

Helena Saarikoski, 2002

Verbal Bullying and Abuse of Girls in Schools¹

In modern society, an essential step for a girl on her way to womanhood is to come to terms with the notion of sexual reputation. Along with the post-modern style, the master narrative of good and bad women has become tentative; girls now wonder about the double standards of morality concerning the reputation of girls and boys and are troubled by the possibility of losing theirs. There are discourses on many cultural levels about the concept of reputation, which I describe and also engage with in this study. The present study on the concept of a girl's sexual reputation as it exists in the youth culture of today's Finland originated from concepts within Girls' and Women's Studies about the essential meaning of reputation in girls' culture (Hukkila 1992; Lees 1986) and the actuality of the whore /Madonna dichotomy, its new problematisation and its growing importance in Finnish culture during the 1990s (eg. Julkunen 1994; Koivunen s.a.).

From 1995 to 1997, I collected young women's informal stories about their experiences of being named and labelled a whore.² These experiences occurred in leisure-time peer groups, at home, and particularly at school: the largest amount of material is from the

¹ Author's accepted manuscript, pre-print. All rights reserved. © Helena Saarikoski 2016. The article is an abbreviated and slightly modified version of Chapter 10 of my book, *Mistä on huonot tytöt tehty?* ("What Are Bad Girls Made of?") (Saarikoski 2001: 218–262; 2nd revised edition, Saarikoski 2012: 173–213). Accepted, in 2002, to be published in Satu Apo (ed., editorial work in progress, 2016), *Changing Models of Girls' Cultures*, forthcoming in Studia Fennica Folkloristica series of the Finnish Literature Society.

² The material consists of 150 pages of written narration, letters in response to a request placed in newspapers and magazines, thematic compositions written in schools, and 101 pages of transcripts of interviews. The writers were 12–55 years old, with an average age of 21. Youth is emphasised both because of the age of most informants and because the stories of the older respondents focus on when they themselves were young. The total number of respondents was 55. When quoting the material, each case is numbered. Quotations from interviews are marked "interview," otherwise the quotation is from a written response. For the original Finnish quotations, see Saarikoski 2001: 278–282 (2012, 233–240) (case index).

secondary school period³, consisting of stories about naming and labelling, and sexual harassment.

What kind of violence does harassment represent?

Researchers of school bullying have only recently started to pay attention not only to direct violence but also to the indirect kind, and this has brought to light new types of harassment. Such violence can be mental, verbal or even physical. The most usual modes are name-calling and verbal abuse, which can be referred to as either direct (face to face) or indirect (behind the back) verbal violence. The most usual modes of indirect violence are ostracism or being excluded outside a group ("let's not be with her"), slandering and gossiping behind a person's back (Salmivalli 1998).

On the other hand, both slandering and ostracism can be acts of direct, face to face violence. In my study, dividing violence into direct and indirect is inessential. Both types of verbal violence are typical in labelling a girl a whore, and are often accompanied by physical violence as well. More useful is the idea of examining the creation of a hostile or oppressive working climate, as has been done in studies of sexual harassment at the workplace (Charney & Russell 1994; Varsa 1994: 99). The current Finnish legislation defines harassment as "the deliberate or de facto infringement of the dignity and integrity of a person or group of people by the creation of an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment." (Non-Discrimination Act 21/2004, Section 6(2).)

Naming a girl a whore or a slut has many connections to physical violence. It is often seen as a precursor to physical violence, since "whore" is considered a boy's last verbal means before he resorts to using his fists. The label transmits the cultural knowledge that one can do anything to "a whore." Based on this, such naming is interpreted as a threat. In the descriptions of the naming situation, physical violence goes hand in hand with naming.

According to Päivi Honkatukia, who has studied girls' views of violence, girls are often ready to defend their sexual autonomy even by force, because becoming a victim of sexual violence seems to have the same effects as getting a bad reputation (Honkatukia 1998:235). The two are intertwined: to become a victim of sexual violence may give a girl a bad reputation (Herbert

³ In Finland comprehensive school begins at the age of 7, and has six grades of primary school ("lower level") and three grades of secondary school ("upper level").

1989); on the other hand, a girl who has been labelled a whore can be considered a legitimate object for violence (Canaan 1986; Kuure 1999; Louhivuori 1988:76). It is reasonable to consider whore-labelling a form of sexual violence – mental sexual violence.

Teachers dealing with sexist bullying⁴ without any knowledge of the current discourse on bullying and sexual harassment will be tempted to decide on methods that only make the victim's situation more difficult. Avoiding re-victimisation is not really a matter of good will, although that too is needed, along with better knowledge.

Bullying and sexual harassment are part of girls' collective sexual education, showing them that a man has the power to make a girl the object of his sexuality.⁵ A concrete example of this is that a girl may start going steady with a boy just to bring an end to slander. Weak intervention in bullying and the re-victimisation of the girl, who is the victim, are essential parts of this education: society condones the harassment and, in the worst of cases, may even affirm its legitimacy and permit it.

A group of bullies gang up on a solitary victim

A specific model of bullying has been developed by Christina Salmivalli in her study *Not Only Bullies and Victims* (1998; see also Virtanen 1978: 60). According to the model, bullying consists of an individual pupil constantly and systematically being bullied by one or several other pupils. This bullying is deliberately harmful, thus distinguishing it from play and bantering between equals. Typical of bullying is the imbalance of power: in the face of bullying the victim is defenceless, often simply because she is bullied by a group. In this model, bullying has a steady and formally determined pattern: the bully is not necessarily in an aggressive state of mind, the bullying can be designed and premeditated, and the victim's role in the group is

⁴ I use the term "sexist" harassment in the same manner as Carrie M. Herbert (1989:19); she makes a distinction between sexual harassment and men's offensive behaviour toward women that has no sexual content, but is based on the existing power relations, that is, seeing women as "only" women. Sexual harassment is often justified or understood as the expression of the perpetrator's desire for the victim. Whore-naming at school has no flirtatious or erotic connotations, but is purely hostile despite the word's association with sexuality. For the variegated meanings of the word "whore" (*huora*) in Finnish, see Saarikoski 2001: 107–125 (2012: 86–103).

⁵ A feature of compulsory heterosexuality described by Adrienne Rich (1980).

constant. Bullying is a form of group violence in which the whole group maintains the permanent roles of the victim, the bully, the assistant, the reinforcer, the defender, and the outsider.

