christianity have supported the tendency to blame, which arises every time in investigations of violence directed at women.

They think somehow that he has been seduced... that she is from Satan. That it is like the story of the Creation, when Eve seduced Adam, that the evil is in woman.

That it is always the woman who seduces the man. (Female, interview, born 1957)

A child cannot understand blame, or branding as bad. She has been brought up in the Christian belief of love, compassion and mercy but she does not receive any of this. It is not until as a grown woman that she can pick up the pieces of the puzzle from the contradictory messages from that childhood environment. She has to think about the questions of guilt and innocence all through her life. Often the line between these two is like a thin red line in the stories.

That is also a weird thing that I don’t understand, what is the difference between being guilty or innocent, if you have been condemned as guilty. It is all the same, as I was so strongly condemned in every possible way as guilty. It was my fault and the whole environment close to me thought I was guilty and acted all the time
like I was guilty, so what did it matter if I am guilty or innocent? (Female, interview, born 1942)

The mundaneness of sexuality and gender as well as the increasing general awareness of incest has reached also the sector of religious morality, thus lessening the direct blame on the victim by the community. In spite of this blatant blaming, ignoring the anxiety or leaving a person to cope alone offers little to the victim of incest. They all invalidate the suffering and human rights of the victim and make her/him carry all the responsibility of the abuse.

**Boy as the victim of incest**

Men create a view of their masculinity by adopting cultural expectations directed towards manhood and by comparing themselves to other men. They are driven to co-operative action both by homosocial needs, and the need to compete with each other and thus test their masculinity. Through competition, a hierarchy is created where some are more masculine than others and also more manly in a more “proper” way (Herkman et al. 1995, 16, Jokinen 2000, 209–212, 222–223). Studies on friendships have proved that, whereas women value confidential interrelationships, men appear more often in groups than pairs thus providing confirmation of each other’s masculinity (Badinter 1993, 169).

It is quite tough... I don’t know where they come from these so-called unwritten rules that... even though all of us people are different, but those things are certain. You should not be too sissy, and you shouldn't be too something, because you can be labelled as gay and well, the boundaries are set. Why does a man have to be like that, that is the basic question... it's someone setting the demands. There’s army service and the man has to answer for that... (Male, interview, born 1970)

Masculinity is defined by norms based on mythical concepts (see e.g. Badinter 1993, 185–188, Hutunen 1994, 52). A man has to be predominant, capable, in control of himself and others, and even aggressive when needed. Man's, as well as boy's, soft, feminine qualities are seen as abnormal. This can be seen for example in the regulations for expressing emotions. Allowed expressions of emotions are connected to anger and strength (e.g. Skeggs 1993, 21) which is also revealed in these stories of childhood incest.

It was kind of competitive, how much could be taken without crying, when some would actually brag about how they could take a beating without crying and, a lot was like that and – even for me too (Male, interview, born 1936)

In a later interview the same is repeated but another aspect is brought up:
A man has to show that goddamit I'm not gonna cry! (...) Mmmm well, I did start to blubber when, if it was harder – hmmm then in sex beating in beating-ups, when it happened to be birch, a birch branch then it hurt there... (sigh) Once in a while then, even though it didn't strike hard, just one of those single hits could hurt really a lot, then you would cry out...

In the interviews the man tells about his abuse in parts, as if it were some kind of a coping performance, covering emotions and playing it all down. The above quote is one of the few where he portrays himself as a feeling and expressive human being. Other times the narrative is dominated by the dismissive attitude towards his abuse. The narrative style is such that it shows that men should be superior and better than others. Manhood is measured in success, position, power and admiration of these attributes. Strong independence and self-confidence are also essential. These myths structured inside our culture control men's notions about themselves and others, despite the fact that there is no substance to them and they are thus unachievable. (Badinter 1993, 185–188.) In the stories told by the younger men the power of the myths does not come across so much. They also talk about their experiences of sexual abuse and admit falling victims to it. They do not attempt to dismiss or lessen the evil they have endured in their narrative. The stories by the younger men convey that attitudes towards masculinity have softened, this has happened as a result of the change in the sexual culture.

Heterosexuality is one of the most important signs of masculinity. Its other dimension is homophobia. Denial of being gay, fear and its repression, are the corner stones of masculinity. Men can fear that they have something non-manly, feminine in them, this would brand them as gay (Badinter 1993, 140–141, Ronkainen et al. 1994, 133–135, Herkman et al. 1995, 17). Being wanted by another man is enough to be branded gay (Jokinen 2000, 227). Being abused by a man will bring out doubts about one's own gayness, and femininity.

And of course they always entail some fear in the background. Homophobia is one kind of fear that... requires a thorough search inside themselves . (Male, interview, born 1970)

Before there had been some transvestite characteristics, painted lips and dressing in women's clothing. And he was so afraid that if he ended his relationship with me that he would go out and look for a male partner. (wife of a victim of incest, interview, male born 1972)

The norms of masculinity are reflected in the ideas of male victims. From that point of view it is almost impossible by definition for a boy to be a victim of incest or any other kind of sexual abuse.

