Chapter 1
Introduction

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Uncertain Times: Youth, Violence and Precariousness

Youth and youth culture are sometimes seen as *seismographs* of social and cultural changes, alerting us to new subjectivities and societal transformations (Johansson & Herz, 2019). In this sense, when we study young people, we are also studying society, and societal change. The transitional period between childhood and adulthood has gradually become extended, and today we also often talk about *young adults* or *emerging adulthood*. In some contexts, young people stay in school much longer and become parents later in life. There is great variation in how young people relate to these changes, to life and to emerging adulthood. In this book, we will combine insights from the discussion on emerging adulthood, youth studies, theories of violence, and theories of gender and intersectionality. Combining conceptual work on gendered identities and sexuality with ideas of stratification, inequality, and the transformation of the meaning of social positions, we will approach the main theme of this book: *young people, violence, harassments and precariousness*.

Our ambition in publishing the current edited collection is to approach the contemporary landscape of violence and harassment by presenting a number of highly relevant international studies of everyday violence, precariousness, gender and safe/unsafe learning environments. The scholars contributing to this collection have been asked to write their chapters so as to connect to these themes. This collection aims to take an international approach to issues of violence and harassment in young people's lives by critically exploring and discussing empirical data from different local and national contexts. We will, however, not – in any systematic way – compare different national and local contexts. Most of the studies included in this

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volume are based upon qualitative research, and we lack sufficient data to enable us to generalize and compare different national differences and similarities. Still, we hope that this anthology and the different contributions can contribute to an interest in more systematic comparisons and international analysis of violence and harassments in and out of school. Consequently, the chapters in this collection are intended to address to a wider international audience and to be of interest to educators as well as policymakers around the world.

Student Victimization, Education and Learning Environments

School is a place where young people spend much of their time and one of the places where they are at great risk of being exposed to harassment and violations (Gottfredson & DiPietro, 2011). When addressing questions on violence, what often comes to mind is physical violence. American studies on school violence often focus on school shootings and extreme physical violence. In European studies on school violence, there is often a spectrum of forms of violence, ranging from physical violence to bullying and harassment.

Since the mid-1970s the Swedish psychologist Olweus (1978) have had a great influence on our understanding of conflicts, violence and abuse in schools (see also, Pikas, 2002; Wilton et al., 2000). The heritage of Olweus and his colleagues is still strong, and hegemonic in bullying studies. In these theories of conflicts, abuse and violence a psychological perspective dominates. There is often also a clear relation between victims and perpetrators. The perpetrator often has an aggressive and abusive personality, and the victim an anxious and dependent personality. When these personalities encounter each other in school, the conditions for bullying are at hand. Today the international research on bullying is massive and growing (Hammarén et al., 2015). In this research violence and abusive behavior is often – but not always – framed on an individualistic level, disconnected from social contexts, power relations and social inequity. In this book, we have instead chosen to frame and analyze harassments, abusive behavior and conflicts in relation to power structures and social position. This does not mean that we neglect earlier research on bullying, and the great contribution of this field of research, of course.

Looking more closely at contemporary studies on violence in schools, we can see that such violence tends to cluster in specific peer groups and around certain variables, where variables such as gender, sexuality and ethnicity stand out as predictors of victimization (Nekvasil & Cornell, 2012). Considering the variable of gender, female students generally report greater exposure to sexual harassment than male students do (Odenbring & Johansson, 2019b). Contemporary research has also shown that gendered acts of harassment often intersect with ethnicity, social class and sexuality (Odenbring & Johansson, 2019b; Rahimi & Liston, 2011).

The importance of gender is also particularly evident with regard to masculinity. Notions of masculinity and of being a victim may be conflicting as regards identities and may affect how male students handle situations of threat, violence and

harassment (Åkerström et al., 2011). The pressure to avoid being labelled as non-masculine and a 'fag' plays an important role here (Pascoe, 2013; Plummer, 2001). At many times, this creates a pressure for young men to 'join the game', and to participate in rough interactions with their friends. Making fun of each other becomes a normality, even though it is not appreciated equally by all participants. As a result, students often have difficulties deciding what should be seen and defined as violence or harassment.