In school bullying, labelling a girl a “whore” can also follow this pattern. Below is an example of the process as told by a classmate of a student who was labelled a whore.

“Personally I don’t have experiences of whore-labelling, but I have a friend, and she was labelled by everybody because of her good looks and her expensive clothes. Right now she is in a special children’s home because of this labelling and bullying. Actually, it all began when she had a crush on a boy, and she tried all possible means to get his attention, but he started to call her a slut, and other boys and girls who were jealous of this friend of mine also started to call her names, but she didn’t care because she considered it childish. On top of this, her things started to disappear, and soon the whole school was at her. Not everybody bullied her face to face, but many snickered behind her back. Last spring my friend stopped going to school, and things didn’t go well for her at home either. She did not want to go back to this school, so she was sent to a special home for young people. I have seen her only twice since, although she comes home every weekend. She has new friends now, and school has started to go really well for her. I’m still angry at my schoolmates, because they have been jealous of her since the early grades and now they call her a whore, which she definitely is not. It’s possible that I will be the next one they name in this way. Neither the teachers nor anybody else can do anything about this; there was nothing they could do to stop the person who bullied my friend.” (Case 20.)

The material does not consist of neutral descriptions of situations; rather, the narrators have made many subjective, personal statements in these stories. As narrators of the gossiping and bullying – with themselves being the victims, or a friend as in the case above – they want to show that the label has no basis or is erroneous and unfair, and that what happened was degrading and emotionally upsetting. By recounting these experiences they want to affect the listener, and by taking part in this research perhaps influence this phenomenon on a wider scale. It is a process of interpreting and affirming one’s personal experience of a subject that in the social reality of the community is often forbidden and consigned to silence (Peltonen 1996:287; for the discussion in girls’ studies on the easy discrediting of their research subjects, as voicing the subjugated and silenced experiences of young women, see Herbert 1989:60; Campbell 1991:x). Underlined in these stories is the narrator’s wish to express what happened from her own viewpoint and in terms of her own evaluation, as opposed to how the events have been seen and evaluated according to the social realities of the community where they took place. These two opposites especially pertain

to the situation where a young person is constantly being bullied: the bullies have the power to determine the situation and thus effectively hide the victim's feelings about the violence from the community. Negating the victim's experience is a form of revictimisation which effectively maintains the vicious circle of violence. The stories construct the narrators' experiences rather than directly explain what has happened. The rhetoric utilised by the narrators in order to take part in the discourses of their culture could be one aspect of the interpretation of the stories, and, at the same time, an object of research (Saarikoski 2001:59–77, 199–216 (2012: 46–64, 157–172)).

In the above example, the story is told according to the model of bullying, but in reality the bullying also takes the form suggested by this model. The model has been learned, it is a traditional scenario, and it governs both the bullying and the perception of it and also the way it is narrated. The case above is a classic example of school bullying: a single person is the victim of constant abuse and slander. The victim becomes the scapegoat for "the entire school" and thus cruel and unfair treatment is legitimated.⁶ The roles of the school bully and of his assistants and supporters dominate the description; the narrator is either an outsider or the victim's defender.

According to my research material, this case is also typical in the sense that the school fails to react. This means that such abuse can be seen to constitute what could be called structural school violence. Bullying causes the social and cultural displacement of the victim, which in turn is affirmed and sanctioned by her transfer to a special children's home. The education system functions to classify future labour resources and grant status to future adults based on their accomplishments. This legitimate power has been granted to schools by society, and how much of it is transformed into structural violence depends on the amount of arbitrariness and injustice in a given school.

The gender inequality produced by the culture is also an aspect of the structural violence in a given school's culture. The lesson of bullying is to the narrator what the message of sexual harassment is to women in general: her gender alone puts every woman at risk of becoming a victim of violent behaviour (for example, Herbert 1989; Liljeström 1983). By focusing the consequences of sexist bullying on its victims, the school confirms this message as the institution's official teaching for all girls.

⁶ Enemy image, see Salmivalli (1998: 13), who refers to A. Pikas' research from 1975 on school bullying in Sweden.

Besides the formal model of school bullying, the girls in this research considered many other actions to be bullying as well. Being called a whore, which many or most girls face all the time, is an example of bullying that does not have the same person in the role of the victim. Labelling one girl a whore or calling all girls names, are part of the same phenomenon. Labelling cannot be understood outside of name-calling or the cultural patterns they both represent. Labelling cannot be effectively dealt with if it is separated from the supporting cultural pattern of debasing women.

The pedagogical study of bullying pays little attention to the contents of school bullying. Concentrating on this may easily turn the victim into the culprit, and lead to conclusions which themselves are part of the bullying; for example, if the bullied pupil were not so “irritating,” others would not feel compelled to bully her.

However, concentrating on contents is a valid angle for viewing the topic of sexualised verbal abuse, because it clearly shows that bullying has connections to wider social and cultural dimensions. These dimensions also pervade the thought and practice of the pupils attending school. Distinctions between good and bad women, between pure and dirty sex, were not invented in the schoolyard, although that may be the place where they are most frequently expressed. It is reasonable to conclude that conforming to normality and the discouragement of abnormality are features of modern middle-class culture, and that bullying the “abnormal” is its application in youth school culture.

Below I shall introduce individual cases for which I have the greatest amount of personal interview material. Although inductive generalisations cannot be made based on single cases, studying such cases in detail with the overall view in mind can lead to new insights into school bullying, and the ways of thinking that generate it in a culture.

Case 14: “Boys will be boys”

In the prehistory of this bullying case, a girl in one of the lower grades at primary school had been given a reduced mark in General Conduct because of her “dominating and stubborn” character.

“In the first and second levels I was kind of a dominating person, and I had as my monitor partner a boy who was smaller than me and I sort of dominated him. I did. In a way he was in my power. At the third and fourth level my teacher said, what I did not at all see myself, that I was too much of a leader, that’s why my General Conduct mark was lowered. Not that I had

done something, it was just that I was too much of a leader in that class, too dominating, they said.” (Case 14, interview.)