The norms require the suppression of physical and emotional vulnerability. It is almost impossible to admit to being a victim of incest, express it publicly or seek help because of the norms.

I have never heard, that anyone had spoken about it or that anyone said that somebody had spoken about it. There are still so many taboos in the world that are not talked about. The man’s world is still so primitive... usually there is no talk about sensitive issues. (Male, interview, born 1970)
Then at one point [disclosure of M.L.] these people then believed that I was losing my mind when I was talking about things like this. (Male, interview, born 1970)

Even though the incest was disclosed, the boy had trouble “earning” the position as a victim of sexual abuse. Gender intertwines in a complex manner together with the cultural stereotypes. It turns all the myths, beliefs and stereotypes upside down. It is a threat to the conceptualisation of both gender and the social structure. (Consiorek et al. 1994, 12.) Being victimised threatens the boy’s own idea of his own masculinity and this often follows him into adult life. There is a feeling of not being a man because you have not been able to protect yourself: one has been helpless and passive. In some cases, there ensues a struggle to prove one’s autonomous sexuality and own heterosexuality all through life.

The position of male victims is so weak that if you’re not lucky enough to have a good therapist you might have to suffer years and years of all sort of things. And you don’t get help from anywhere... the dynamics have been somewhat different for men than for women. (Male, interview, born 1968)

Mythical notions repeat the victimisation. A man can be also seen as the victim of masculine values and norms. The men I interviewed also brought up how total this type of double victimisation can be. (c.f. Falk 1985, 24.)

**Meanings for sexuality**

Concepts, values and norms connected to sexuality are somehow reflected in the incest victims’ experiences about their own sexuality and its realisation. Studies have proven that they have varied sexual difficulties in their adult life (e.g. Martens 1989, 112). The violation of sexual integrity can show up later in life as disgust and fear of sexuality or as emphasised sexual behaviour (Glaser & Frosh 1993, 23–23). The liberation of the sexual culture and the commercialisation of sex has made emphasised sexual behaviour possible for women, in part. The incest victims fairly typically revealed a kind of uncomfortable feeling about their own sexuality and their own femaleness and maleness. They do not find their place naturally in the gender system.

In childhood events, sexuality is connected in a complex way to gender, power and violence. This has moulded the child’s and the young person’s experience of her/himself as a sexual being, as a woman or a man. The integrity and ego of these people has been broken in the worst possible way and in some ways also definitively: what has happened cannot be undone. Childhood experiences result in different sexual difficulties experience in adulthood, such as denial, as victimisation, as emphasised sexuality built on dependencies.

Many of the people I have interviewed describe themselves as sexual neuters. They cannot find their place in the gender system which amounts to neutrality, not masculinity or femininity. They do not have experiences of themselves as sexual beings, as women or men. They dismiss it and in extreme cases they want to suffocate external characteristics pointing to it. To them sexual intercourse is difficult, even impossible. The intricate web of secrets, disgrace and guilt has stained sexuality, the body and its integrity. Sex and sex-
uality are connected in people’s mind to pain, fear, helplessness, weakness and hatred. As a precondition to survival they opt for exclusion from sexuality, denial.

I wanted to dress in tracksuits and trainers, I have been really tomboyish, I have gone around in just tracksuits and trainers. Tried to in a way to cover all that femaleness and being a woman, you can’t make it otherwise. (Female, interview, born 1963)

How do you see yourself as a woman?

Well I don’t feel very much like a woman, femaleness, femininity: what are they? They are really still quite foreign to me, no-one can touch me because my body is so filthy that you can’t touch it. (…) Then when I had the sterilization that fear of sexuality disappeared a bit. If I think about my own sexuality then well, I deny it totally, I don’t want to be sexual or look sexual. (Female, interview, born 1965)

When in puberty and later in my life I ended up in an intimate situation with a woman (sexual punishment was always given in the mother’s bedroom), then this messed things up. Then, when you were supposed to “get to business”, it did not work out. In the situation the punishment situations come to mind. (Male, letter, born 1936)

On the other hand, the stories reflect how people have continued the pattern of abuse they have learned as children in their later personal relationships. In childhood, life’s basic operations are connected in many ways to sex and sexuality. All of that arose from other people’s needs. The welfare of the child or her/his needs have not been an issue. The familiar cycle of victimisation is repeated often in adulthood. Adults can be subjugated by others using power, violence and gender.