Studies worldwide have demonstrated that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer students often face different forms of bullying in everyday life at school (Odenbring, 2019; Pascoe, 2013). Research also suggests that communities with conservative values and traditional masculine and feminine ideals often create a hostile school climate for these students (Bishop & Casida, 2011; Msibi, 2012). Compared to their heterosexual counterparts, sexual minority students have more mental health problems, higher rates of depression and increased risk of failing academically (Bishop & Casida, 2011; Martin-Storey & Crosnoe, 2012).

Taking a closer look at research on young people with a minority background, particularly boys with a minority background growing up in poor neighborhoods, they are more likely to be exposed to violence than are young people with majority background (Ellis et al., 2018). In school as well as in society at large, research shows that young minority boys are often categorized and positioned as violent, and sometimes even as dangerous (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2013). Contemporary research also suggests that many young people with a minority background, regardless of gender, often experience everyday systematic racism in school and the surrounding community (Kohli, & Solórzano, 2012; Odenbring & Johansson, 2019a).[1]

There is a growing concern in many countries around the world that children and young people are at risk when they are at school. In the Nordic countries, for example, the tendency to treat unruly behavior, bullying and violence as crimes is quite a new phenomenon (Lunneblad, 2019; Lunneblad et al., 2017). This increased regulation by law has been described as a *process of juridification*. There is also a growing tendency to treat violence and unruly behavior in schools as personal and psychological problems. Instead of addressing these issues at the institutional and structural level, there is instead a focus on individually oriented solutions and psychiatric diagnosis (Odenbring et al., 2017).

The tendency to treat bullying, harassments, abusive behavior and violence as crimes is a complex matter. On the one hand, there is a lack of sound evidence that a more legal and repressive approach reduces the extent of violence in schools (Hammarén et al., 2015; Sharif, 2004). On the other hand, a by prosecuting degrading treatment and harassments the legal discourse may facilitate an increasing focus on children's and young people's vulnerability and put greater emphasize on schools creating safe learning environments.

[1] We are well aware of that the term 'minority background' is widely discussed among scholars. In this section, we have chosen to use the same term as the researchers who conducted these studies. However, in the different chapters the use of concepts such as minority, immigrants, ethnicity, 'race', will be discussed in relation to different national and local contexts.

Theories of Violence

There are many different ways of conceptualizing violence. In this volume we are focusing on different forms of structural and cultural violence. We will use Galtung's distinction between different levels of violence as a point of departure, but another ambition has been to get closer to the everyday life of young people own perspectives, and their experiences of violence, abusive behavior and harassments. The different studies will, thus, provide the reader with more detailed and precise information on how violence is enacted and played out in the everyday life of young people.

Johan Galtung (1990) distinguishes between direct, structural and cultural violence. *Direct violence* includes physical and psychological violence. It stretches from overt physical violence to different forms of harassment and hate speech. *Structural violence* is embedded in different power relations and societal hierarchies, for example, patriarchy and men's violence towards women and other men. *Cultural and symbolic violence* concern different forms of legitimation of violence, for example, when racist words and expressions are tolerated and even defended.

A great deal of the violence occurring in schools also takes the form of verbal harassment. These verbal assaults often include sexist and/or racist content. In *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, Judith Butler (1997) explores and problematizes hate speech. These kinds of verbal assaults can result in *linguistic injuries*. In this sense, verbal/psychological violence is also a severe violent act. Calling people names and using derogatory labels constitute a common form of violence. However, Butler also wants to nuance and elaborate on the relation between speech and acts. She argues that name-calling can be the starting point for counter-mobilization and resistance. Butler states: "To insist on the gap between speech and conduct, however, is to lend support for the role of nonjuridical forms of opposition, ways of restaging and resignifying speech in contexts that exceed those determined by the courts" (Butler, 1997, p. 23). This skeptical position implies that we must be careful not to predetermine what should be seen as violent acts. There is instead a need to investigate and bring forward the complex and often contradictory aspects of school violence. In addition, there is a need for a critical discussion on the ongoing juridification of school violence. Instead of dialogues and pedagogical interventions, what we observe is an increasing tendency to treat interpersonal conflicts and verbal assaults as crimes, leading to different kinds of actions and interventions.