This girl was punished because her behaviour was considered inappropriate for a girl. The explanation does not imply different standards for girls and boys, but in practice school authorities are more apt to punish girls for violating norms than they are boys, and are far more tolerant of the misconduct of boys (see, for example, Lahelma 1999:84). In this case the gender neutrality of the overt curriculum enables unequal treatment of boys and girls according to hidden patterns (Gordon & Lahelma 1992:318).

When the bullying resumes at the upper levels, the girl and the bullies have already learned from the school system that in this case a fault exists from the girl’s earlier years, and that she deserves to be punished. At the eighth level her monitor partner was one of three boys who constantly called a group of four girls who were friends “whores.” According to the interviewee, the reason for this was that the girls were stubborn and domineering.

Along with verbal violence, brawling, arm-wrestling, and fights between girls and boys occur in the account, for example:

“Two short boys were the worst bullies, and already then I understood that by downgrading and discouraging us they were showing off their power. In arm-wrestling they were clearly less capable than we, the girls. At least we gave them a good fight.” (Case 14.)

Contrary to what studies have suggested, the girls in this class community did not learn that girls are physically weaker than boys or incapable of defending themselves against boys (for example, Honkatukia 1998:192). Instead, they learned that boys need protection and understanding because of their weakness, of which calling girls names is just one example.

After talking with other girls, her friends, about what could be done to stop the whore-naming, the girl then appealed separately to two teachers. She was told that since “boys will be boys” she should “wait and see” and “be patient.” The teachers’ “boys will be boys” response matches her own opinion that on the one hand, the boys’ immaturity vis-à-vis the girls explains the bullying, as on the other, does their typically male need to dominate.

A teacher intervenes only once, when the girl defends herself with physical force. Both the teachers and the girl consider it normal that boys bully girls. To the girls, the fact that only they are told not to defend themselves creates their experience of unfair treatment. Clearly, how the

pupils are treated at school depends first of all on gender. Girls and boys are treated differently: “Boys will be boys but girls are not allowed to do anything.”

In the same class with the four girls who are constantly being called names, are three girls who are quieter, and one of them is also labelled a “whore.” According to the interviewee, the main reason for this is the very fact that she is so quiet and introverted, but the interviewee sees no discrepancy in her thinking that she herself is an object of names-calling because of her loud voice and domineering style.

In her own case this girl knows that the name-calling is baseless, but she takes part in the labelling of the other girl by not expressing an opinion on whether the gossip she is indulging in (in this interview) is true or not. She considers the gossiping justified because the girl is “different” and an outsider, and participates in her segregation. In this case, a victim of school bullying acts as an assistant and supporter in the bullying of another girl, which within the framework of whore-naming often seems to be the case.⁷

She has not told her parents about the bullying – apparently because she wants to protect their feelings. She has a close relationship with her mother and father, and normally feels she can tell them, especially her mother, anything. Yet, she has feared that being called a “whore” is so delicate that such information would make her parents worry too much.

The parents’ attitude towards her sexuality is contradictory:

“My father said jokingly – but half of it is naturally true – that you, our daughter, are a ‘no-nonsense’ kind of girl, you don’t care about boys... like he wanted in a way to keep me always at home for himself... he wanted to have a kind of hold [unclear], and on the other hand so do

⁷ What I call the “Not me but the others” strategy in response to being called a “whore” is to delegate the social rejection the word suggests by transferring it to other girls. A common example would be a respondent saying that the word “whore” really means “a prostitute,” which in actual use it does not, but the label is transferred to an outside group that seems easy to be set clearly apart from oneself. In a whore-naming community, the girls may feel forced to prove that they themselves are not whores by pointing out other girls in the same social environment who might be. (Saarikoski 2001: 201–203 (2012: 158–160); Lees 1986: 162; Honkatukia 1998: 168).

I of course. But, as I said, I always understood that it was like a joke, but now I can see that maybe partly there has been some truth in it.” (Case 14, interview.)

The father expresses a wish that in reality has the same content as whore-naming: the girl is not allowed to want or have a love relationship. Although she reads the message as “no one can like me,” she also grants it a positive emotional content because of her father’s wish.

She gives an example of her mother’s attitude to her sexuality:

“I remember once when I went with this boy to his summer cottage and my mother told me to be aware of what can happen. I was like ‘what nonsense’, like nothing can ever happen to me, and she said ‘Don’t forget, you never know what can happen and when’ ... Oh well, I can take care of myself.” (Case 14, interview.)

Here the mother suggests that a girl’s sexuality is passive and subjugated; a girl can never know what will happen to her beyond the fact that sex itself, which is a boy’s action, represents a threat (and she understands that she has to protect herself against it).

In this light, the girl’s opinion that her upbringing never included attitudes such as “degrade yourself and be lower than others” is unrealistic. She believes she has “always” been told, on a general level, that in sexual matters she should “see how you feel and act accordingly,” which in many ways is the direct opposite of what the parents have actually said, according to the examples.

The idealised image of education represents at the level of the individual the general notion that modern thinking in connection with children’s sexual education advocates openness, absence of prejudice, and truthfulness. Yet there is a contradiction, for at the same time children are in practice brought up to keep quiet about “those things.”⁸

Concerning school, studies on the subject of the ‘hidden curriculum’ have concentrated very much on a similar discrepancy between the idealised image of education, or the overt curriculum, and the reality of the classrooms.

⁸ Malmberg 1991: 123, 180; Helén 1997: 175. For the tradition and methods of education into silence, see Helsti 2000: 263–274.

The parents' prejudices reaffirm the teachers' message: nothing can be done about the bullying and "don't mind the boys." For a girl, sexuality represents the threat of losing something (virginity, reputation, or closeness with the father); further, she is made to feel that she is incapable of managing events in this area of life.

Descriptions of situations at school tell us that despite this state of affairs the girl has not given up resistance, and she tries to make the bullying stop. Still, in her own narration about her sexuality and about her relationships with the boys she repeats the joint message – of the school, which accepted the sexist bullying and sanctioned it in the form of a lowered mark in General Conduct, and of the parents, that her gender is an external threat, rendering her a helpless victim (see also Fine 1993:77).

This forces her to reflect on the unsolved paradoxes of her own womanhood: on the one hand, she lacks the competence to deal with what happens to her in the area of sexuality and love, on the other, it is her responsibility to ensure that what happens is sensible; she has to concentrate on what boys think of her and feel towards her, and at the same time she has to believe that no one can, or has the right to be, attracted to her as a woman. The combined message of her parents' attitude, the lowered mark, whore-naming and how teachers react, goes as far as to inform her about the invalidity of a woman's sexual subjecthood, and of her incompetence and incapacity to act as woman.

