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VIOLENCE FROM WITHIN THE REFORM SCHOOL

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This article examines young people's talk of violence to highlight the meanings of violence. Violence is approached as a fluid concept with multiple meanings. The empirical data consist of 15 focus group interviews of young people (38 young people between 12 and 17 years of age) in two Finnish reform schools carried out by two interviewers in each session. The interviews looked at the young residents' views on violence in general and on the reform schools in particular. The analysis focuses on the narrative means that the young people employed to describe violence: violence either as an instrumental means or as a form of expression. The collective nature of violence was emphasized. The results suggest that it is important to identify the multiple meanings assigned to violence for the needs of social and criminal policy and of research.

Keywords: *youth violence; residential institutions; focus groups; multiple meanings of violence*

The question of what violence signifies has become more problematic in postmodern culture (Schinkel, 2004, p. 23). Partly, this is because violence is seen as an ever more elusive concept. It refers to different forms of behavior and relationships with various contextual meanings, even though popular notions tend to represent it stereotypically as a universal phenomenon with an evil perpetrator and an innocent victim (Stanko, 2003, p. 4; Stanko & Lee, 2003, p. 10). Besides acts causing serious physical harm, the concept of violence refers to various everyday infringements of bodily and even mental integrity that can be regarded as normal or even acceptable behavior. During the past decades, the Western world has witnessed a tendency to broaden the scope of violence. Many of its previously hidden forms, such as violence against women and children, have become sources of public discussion, disapproval, and criminalization, even if this development has also been contested (Stanko, 2003, p. 12). Nowadays, if not also earlier, the concept of violence is fluid and ambivalent.

In this article, we will analyze this fluidity in young people's talk on violence. For this purpose, we have interviewed young residents of reform schools in Finland, a small northern European country. Reform schools are among the most specialized institutions of Finnish child protection, and they are actually the only child protection institutions maintained by the state. They provide a placement for young people between 12 and 17 years

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of age who have difficulties in adapting themselves to the social norms expected of young people. There are six of these institutions in Finland, and they hosted 292 young people in 2003. We interviewed young people who were living in two of these state-run institutions.

We will focus on the meanings of violence as based on our data, namely on the particular narrative means that the young people employed to describe violence: They articulated violence either as an instrumental means for something or a form of expression. We have named these narrative means as instrumental and expressive representation of violence.

We will begin by arguing why we have done this research in a particular societal and physical context, namely in Finnish reform schools, before briefly exploring some of the scientific discussions on instrumental and expressive violence. This will be followed by an introduction to some methodological underpinnings in addition to our method, namely focus group interviews in a residential setting. These sections provide the necessary basis for the actual analysis of how the young people we interviewed used the instrumental and expressive representation of violence while making sense of violence.

Why Youth Violence in the Finnish Residential Setting?

At first glance, Finland can be described as a rather peaceful welfare state in which violence plays only a marginal role. A closer look reveals that the number of criminal homicides in Finland is one of the highest in the Western world (LaFree & Drass, 2001). A notable group of the victims are women who have been killed by their intimate partner. Gendered violence, in particular, has long remained a hidden problem in Finland. Violence against women had been discussed as a serious social problem only in the 1990s, a few decades later than in Scandinavia and in Anglo-Saxon countries (Lahti, 2001; Nyqvist, 2001; Piispa, 2004).

Youth violence, in contrast, has raised public concern. However, each year there are only a few homicides, unlawful killings, or murders by young people: Between 1996 to 2003 the number of such crimes has varied from 0 (1997) to 9 (2002; Lehti, 2002; Marttunen & Kivivuori, 2003, pp. 146-157). The number is so small that in the World Health Organization statistics on homicide rates among youths aged 10 to 29 years, the rate for Finland in proportion to its population has not even been calculated (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002, pp. 28-29). On the other hand, recent studies have documented the polarization of the welfare and social problems of children and youths. More and more young people are doing well at the same time that social problems, including violence, seem to accumulate in certain sections of the population (Järventie & Sauli, 2001; Kuure, 2001).

From the viewpoint of adult society, youth is glorified as the symbolic period of beauty and freedom, but it is also associated with plenty of worry and problems (Muncie, 2004, p. 3). Youth as a period is described by a certain semidependency: Young people are not yet totally independent citizens, but, at the same time, they represent future generations (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997, p. 41). The media, politicians, and authorities are therefore particularly interested in the problem behavior of young people, an interest that has labeled all young people as a social category. The young have often been the cause of what is called moral panic: Groups of people considered dangerous are labeled with negative stereotypes that are often overdimensioned in comparison to the original infringement of norms. Moral panics may justify a stricter control of the labeled group. The violent behavior of young people is an often-repeated example (e.g., Muncie, 2004, pp. 5-7).