About this sexuality, that even though I didn’t always want to, I just thought that one must put out for men and that they have to be pleased so they don’t do anything bad. Men have always been able to twist me around anyway they want. They have had the upper hand since what happened in childhood. They have been able to twist me. And I haven’t been able to say no to them. Alcohol came into the picture awfully early: 13–14 years old – and prescription drugs. That gave the permission to be with boys. (Female, interview, born 1945)

A traumatic sexuality beneath the problems is born when sexuality is combined with negative feelings and memories. The incest experience shapes and forms notions about sexuality and gender morals. As well as denying one’s own sexuality, excessive accentuation of sexuality is common. (Rowan et al. 1994, 51–61.) In many of the stories the cycle of alcohol, drugs and sex is repeated. Accentuation is typical of sexuality that is built on dependencies. People can look for warmth, nearness, love and security through sexuality. On the other hand, one’s own sexuality can be a tool for control or a way for revenge and or vent anger against the opposite sex (the abuser from childhood). Thus the connection of power, violence and gender is repeating itself. Gender makes power possible and guarantees it, by exploiting the needs of others through sexuality. This has been used to explain incest extending over generations, as victims start repeating the hopeless model of parenthood they have experienced in their childhood.

I have that sex dependency too. With the sex phone lines... they cost a fortune... (Female, interview, born 1945)
Sex gave a temporary good feeling. I’ve had casual affairs and then I was in a common law marriage but cheating all the time. This continued from when I was 15 to about 24 years old. (Male, interview, born 1968)

When I went to junior high school I knew I could push men around however I wanted and I was already fast becoming an alcoholic. I quickly learned the ropes in nightlife and enjoyed it to the full. My hatred towards men rose as I enjoyed the company of rich, well-dressed men, consuming free drinks and good food all evening. We went from one restaurant to the other, often all through the weekend. In the early hours of Monday I would then disappear. I felt like I was taking my revenge on them by taking their money and all these luxuries. All in all I felt like I hated men more and more, but I got great satisfaction from the feeling of power which I used for subjugating them only because I was a young woman. When I turned fifteen I started to use sex as my weapon. I felt it was the key to everything. I was cruel and ruthless and cared little for other people. My own desires and power seeking were the most important things. Once in a while I would meet these men on my expeditions who would be so-called “regular” guys who were looking for warmth and kindness. I didn’t have any of that to give so I was even more cruel to them. Most of all I hated life and destiny which had thrown me to this situation. On the other hand I hated and blamed myself. That’s why I drank loads of alcohol and sought peace in prescription drugs and marijuana. I fought, brawled, fucked and drank. That was the recipe for life at that time. (Female, letter, born 1976)

The working of the complex problems connected to sexuality is a long process. Finding one’s own place in the gender system and creating stability in one’s own sexuality requires going through the difficult experiences of childhood. It means dismantling and reassembling the memories and thoughts connected to sexuality, one’s own body and the self as a sexual being.

I am a woman for the first time in my life. So before I have been somebody. In a way I have been someone who can be abused and I haven’t understood my real gender and femaleness at all. (Female, interview, born 1951)

Converting from being neutral into being feminine or masculine is possible but usually a result of years, maybe even decades, of work.

**In the End – The mythical reality of the incest victims’ experiences**

The stories reflect the great post-war structural changes in Finnish society. Traditional lifestyles have been given up and new ones have been adopted also in connection to sexuality and the attitudes to it. Many things that before were kept in silence are now talked about. Attitudes towards sex, the sexual abuse of children and incest have changed. At the same time the tools and places for intervention and control have improves. The public is more supportive as services have expanded and become more varied. The change is significant when it comes to people who have been so greatly mistreated. These days, different child welfare organisations (clinics, day-care centres, schools) function as some kind of interface in incest situations.
The change does not automatically guarantee the identification and recognition of incest and its victims in either the service system or in a broader sense in society. The cultural myths connected to femaleness, maleness and sexuality are still alive and influence attitudes towards incest victims.

Different expectations are directed at the different genders in incest experiences. For females it is still typical to experience blame and targeting. It is rare that a boy is the victim of incest or other type of sexual abuse, as much research has proven (eg. Kauppinen et al. 2000). The men I interviewed note that it is possible even though it has, in their case, been ignored. Common to both gender experiences is the almost impossibility of breaking the mythical prejudices directed at them. It has also been difficult for them to answer the cultural expectations, reflected in their experiences of gender and sexuality. They are not able to find their own place in the gender system and their relation to sexuality, but it requires even decades of therapy to rebuild the self.

Mythical expectations have significantly made the lives of the incest victims – now adult people – and their survival from the traumatic experiences a lot harder. They have cemented their own sense of responsibility and guilt about their childhood experiences. They have also kept up the sense of disgrace and feeling of filth connected to the experience. Even though the incest experience by the women and the men that I have interviewed have been defined in different ways through cultural expectations and mythical expectations, common to their experiences has been that they have been left alone. This is reflected in the story of one woman:

I'm somehow bitter with life and society that I'm this kind of a prototype. That I have survived this society's whirling and these taboos and bans and secrets. And I'm still very, very badly affected. Then some people with HIV or cancer or rheumatism or Parkinson's disease have been protected and given rights, but who will protect the right or protect the rights of someone whose disease or sickness hasn't even been recognised? (Female, interview, born 1954)

In this way, social reality, built on myths, manages to annul the victims of incest, which increases the exploitation which has already happened. They do not receive any justice, either for themselves or for their experiences. Behind each case there is always a unique, and expressive human being who deserve support for their healing process.

References


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