Case 17: A teacher confirms the degrading label

In a letter, another girl describes a particular incident as follows:

"I'm writing this letter because I have been called a "whore" ever since I came to secondary school. I'm now at the eighth level. It all started with me having a different style in clothes than the other girls in my class. I just dressed in a more sophisticated and daring way than the others, and I wore makeup. I was the only girl in our class who had makeup and of course the boys immediately started to call me a whore. At school I get on rather well with the teachers and other pupils. Whenever they got the chance the boys called me a whore and bullied me as much as they could. But the worst came at the seventh level in chemistry class when our teacher was away. We were in the classroom by ourselves doing work that another teacher had given us. The boys started to make bets about who'd be brave enough to come and squeeze my breast, and finally the boy who always bullied me the most came and squeezed me so badly that I had bruises long after, and after that he put his hand inside my blouse. The next day I went to our teacher and told him about it, and he gave a speech to the boys, but

that was of no help. And this has continued ever since (every now and then). I have not told our teacher anything more, since his attitude to it was really unpleasant. (He is still quite young himself.)” (Case 17.)

As later revealed in an interview the bullying turned out to be much more extensive than what was described in the girl’s letter. Other girls have participated in the name-calling, her things have disappeared in connection with the bullying, and there have been other episodes.

The teacher had actively taken part in the bullying, which made it acceptable, and the bullying escalated into labelling the girl a “whore” in a way that made it legitimate to do just about anything to her. When the teacher reprimanded the boys, they accused her of causing the bullying by being so irritating. The end result was that the teacher said that he could do nothing about it because the boys considered it to be her own fault. According to the girl, the teacher “was of the opinion that I was annoying, so much so that it justified the bullying.”

After this, girls in another class at the same level began to say that she was having a sexual relationship with the teacher. The sex fantasies, as told by the girls in the school community, may be interpreted as a symbolic punishment for the girl for having told the teacher about the bullying. Again she goes to the teacher and asks him to stop this gossip. He says that she must have a crush on him “if that is what they say” and as is shown by her contacting him frequently to stop the bullying. He tells her not to mention to him again this matter and threatens to call her parents if she does.

Here the roles of teacher and forbidden though potential sexual partner are mixed – the girl has to justify her denial of the rumour by saying that in fact she cannot stand the teacher at all: “We are not even on speaking terms, not to mention love-making.” The teacher does not reject the idea of changing a teacher/pupil relationship into a sexual affair, on the contrary, he grabs it in order to avoid resolving the matter. The sexual label cannot be removed, and there is no intention to do so, and it is extended to all possible relationships.

The girl thinks that the teacher protected his own reputation by refusing to deal with the incident: in his private life he is married and a father of small children, facts that become significant. During the interview the girl produces a mental image in which the teacher is somehow attracted to her: “You are so very irritating,” “you do to me whatever,” he would have said. With this, the teacher expresses how helpless he is in front of her and the attractiveness that he also sees as the cause of the bullying. The teacher is a young and handsome man,

and she thinks that the girls in the parallel class are in love with him and that the gossip is actually an expression of their jealousy.

The girl has been labelled, and now she is made a part of the other girls' sex fantasies about the teacher. The fantasising becomes bullying when the dramatic fantasies are retold, and when the real people who are models of the imaginary persons are threatened with punishment because of the contents of the fantasies. The imaginings are fuelled by the fact that the girls in the parallel class do not know this girl at all; thus reality does not prevent them from attributing to her any imagined characteristics.

In her own class, the girl's role is contradictory. She is not a permanent victim as described in the formal model of school harassment, although in other ways the bullying does carry the hallmarks of it (for a similar case, see Lehtonen 1999: 79–80). She gets along well with men and women, including her teachers, and has courage and is capable of handling matters with the teachers for all of her classmates. Also, the fact that she is the only one in the class who uses make-up shows that the other girls are "sissies," which she associates with their inability to get along with boys and with teachers, and to handle things in general.

The kind of pestering she experiences may actually have features of mass admiration, and the sex fantasies of the girls in the parallel class have similarities to the institutionalised teasing about "who loves whom," a special means of gender segregation in children's traditions (Virtanen 1978). Mass admiration, along with ardent guarding and jealousy of its object, especially if sexual content is added, is not far from whore-labelling, in the form of the targeted person's experiences. Becoming the centre of attention has in these two traditional models the common feature that real contacts with the targeted person are rare or shallow, and the cause of the emotional turmoil is the projection of the object fantasised by the group, rather than the real person. Clear segregation of gender groups creates a basis for both mass admiration and whore-labelling.

All that we know about the gender culture of the class further refers to the segregation model of children's cultures. In the class there is no communication between boys and girls except in the form of "going with" (see Anttila 2009) engaged in by some individuals.

The girls and the boys stay with the same group of friends also during their leisure time. The interviewee has never had a friend who is a boy and she has not "gone with" anyone. At an earlier age she had a distant crush on someone she knew slightly, but he lived in another locale and was "attached". After him she has not had any real infatuations.

The girls' culture that she produces with her best female friend is not separate from the gender culture at school nor is it non-sexual; part of it includes watching and commenting on "good looking guys", for example. But since she has many creative and self-expressive hobbies, she does not feel she has the time or interest even to consider matters connected to love. Perhaps this is an example of a shared girls' culture where whore-naming becomes irrelevant.

The sex education received both at home and at school seems rather normal: the girl feels she has a good and trusting relationship with both her mother and her father, and this is emphasised by the fact that they know about the school harassment and support her. The mother knowledgeably and in an amicable way puts limits on her daughter's use of make-up, ensuring that it is appropriate and not too heavy. The mother has also been her main source of knowledge in sexual matters, to a sufficient degree. She has told her about menstruation, about contraception, and "where children come from," always using "the real names" without reservation or shame.

At school, sexual information in the lower grades has been given in connection with health education/gymnastics, separately for girls and boys, in the form of a video about "going with someone." However, when the national education plan was no longer applied and responsibility for sex education was left to the schools, it was given a low priority or not taught at all.