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Young people in trouble tend to be portrayed only as problematic, and their views are seen to be irrelevant in scientific accounts, public discussions, and decision making. This is true especially in the case of those children and young people who live in residential care institutions (Stanko & Lee, 2003, p. 6). Listening to how Finnish young people living in reform schools talk about violence makes it possible to explore descriptions of violence delivered during youth. How do the young people employ the meanings of violence available in society at large while making sense of violence? At the same time, the fact that our interviewees were staying in a reform school and their possible earlier experiences of institutions or other fostering measures allow them to speak of violence in many different environments. Very little is known in Finland about such phenomena as violence in institutions, for instance (Frost, Mills, & Stein, 1999, pp. 103-114; Sariola, 1993).

Representing Youth Violence: Instrumental and Expressive Aspects

Social scientific research on violence has been mainly interested in the causes of violence (Schinkel, 2004, p. 13). Our methodological approach, focusing on the meanings of violence, departs from the positivist one, that aims at finding causal explanations for violent behavior. We argue that despite its importance, the positivist model should be supplemented with a more diversified understanding of the meanings attached to such concepts as violence, crime, and youth, particularly from the point of view of the young people (Anderson, Kinsey, Loader, & Smith, 1994, p. 7; Muncie, 2004, pp. 39-43; Stanko, 2003, pp. 2-3).

Positivist scientific theories have been claimed to have serious problems in their attempts to convincingly explain the causality of violence (Schinkel, 2004, pp. 9-15). On the other hand, the analysis of meanings of violence has also been questioned for its tendency to present determinist accounts and for ignoring "the aesthetics of violence" (Schinkel, 2004, p. 15). Researchers have detected meanings of violence in the social background of the violent person or interpreted that violence serves certain functions of that person's social standing. However, what violence really means for its own sake (i.e., the "will to violence") remains unsolved (Schinkel, 2004, p. 17). By listening to young people and analyzing their accounts, our intention is to be sensitive also to this neglected aspect of violence.

Our contribution to the theoretical debate on youth violence is mainly empirical, as will be shown later. The empirical notions, that is, the narrative means of instrumental and expressive violence the young people employed when talking about violence, do, however, share the same approach of conceptualizing violence as known in the literature. The distinction between instrumental and expressive violence is classical in psychological and criminological research (e.g., Berkowitz, 1993; Campbell, 1993, pp. 8-14; Felson, 2002; Salfati, 2000; Wolfgang & Ferracuti, 1967). The instrumental representation may be summarized by stating that violence can be considered necessary for the reaching of a given goal. Descriptions of physical violence have been regarded as being expressive if violent behavior is seen as the result of a person's incapability of controlling his or her feelings of anger. Aggression and violence have been scientifically explained in this latter way, at least in psychoanalytical approaches and in theories of anomie and social control.[1]

We also acknowledge that this division has been challenged. It has been debated whether all aggression and violence should be interpreted as only goal oriented and therefore always instrumental (Felson, 2002; Tedeschi & Felson, 1994) or whether at least a part of it is a consequence of impassioned negative emotions—or frustration over the discrepancy

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between desired goals and the means to achieve them (the so-called frustration-aggression hypothesis; e.g., Berkowitz, 1993, pp. 26-47; Merton, 1968).

Based on our data and analysis, we cannot take a stand in this debate on the nature of violent acts. However, in the concluding section of the article, we do discuss whether and how these aspects play a role in the meaning-giving processes and what they tell about young people's relation to violence. Our approach is somewhat reminiscent of Anne Campbell's (1993), who links these two forms of aggression or violence to what it is to be a woman or a man. In her empirical studies, she observed that men and women generally employed different ways in talking about their violent behavior. Women interpreted their violence as a stage in a process during which they lost control over their behavior (expressive interpretation of violence). They often interpreted this as a shameful occurrence. In contrast, many men saw their violence as a means of acquiring control over a situation. They resorted to violence to achieve obedience by someone else or to restore a lost reputation (instrumental representation of violence). According to her, these two ways of interpreting violence are everyday theories and shape our understanding of violence. They are attached to gender-bound social norms and shape our behavior: At a fairly early age, boys engage in battles over space and social standing, whereas girls are socialized to behave nonaggressively and to control their behavior in this respect (Campbell, 1993, pp. 19-20).

In the following, we will employ the concepts of instrumental and expressive violence in presenting young people's narrative approach to violence. We do not intend to classify, explain, or find causal variables in the classical psychological or criminological sense but present how young people employ this distinction while giving meaning to violence. Our approach is therefore empirical and shaped by the narratives of the young people.

Focus Groups as an Arena for Producing and Sharing Definitions

The study is based on 15 focus group interviews of 38 young residents, 12 to 17 years old, conducted in two Finnish reform schools during the spring of 2002. As so often in research designs using focus groups (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001, pp. 8-9), our focus groups were preceded by other research—an ethnography on residential experiences—carried out by a member of our team in the same institutions (Pösö, 2004). It was only in the focus groups where violence was discussed as an issue, but the ethnography did familiarize the young residents with the very idea of research and facilitated, in that sense, access to focus groups.