What we are approaching in the different chapters and studies in this volume, is an ongoing, but not always explicit and obvious, verbal and sometimes also physical enactment of different forms of violence. This form of *low-intense violence* can be defined as an intrinsic part of the normative regulations present in schools. In this sense, low-intense violence is interwoven with gendered structures and hierarchies, thus becoming naturalized and normalized. Low-intense violence is also ritualized and enacted in jokes, play, social interaction and basically everyday life and

encounters at school. This also makes it difficult and challenging to study and make visible everyday school violence.

Structure of the Book

In this book, a number of international scholars from Australia, Finland, Iceland, the United Kingdom and Sweden contribute chapters exploring different aspects of violence and harassment in schools and in young people's everyday lives. This collection focuses on and aims to examine young people, violence and issues of victimization in different educational context as well as in the everyday lives of young people in certain parts of the world. The collection includes 13 chapters, organized and presented under three main parts: *Power relations, homosociality and violence, Sexualized violence and schooling* and *Everyday racism, segregation and schooling*.

The first part on the themes of power relations, homosociality and violence focuses on masculinity, boyhood, different forms of homosocial relations among boys and well-being. In particular, we dig deeper into the relation between homosociality, gendered expectations and harassment.

This collection starts with Chap. 2, with research conducted by Elina Lahelma. Chapter 2 draws on results and interpretations from a previous study on the situation of sexual and gender-based harassment in Finnish schools in the mid-1990s. Although sexual and gender-based harassment were already mentioned in the Act of Gender Equality, in the 1990s the terms were hardly familiar even to teachers and were not discussed at school. Lahelma revisits her earlier analysis of the experiences of girls attending lower secondary school. She also presents some newer Finnish and international research in the field and refers to other chapters in this collection. In the final part of Chap. 2, Lahelma combines earlier conclusions with new findings and reflects on what has changed and what has remained the same in young people's experiences of and reflections on sexual and gender-based harassment in schools as well as in teachers' responses.

The violence that 'doesn't count' at school is explored by Victoria Rawlings in Chap. 3, Victoria Rawlings reviews data from students and teachers concerning acts of violence at school that target individuals' gender or sexuality, utilizing the work of Judith Butler – *The Force of Nonviolence* – to examine and interpret their accounts. In doing so, Rawlings argues that ubiquitous definitions of 'bullying' that emerge from the state and operate in schools and other institutions actively resist recognition of this type of violence, regardless of how it is manifested. By examining the ways in which students and teachers experience and define violence while being constrained by hegemonic policy narratives, Rawlings argues that, as it stands, bullying policy entrenches violence against minority groups in existing structural lines of oppression and subjugation. In doing so, bullying policy significantly tests the bonds between students and teachers, undermining their fundamental relationships. This analysis illustrates that a more nuanced, comprehensive and socially just

imagining of violence is needed to empathically and deliberately move towards nonviolence in schools.

In Chap. 4, David Plummer investigates the passage from childhood to manhood. This passage has long been recognized as the site for social engineering to turn boys into men – a period when 'real men' are made. While traditional societies typically orchestrated this transition through rituals entailing mentoring of young males by older men, modern society has largely handed responsibility for much of this passage over to the modern education system. For a number of reasons, a key difference in the modern transition is the reduced importance of adult males in the process. However, the passage itself remains as important as ever, and boys often find themselves resorting to alternative ways to collectively navigate this complex, high-pressure time. These arrangements can be both positive and negative. On the one hand, greater latitude is possible as boys re-work traditional masculinities into new forms. However, driven by masculine obligations and taboos, boys can also act out masculinity in extreme ways and punish transgressions severely, often using homophobia as the gender weapon of choice. At their most extreme, peer group politics can spill onto the streets and form gangs or gang-like groups with similar codes of conduct, but differing greatly in how extreme they are.