Harassment at school may be a symptom of abuse at home

The likelihood of becoming an object of sexual harassment and bullying is not the same for all women, and only a small number of women are constantly pestered. According to Bagley, Bolitho and Bertrand (1997), four per cent of girls in the higher grades were in this group. A statistical overview does not tell us why some girls at school are continually harassed, but Bagley et al. speculate that some of these girls may be victims of abuse at home. A characteristic symptom of such abuse is a girl's overly sexualised behaviour in other environments, and this in turn may easily lead to a revictimisation of the victim.

There is one case in my material in which the school harassment could be seen as a direct consequence or symptom of a girl being a victim of ongoing incest at home. In this case, the school intervenes and puts an end to the bullying at school, but has no means to go any further. Acting against the harassment at school could in fact be interpreted as reinforcing the incestuous situation, as it is the girl's father, the perpetrator, who is called upon to protect her

against the sexually molesting schoolmate. The girl's sexuality is thus confirmed to be the father's possession.

In studies on the sexual abuse of children at home, the figures do not include verbal abuse, of which there are examples in my material. Verbal sexual harassment at home creates an overly sexualised atmosphere for a child to grow up in, and at worst it can be just as damaging as physical violence.

Sexual abuse or an over-sexualised situation at home can set off school harassment either as re-victimisation or by being part of the same cultural climate, according to which it is normal or culturally logical that a girl becomes the object of sexual harassment everywhere, including home and school.

Another mechanism in operation here, not envisaged by Bagley et al., may be the often-reported tendency of untreated victims to turn into perpetrators of violence, and the inclination of the perpetrators to put the blame on their victims. A female perpetrator of sexist harassment might easily see herself as the victim, especially if there is real, untreated victimisation in her history (on the feminist discussion concerning the "preoccupation with victim status and refusal to accept personal responsibility", see Maglin and Perry (eds.) 1996). Identifying the perpetrator and the victim may seem crucial for the actors in the situation, but it will not increase our understanding of the communal processes of mental violence. For example, in case 17 above, the girl who contacted the researcher to share her experiences of being a victim of sexist bullying is unanimously defined as the perpetrator of it in the school community, by the various actors in the situation, the boys, the teacher, and the other girls. It is precisely the accusation that makes the girl feel victimised. While the researcher must not betray the research subject by contesting her (personally very true) experience of being a victim, there is no reason to enter into the local power struggle over the naming of wrongdoers and victims either. Assigning guilt, introducing symbolic or tangible punishments, and reinforcing the victim status bring no end or solution to the process of communal violence, but are a form of perpetuating it, as a part of the scapegoat mechanism (Girard 1986).

Case 19: Bullying as one form of a sexualising culture

In Case 19, the girl has been going with a schoolmate one year older than her. She leaves this first love after he calls her a whore in front of a classmate. Whenever he meets her at school or in town he shouts "whore" at her.

The pestering at school is not due to problems at home, but rather is a part of the same culture where a girl is receiving messages about sex and sexuality, about how reprehensible and risky they are. Typically, this punishable or reprehensible sex is seen to prevail everywhere: all relationships between girls and boys are viewed as sexual, and girls are constantly pestered and punished for their presumed sexuality.

She gives an account of how her mother had hurled accusations at their next-door neighbour, a girl of her own age:

“The way my family thinks about whore-labelling is... my mother at least... this has felt the worst because my mother has labelled my best friend who has lived all her life next door, and then she got a boy-friend, sooner than me, who stayed with her at night so that he sort of started to live at their home, and my mother got very frightened that maybe I would be the same and bring someone who would then start to live in our home... when one remembers how terribly hostile she was to my girl friend, beating the bushes and nagging... ‘starts to deal out at that age’, things like that. It felt bad... talking to herself like she did, and I’m sure she was secretly wishing ‘Do not become like her because I cannot stand it’, but she never said anything to me... But I did understand it when I thought about the girl’s parents and how they must feel when their own daughter has brought someone there to live in their home and with whom she does God knows what at night in her own room and with her parents there in the same house, and I was thinking how they must feel... And in a way I understood my mother too. Then again when we spoke [with the next-door girl] I understood her also, you do what you feel like and it makes no difference to me, I don’t mind.” (Case 19, interview.)

What the girl says in the interview clearly underlines how she understands and cares, even for the feelings of her former boyfriend who called her a whore. For a good girl, everybody else’s needs and wants come before her own. Understanding other people’s feelings is a way to maintain the “good girl” status that is threatened in a whore-naming and harassing situation, but deciding on this strategy forces her to neglect herself and her own hurt feelings, which becomes a way to continue the pestering as (depressive) aggression towards herself.

Along with her mother and an aunt, her grandmother has had a strong influence on her sexual education. She states:

“In these matters I’m more conservative than my granny. My granny sometimes even uses rude language... I go to her with my boyfriend and she maybe asks if I take the pill, if we have

everything alright with contraceptives so that there will be no children, and there we are, cheeks burning and yes, well, of course..." (Case 19, interview.)

This could suggest a heterosexual expectation according to which a girl and a boy, when by themselves, cannot possibly have anything else to do than have sex, which then is shameful. Sexualising with censure is an aspect of the discourse of "boys will be boys" and covers all male characteristics (see also Helsti 2000: 276).

The governing definition of a person is gender. This is expressed, for example, in the girl's opinion that she has been brought up in a totally different way than her brother, and that her role as a child in the family is defined by her gender. This is repeated in the pupils' culture at school.

At the girl's school it is quite normal to call all girls "whores". There has also been gossiping about girls behind their backs, starting from the lower grades. The interviewed girl's best female friends have all been labelled. The student culture in her school follows the model of gender segregation, all relationships between girls and boys are sexual, and non-sexual friendship is unthinkable.

Early heterosexual courtship seems to be an obligatory ritual of the youngsters' culture.

"It was like you had to bring a date to all gatherings or house parties, you were not allowed there alone, you always had to be with someone... They listened to music and sat in dark corners and kissed I heard... It was like that when you went to a party then, well, that one is my partner, come let's go to this party, and afterwards, no more (courting). I was sort of terrified just to think that I'd have to go to a party and choose a partner just like that and go with him, and if he'd start kissing me [laughing], it makes me sick..." (Case 19, interview.)

She has had sex education at school and at the confirmation camp of the church, but for her many important and mysterious questions were left unanswered: how to deal with her sex and sexuality, premarital sexual life and even sex in married life.

Thanks to her family and the students' shared tradition at school, she has learned the ways of sexual culture, which in this case is characterised by strong gender segregation, a sexualising of all relationships between males and females, a disapproval of girls' sexuality, and, at the same time, an obligation to begin sexual courtship at an early age. The education provided by

school and church, which lacks a discussion of morality and values, has not equipped her with tools for questioning or criticising this popular model.⁹

Techniques of neutralisation

The reluctance to complain to teachers about harassment is a recurring fact in all cases in this study.¹⁰ Complaining would require support from home or discussion with other victims of bullying. Speaking about it with teachers is described as a difficult task, and in which disappointment is even greater when teachers are unwilling or unable to intervene. If harassment is ignored or a feeble attempt to stop it does not help, this shows the girls, that complaints are no use, that even the teachers have no power, that no one can stop the bullies, and that this kind of harassment of girls is in fact allowed at school.

The “neutralisation technique” is a criminological term for a mode of speaking that justifies criminal activity (Sykes and Matza 1957). The study of sexual harassment recognises the ways of justifying pestering, of making it invisible, of keeping silent about it, and of ignoring or invalidating women’s experiences of it (Herbert 1989). Neutralisation techniques prevent girls from naming harassment for what it is, bringing it out into the open and from getting justice once they do. Just as with school bullying, one of the biggest obstacles in uprooting sexual harassment is the fact that the victims keep silent, or they are not listened to if they do speak out. Neutralisation techniques maintain the silence that supports the bullying.

⁹ In Finland’s national church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, confirmation classes are attended and first communion is taken at the age of 14 or 15. Although the significance of this act for young people has been on the decline, it still has some symbolic age-group ritual features, for example, a young person can thereafter enjoy more freedom or have more responsibilities (Aapola 1999: 248–249). Most often the confirmation classes are held at a camp, which imparts certain features of a rite of passage. The confirmation classes are often expected to provide value discussions concerning sex education or family education, since this important matter gets very little attention at school, but, according to my material, such expectations may not be met.

¹⁰ Only an estimated 1 to 7 % of all victims of sexual harassment report it (Charney and Russell 1994). In Finland, the estimated figure is about 5 % of rape victims, of which only a third leads to indictment and even less to a sentence (Pollari 1994).

The main modes of speaking that neutralise whore-naming at school are those that victimise the girl by rendering her guilty, and the sexualising, normalising and naturalising associated with this, as well as denial of the phenomenon.

The girls themselves use these modes of speaking, and so do the teachers and the parents. From the girls' viewpoint, this may arise from a need to justify the violence which they as victims cannot avoid. Neutralisation helps to eliminate the doer's guilt, and also the victim's shame. Neutralisation techniques are involved with modes of speaking and acting that I have dealt with in other contexts as the girls' defensive strategies to sexist harassment (Saarikoski 2001: 199-216 (2012: 157–172)).

Teachers and parents may easily react more according to their own feelings of guilt and shame than to the plight of the pestered girl. Communities prefer not to know about sexual harassment, which in most cases involves harassment at school. In today's culture, sexual harassment and violence is the dark side of "romantic love," an essential value. In the same way, the victimisation and traumatising of young people at school is the dark side of another central value, a "good education."

According to various researchers of gendered violence, neutralisation may also be directed toward the researcher who raises awareness of the issue in the community (Herbert 1989:11). Sari Näre has observed the tendency of potential perpetrators of sexual violence to betray themselves by attempting to deny the validity of research materials (Näre 2000:122, note 2). Such acts of denial, but also all the other forms of neutralisation, and outright bullying, may be the lot of anyone who speaks out about violence against women, in a society where this is a central factor in maintaining power structures.

Making the victim seem guilty involves focusing attention on the victim of the bullying, on her conduct and possible culpability for getting harassed. Often, schools have tried to solve the problem of harassment by concentrating all consequent measures on the victim, such as making her change schools. For example, the girl's way of dressing, her circle of friends, and her leisure activities can be analysed in connection with whore-naming, or even whether she in fact is a whore or not. Here in particular, demands to stand up for oneself or give as good as one gets are impossible and unreasonable, and are based on incorrectly seeing whore-naming as a harmless squabble between equals, and school violence as a suitable model of behaviour.

The concept of reputation is referred to when analysing a girl's own role in becoming pestered and harassed; this concept seems to offer the promise that if she behaves in a certain way a girl will maintain her respectability and her right to sexual autonomy. The very fact of being harassed seems to indicate that she deserves it, having triggered it thanks to her own conduct. Protecting a good reputation can be a strong enough reason for a girl to keep silent about having been pestered (Herbert 1989: 88).

Gender expectations on a more general level come into play when a girl who reports harassment is supposed to understand the feelings of the bully or protect her parents' or her teachers' feelings. She may also easily deny her own negative feelings in favour of understanding those of others, especially when her reputation as a good girl is questionable. Her angry or offended reaction could further aggravate the threat to her feminine self-respect (for the cultural norm demanding that women suppress their aggressive feelings, see Lagerspetz 1998).

One mode of blaming the victim can also be the mistaken idea that girls in particular call others "whores", and that boys do it less. The girl who mentions name-calling may be told to pay attention to the language that girls themselves use. Whore-naming between girls is generally considered to be an expression of (gender typical) envy. The alleged reason can be success in school, like good grades or good relationships with teachers, or success in girls' skills such as dressing with flair, maximising one's good looks, or being popular with boys. It is as if the girl should understand that she is not to awaken envy in others by being successful in ways that actually are expected and required of her. Her right to feel offended is denied and instead a contradictory emotional response is required: to assume a scornful attitude towards her tormentors.

Sexualisation means to define the naming as sexual attention rather than an execution of power. A girl can be accused of provoking whore-naming or of saying she has been harassed out of a desire for sexual attention. Boys will pester girls in order to show their interest. When girls are taught (according to the proverb) that "it's love that makes the horses kick" they are expected to experience conflicting emotions, to feel both pleased and offended. This could later lead to the acceptance of violence in sexual relationships because it teaches that that is just what love is about.¹¹

¹¹ Suggested by Anna Anttila (2009), who studies the romantic culture of preadolescents.