Research on joking cultures, masculinity and homosocial relations among teenage boys in lower secondary school is undertaken by Thomas Johansson and Ylva Odenbring in Chap. 5. The chapter draws on a meta-analysis of data from two different research projects and includes interviews with teenage students conducted in two lower secondary schools located in different rural areas in Sweden. The results in this chapter reveal that homosocial bonding and 'having fun together' can serve as a kind of glue in boys' social relationships at school. Yet, there are also situations when the fun-making actually crosses a boundary and turns into violence. According to Johansson and Odenbring, using jokes or fighting for 'fun' as a way to conceal different forms of harassment can be interpreted as part of the construction of a highly contradictory homosociality. Also, the tendency among the boys to trivialize different forms of everyday violence makes it difficult for most boys to actually discern when they have crossed the thin line between fun and harassment.

In Chap. 6, Chris Haywood and Ella Bending explore what happens when young men are hurting. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 12 young men, this chapter explores their everyday experiences of partner-initiated relationship dissolution. More specifically, Haywood and Bending explore how educational contexts impact how young men manage feelings, such as loss, anxiety and anger, that emerge as a result of relationship breakup. While much work on men and violence provides an insight into how masculinity is made and constructed, this chapter explores the ways in which masculinity is fractured, displaced and lost. Furthermore, it examines young men's strategies for restoring and compensating for their sense of self and the role of educational well-being services in supporting them.

The collection then moves on to the second main part, *Sexualized violence and schooling,* in which sexual harassment and violence directed at sexual minority students are addressed. In this section, sexting, online sexual harassment, online victimization and homophobia are in particular focus.

This part starts with Chap. 7, presenting the research carried out by Carolina Lunde and Malin Joleby. Lunde and Joleby investigate young people's experiences of sexting and online sexual victimization. Lunde and Joleby look at the ways in which the Internet and smartphones are used for sexual purposes. Research focusing on adolescents' experiences of sexting, i.e., the creation, sharing, and forwarding of sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude images or video clips, is discussed. This research indicates that a substantial minority of young adolescents engage in sexting, and many report receiving sexts. Building on both quantitative and qualitative work, it is evident that experiences of sexting are complex, involving both positive and negative elements. It is also evident that sexting is surrounded by gendered norms, sexual double standards, and power issues. The chapter is also dedicated to research on online sexual abuse, outlining studies that have explored risk factors for, and consequences of, online sexual abuse. Perpetrator strategies when approaching young people online are discussed. One important lesson is that the adult world's lack of insight into adolescents' online world means that young people are left on their own to deal with online sexual encounters. The chapter ends with practical guidelines concerning how to address issues of sexuality, sexual interaction, and sexual abuse in the online setting. In Chap. 8, Kristina Hunehäll Berndtsson and Ylva Odenbring investigate how the dick pic has become a growing phenomenon among teenage students. The study draws on interviews with students in year nine in a lower secondary school (year 7–9) located in an affluent area in Sweden. The students' experiences of sexual harassment in the school are examined in relation to the school's context, based on the perception that school violence is characterized by both school culture and the local context. The results reveal that receiving dick pics is an everyday occurrence for girls. The most common way of handling the issue is to block the sender, but when the sender is a schoolmate, the girls in the study marked this by ignoring and not talking to the perpetrator. The students expressed unawareness that sending unsolicited pictures is a criminal act. This finding indicates the importance of preventing sexual harassment in school.

In Chap. 9, Jessica Ringrose, Kaitlynn Mendes, Sophie Whitehead, and Amelia Jenkinson explore how schooling cultures reproduce gender and sexual inequality, particularly focusing on how policies and practices legitimate and sanction what we will term 'rape culture'. Rape culture is a logic that normalizes practices of sexual shaming and blaming of the victims of abuse instead of focusing on tackling sexually aggressive and predatory forms of masculinity. Drawing on their research project entitled 'Documenting Digital Feminist Activism: Mapping feminist responses to new media misogyny and rape culture', in which teen feminists in the UK were interviewed, the authors explore girls' experiences of rape culture and how girls are tackling rape culture through their activism both at school and online. Drawing on the girls' experiences, the authors show that schools not only fail to support young people's civic voices, but that many actually actively dissuade activism that is viewed as disruptive to authority and school rules. This research shows that while some pupils possess the personal and social resilience and digital literacy skills necessary to cope with these challenges of speaking out against sexism and rape culture, many do not and that there is an urgent need for pedagogical interventions.