Normalisation of the naming is shown, for example, in the suggestion that the overuse of the word “whore” divests it of all meaning. The offence the girls experienced is thus invalidated, sexualised or ridiculed. Boys tormenting girls can be considered normal in both the common and normative sense. Pestering is so common that nothing can be done about it, it should be ignored, and sexually coloured pestering is only natural in relationships between males and females.

Naturalisation or expressions such as “boys will be boys” suggest that aggressive dominance is a natural male characteristic, evident in certain stages of a boy’s development, is a typical neutralisation technique in the speech of both girls and teachers. Male dominance is one of the central value systems in society that claim to be “natural” – supposedly their expressions cannot and should not be affected because they are part of human nature. However, aggressive behaviour and modes of subjugating women are cultural features and have been learned and chosen, whether intentionally or not. A strong argument against biological explanations is the fact that most boys and men do not act violently or practice sexual harassment.¹² The notion that “boys will be boys” gives girls the gender-specific emotional responsibility of “understanding” name-calling while at the same time releasing boys from any responsibility.

Naturalising also includes discourse which maintains that being named “a whore” as well as the consequences of this, are natural in adolescence. The consequences of sexual harassment: weakened self-esteem, anger, fear, depression, fits of crying, anxiety, irritation, feelings of humiliation, alienation, helplessness, and vulnerability (Charney and Russell 1994), however, are not tied to a particular age. If two-fifths of girls in Finland have encountered physical sexual harassment¹³ (there are no statistics for the verbal type), it is unreasonable to

¹² Lahelma 1996: 485 (referring to an article by J. Larkin in *Gender and Education* 1994, 6 (3):263–280); Lehtonen 1999.

¹³ The 15-year-old girls were asked in an inquiry if, during their lifetime, a known or unknown man or boy had approached or touched them or tried to kiss them against their will, which in the study was interpreted to be “physical sexual harassment” (Honkatukia 2000; Niemi-Kiesiläinen 2000: 7). It has to be noted that the question might as well cover other types of physical violence, for example, at home, the so-called corporal punishment by father in the first place. Unless there are unexposed reasons in the study to interpret the answers as concerning precisely “sexual harassment,” the figure of 41 % seems to be a gross overestimation. In an inquiry conducted in 1990 among 15 to 16-year-old boys and girls, 72 % of the respondents reported having

dismiss the so-called symptoms of puberty crisis (Aapola 1999:104,169, 177-181) as simply “part of that age.” Not all girls have these symptoms, but the eagerness of the adult community to explain the consequences of sexual harassment as something else may be an efficacious means of silencing the victims.

Denial of harassment at school or in the workplace (Varsa 1994: 106) is typical both at the general level and in individual cases. A principal may claim in a speech that there is no bullying “in our school.” The person who brings it out into the open will meet with evasion, belittling, or direct accusations of imagining things and lying. A teacher may consider “telling tales” to be an unfair – and typically female – attempt to draw an authority figure into a squabble or game played between equals, and ignore it accordingly. According to my study, “telling tales” is by no means typical to girls, on the contrary, many different mechanisms prevent girls from talking about the sexist harassment they have experienced. Girls who have the courage to speak up about such harassment deserve to be taken seriously.

The segregation model of children’s cultures in the context of whore-labelling

The interviewed girls spoke about a sexual culture in which whore-labelling is not a random practice. Daily name-calling is normal, and even if someone has not directly been labelled “a whore” herself, those that have are not far away. Not only sexism but also sexuality dominates relationships between girls and boys; friendship across the gender divide is non-existent, the only relationship is courting.

In the interviewed cases, sexist pestering is closely connected to the sexual model of youth culture, and can be considered a continuation of the segregation pattern in children’s culture that was described by Leea Virtanen (1978).

There are several features typical to the segregation in children’s culture: a strong dissociation from the opposite gender group, teasing about “who likes whom” and mass admiration movements, interest in sexual traditions and humiliating girls about it, and announcing the

encountered some kind of physical violence at home, and only 7 % of girls and 3 % of boys reported sexual harassment (Upanne 2004). The issue of preadolescent and teenage girls being sexually harassed is severe enough a problem even without exaggerating its quantitative importance. Indeed, so is the issue of physical violence encountered by young people in general, without undue sexualising of it.

inferiority of girls and their status as sex objects. Early courting is a continuation of this segregation pattern and is based on the same comprehensive idea of differences between the sexes: a boy and a girl cannot approach each other except as sexual beings (Virtanen 1978; for a slightly different view, concerning a generation of girls approximately ten years younger than my respondents, see Anttila 2009).

The segregation pattern of children's culture describes how some features of behaviour and attitude belong together: the stark gender opposition and emphasis on sexuality go hand in hand. The stark gender opposition is produced by emphasising the value difference of the sexes. The inferiority of the female sex is produced by sexualising: a woman is a sex object more than anything else, and she is the object of sexual desires as well as projected fears and anxieties. The emphasis on sexuality means that feelings of sexual shame and guilt are imbued in all areas of the culture. No sexually free zones exist, and all people are always encountered and understood as representatives of their sex and the sexuality typical of their gender.

The segregation in children's culture is not an autonomous cultural construction, and adults in the surrounding environment participate in many ways to produce and maintain it. Gender segregation, meaning the physical, social and cultural isolation of the sexes, is an extreme way to establish a gender divide. For a girl, the segregation pattern means being raised into a woman's subordinate position, becoming a victim of sexual harassment, and protecting her reputation in a situation where it is constantly threatened.

Leea Virtanen suggests in her study, for which material was collected mostly on children from the 1960s, that industrialisation results in an emphasis on gender segregation and sexuality. Sex roles become problematic and are under continuous examination and reevaluation. The rise of the information society does not seem to have reversed this development. Sexuality, the public and commercial aspect of sex and its visibility, gains more and more emphasis, while gender differences, measured for example by differences in salary or segregation of professions, are not reduced. Further, with its sexual prejudices the so-called neo-conservatism of recent years corresponds to this process. As a fact of life for today's youngsters, gender segregation is not a pre-revolution relic but one possible way to understand the requirements of growing up sexually in modern society.

Whore-naming in secondary-school culture

Whore-naming and labelling can in the beginning of the secondary school stage be connected and equated with the hazing of newcomers in the military, or “conscript bullying”. Hazing must be distinguished from the official and public rituals, for example the “skin ceremonies” (Leimu 1985: 55) that a student body arranges upon the arrival of newcomers. The arrival rituals are traditional celebrations approved by the school institution, while hazing is prohibited school bullying, even if it claims the respectability of a tradition.

In some respects the stories in my material closely resemble the horror stories that pupils in England had heard before entering secondary school, collected by Sara Delamont (1991). The biggest difference is that the stories here are recollections or descriptions of personal experiences. They are less schematic, anonymous and communal, and in these respects less folkloric than Delamont’s, and I have not observed girls speaking about whore-labelling in order to warn or frighten other girls who have not yet been named “a whore”. Such a cautionary function may appear in advice-books for girls, which are generally written by adult women, and may warn girls about losing their reputations (Aapola 1999: 198). The modes of hazing that can be expected in secondary school are common knowledge to all pupils, whereas being a victim of whore-labelling is the girls’ silent and often untold history.

The most common theme of the horror stories is bogwashing, or having one’s head washed in a toilet bowl. In light of everyday knowledge there seems to be an interaction here between storytelling and practice: stories about bogwashing are told because it really happens, and vice versa. Presumably, bogwashing has become a symbolic image of the entire hazing practice – ritual pollution that equates the newcomers with excrement and thus dramatically showing their utter worthlessness. In Delamont’s material, the girls who told of bogwashing did not expect it to happen to them, and it may be a more common practice among boys.

The hit list, a topic that gave name to Delamont’s article, is described in my material as something real:

“Three older girls started to bully us and push us and vandalise our clothes. They called us sluts and whores, and in the canteen they glued labels on our seats saying “slut”. They smeared our chairs in the canteen with butter and threw food at us. ... Now, after my girlfriends and I have been manhandled, I don’t dare to move anywhere or go places. All the time I’m afraid they’ll come by and hit me. The whore-naming and other name-calling is still going on. I have tried with my friend to think of how to escape it and suicide is not far away (my friend even tried). In our school there is now a blacklist, a slut-club, where our names have also been added. We haven’t done anything, still we have been declared public “whores”... It means that we are not the only ones to have this

experience. No, there are about ten of us who have the reputation of a whore, thanks to these assholes.” (Case 33.)

As in Delamont’s example, the bullies here are also older female students. In this situation the patterns of pestering the newcomers are connected to sexual discipline. The slut-club is an example of the second most common theme in Delamont’s story material: “the violent gangs of children roaming the secondary school” (Delamont 1991).

The third most popular theme in Delamont’s material is horror stories about teachers, their disciplinarian methods, sexual tendencies and sexual harassment of students. To this I can add stories from my own material about the ways teachers react to reports of harassment. It is all about accountability, about what arises from the routines of everyday life as remarkable and worth narrating. Delamont maintains that what essentially makes the horror stories so compelling as narratives is the striking contrast between the primary and secondary school. The teacher in primary school and the teacher in secondary school represent opposites in terms of closeness, personality, knowing the pupils, and also sex: a typical primary school teacher is a woman whereas there are many men among secondary school teachers. Part of this opposition is that the male teachers appear to students as sexual agents or harassers. A student’s own sexuality therefore becomes a threat to them when entering secondary school.

The function of hazing is to create differences in status within the group at the lowest hierarchical level of the community (Leimu 1985: 50–52). In terms of the whole student body in a secondary school, hazing shows the differences between students in the lower grades and the higher ones. At any one level it assumes features of puberty initiation (cf. Leimu 1985: 39–59) and establishes differences of status between the groups of boys and girls.

The newcomer hazing practices in secondary schools underline the comprehensive and irreversible superiority of the students in the higher grades compared to the others. The status of “eldest child” gained by the end of primary school is rendered worthless, and socially rising from a child’s position into a juvenile peer group becomes a desirable goal. In an exaggerated and burlesque way these customs expose the negative valuation of childhood that the school conveys: children are ignorant, immature, and incapable. At school they are the opposite of teachers, and hazing makes fun of the disciplinary system the teachers represent (cf. Leimu 1985: 53–54). The purpose of life is to get older and move from one level to the next, and everything is supposed to serve this goal. In this respect the traditions of juvenile peer groups also appear to convey the values and attitudes of adult

society, even if the parody exhibits features of resistance and contestation (cf. Anttila 1996; Lipponen 1992; Nitovuori 1997; Saarikoski 1994: 152, 158–169; Virtanen 1978).

In the army, experienced troops have no way to differ officially from newcomers; in the same way, the formal school curriculum does not distinguish between students on the basis of their sex. Officially the teachers and the school are supposed to treat all students in an equally personal way, gender notwithstanding (Lahelma 1992; Gordon & Lahelma 1992). The unofficial traditions of the students have dealt a great deal with such themes that the official school traditions overlook. Constructing the difference between men and women and valuing man as superior – the cornerstones of our gender system – are left to be learned unofficially. What is known as gender neutrality in the official curriculum and schoolbooks means in practice that these issues are not pondered consciously and are not agreed on publicly and communally (Lahelma 1992; Gordon & Lahelma 1992). Romantic love, which appears as a central theme especially in girls' traditions, is not critically considered in education. Discourses on the subject of sexual harassment, and gender equality in general, do not exist. Sexual education is hetero-normative and in other ways avoids value discourses and questioning. Sexual enjoyment is not discussed at all but the cautionary and restrictive messages are clear (Aapola 1999: 149–171; Fine 1993; Lahelma 1996; Lehtonen 1998).

The rights and responsibilities of boys and girls regarding saying yes or no to sex are discussed through the unofficial tradition. Double standards, the different positions of boys and girls in relation to sexuality, and sharp differences between boys and girls on a more general level, are constructed within the shared culture of a juvenile group.

Entering secondary school, the student sheds her previous role as a child, a non-sexual being. Sexuality and gender roles become problematic, and all young persons are bound to take a stand on, and deal with, connected themes. Whore-labelling in the initial stage of secondary school may become institutionalised and develop features of puberty initiation. This means that many girls enter femininity traumatically, by becoming conscious of the inferiority and vulnerability of their own sex. For boys, the whore-naming custom makes them feel required to treat girls with an attitude of superiority, and as sex objects.

If the adult culture does not have a monolithic value system, then the juvenile culture must also have a variety of discourses, for constructing, negotiating and conveying the tendencies and arguments they reveal, and the different manners of speaking and value systems they form.

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