Responding to this gap, this chapter concludes by outlining a collaborative project aimed at developing new pedagogical resources on "Digital Defence & Activism Lessons" for UK schools using the sexuality education charity Sexplain. In Chap. 10, Jukka Lethonen analyzes the responses and stories of non-heterosexual and trans youth, based on data from a survey produced by the Finnish lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex human rights organization Seta and the Youth Research Network. The survey data used in this chapter consist of 1861 responses, out of which 994 were non-heterosexual women, 380 non-heterosexual men, 404 trans-masculine respondents and 83 transfeminine respondents. Lethonen argues that young people leave out of focus a part of violence that is linked to and/or based on heteronormative practices. These are also rather psychological and medical concepts, which often focus on individual behavior and emotions, and they do not always take into account larger societal issues and contexts.

In Chap. 11, Jón Ingvar Kjaran and Brynja Elísabeth Halldórsdóttir Gudjonsson discuss the concept of epistemic violence and how it can be applied when evaluating how LGBTQ students are still excluded from the curriculum, educational policy, and educational spaces in Icelandic schools. Kjaran and Halldórsdóttir draw on interviews with 10 students who identity as LGBT/queer and analysis of various policy documents. Theoretically, this chapter draws on queer theory, providing a theoretical framework and perspective for both teachers and researchers, the goal being to bring about change and transform education so that it serves the needs of all students. This is particularly important within educational contexts where the values of the dominant class and culture are often reproduced and forced upon the 'other'. In other words, teachers are agents and often part of the dominant culture, and therefore it is important to include in their education and training critical race awareness with a view to counteracting epistemic violence in education and teaching.

In the third part, *Everyday racism, segregation and schooling*, we look more closely at this theme and what effect it may have on the young people concerned. This section starts with Chap. 12, which is based on research conducted by Ylva Odenbring and Thomas Johansson. In this chapter, Odenbring and Johansson address everyday systemic racism in a Swedish rural lower secondary school, providing new insights into how students with various immigrant backgrounds experience everyday racism in school and being positioned as *the Other*. The results indicate that immigrant students, regardless of gender, were exposed to racist and degrading comments due to their immigrant background or the color of their skin. The boys' narratives also intersect with masculinity. During the interviews, the narratives of the immigrant boys also revealed that everyday racism was expressed through physical violence and that sometimes they also had to fight back. The micro-aggressions expressed by the racist comments as well as the physical violence aimed to immigrant students had a great impact on their well-being at school.

In Chap. 13, Marcus Herz and Philip Lalander investigate unaccompanied minors' experiences of schooling in Sweden. Herz and Lalander use ethnographic data on experience of school among young "unaccompanied minors" who arrived in Sweden between 2012 and 2016. For most of them, going to school was considered

an opportunity and sometimes as something that could take the edge off their everyday life, allowing them to think about something else for a change. For those who did not receive a positive decision regarding a residence permit, school became something fragile, associated with feelings of anxiety. Going to school or getting an education had its difficulties, even for those who received a positive decision regarding their ability to stay in Sweden. Many of the young people told of experiences of not being heard, being 'othered', being exposed to administrative and symbolic violence as well as racism.

In the final chapter of this collection, Chap. 14, Thomas Johansson and Ylva Odenbring explore how students in a lower secondary school in a disadvantaged urban neighborhood in Sweden experience and talk about everyday life and violence at school as well as in the local neighborhood. The results reveal that everyday life at school and in the neighborhood is strongly framed by a culture of silence, brotherhood and distrust. The results also demonstrate the existence of a strong local culture and methods of solving different problems at school. Talking with 'strangers' about local problems, is regarded as a form of betrayal. The young boys refer to people who talk too much about different incidents in school or in the local neighborhood as snitches. The authors discuss how this form of local protectionism influence how violence is dealt with in and out of school.

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