The qualitative research interview has been considered to be a powerful and interactive method of approaching the social worlds of personal narratives (Kvale, 1996). Focus groups, in particular, are seen to be a good source of data on group behavior, attitudes, or shared understandings among a set of people (Bloor et al., 2001, p. 17; Morgan, 2002, pp. 152-154). To study the variety of meanings attached to violence, the strengths of focus groups, as presented by Jenny Kitzinger, supported our choice of method. Kitzinger (1994) argues,

> The focus group method is ideal for exploring social and communication issues, and examining the cultural construction of experience. It taps into people's underlying assumptions and theoretical frameworks and draws out how and why they think as they do. The data generated by this method confront the researcher with the multi-leveled and dynamic nature of people's understandings, highlighting their fluidity, deviations and contradictions. (p. 172)

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Focus groups emphasize the importance of interactive processes in producing data. The purpose is that the members of the group may not only voice their individual opinions but also discuss and even debate among themselves and thus present arguments for their opinions—or modify or elaborate them (Kitzinger, 1994, pp. 103, 107). In a focus group, the researcher-interviewee relationship differs from the uni- or bidirectional relationship of an individual interview. The focus group interview has therefore been considered as one means of dismantling the one-sided authority setup of the research interview, such as our role as adults living outside the semiclosed residential community.

By conducting focus group interviews, we wanted to emphasize the fact that we were interested in the young people's understandings of violence as opposed to their personal experiences. Our aim was to keep the conversation on a general, shared, and cultural level. It turned out that the young people wanted to move on to a broader conversational arena. Personal experiences turned out to be the very domains that the young people brought into the conversation to a more marked degree than the researchers wanted. This shows that the focus groups cannot be exclusively controlled by the researcher (Kvale, 1996, pp. 101-102). Based on this experience, we would also like to challenge the belief that focus groups do not allow any deep investigation into attitudes and thinking. In this, we agree with Caroline Överlien, Karin Aronsson, and Margareta Hyden (2004), who had a similar experience of "rich data" in conducting focus group interviews in a youth residential setting.

The interview structure remained the same in all interviews, but the interviews were carried out in a manner that was only loosely structured, keeping the groups as flexible as possible (Morgan, 2002, p. 147). The themes focused on violence in various physical contexts, such as at home or school, in institutions, and on the street. The groups also discussed norms related to violence and the relationships of boys and girls to violence. The interview length varied from less than 1 hour to 3 hours. At times, we had to adapt our work to the school schedule so that interviews would not have disturbed schoolwork in the institution. In these cases, the interview climate was more nervous and time conscious than when the interviews were conducted during leisure periods in the evening.

In general, each group consisted of 2 or 3 young people and 2 interviewers (the main interviewer and a follow-up interviewer). In the first institution, the groups were selected by the personnel, and in the second, the young people themselves formed the groups, meaning that we used both purpose-constructed and preexisting groups (Bloor et al., 2001, pp. 20-26). Participation was voluntary, and roughly three fourths of residents participated in our study. However, in an institution, the issue of whether participation in research is voluntary is problematic (Burman, Batchelor, & Brown, 2001; Honkatukia, Nyqvist & Pösö, 2003).[2] The self-selection produced groups in which the climate was calm and reflective. On the basis of self-selection, two individual interviews were also conducted as 2 young people were willing to talk about violence but not in a group. These 2 persons were included in our data of 38 interviewees. It was also interesting to note that self-selection led to single-sex groups (six groups of boys, two interviews with single boys, and three groups of girls), whereas selection by the personnel led to mixed groups (four groups).

Analyzing focus group interview data has often been considered exceptionally difficult because of the material, which is thematically rambling, abundant, and filled with dynamic interaction (e.g., Kvale, 1996, pp. 146-147). The material we collected may also be described as difficult. We started our analysis by separating the themes (in particular, on the basis of the different contexts and definitions of violence). In the following phase,

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the analysis focused in more detail on the narrative means that the young people employed to describe violence. The narrative means are understood as (mainly linguistic) ways of telling stories of violence, as thematic entities linked through meanings situated in the interview context (Kvale, 1996, pp. 199-203).

In the analysis, two major narrative means were located. In the following analysis, we will empirically demonstrate how young people employ the distinction of instrumental and expressive violence while giving meaning to violence. The analysis will cover a great number of different forms of violence. The forms and different contexts will not be analyzed thoroughly as such, but the aim is to use the young people's descriptions of them to illustrate the narrative structures and logic of the violence talk in general.

Instrumental Violence

Empirically, describing violence as a tool of some kind was a strong narrative, found in every focus group. Violence made sense as being useful and was sometimes desperately needed to gain something. When talking about violence, three different ways to narrate about violence as a tool were introduced. The young people noted that violence was mainly needed for, first, belonging to a group and sharing the group membership, second, for producing social order, and, third, as a means to solve problems. The contents of such approaches will be described in more detail in the following.

Violence as an Instrument of Belonging and Sharing

The essentially collective nature of violence is a strong element of violence talk in the focus groups. Often our interviewees described violence as a necessary element to be a part of a group either outside the institution or in the institution. Usually, the young people were part of a set that was not, however, primarily constructed around violence but that served many other needs as well. The set, or crowd, may become a second home for many young people. The set may be seen as a so-called free zone where one can detach oneself from the norms of home and school—or reform school (Lieberg, 1993, p. 210).

In connection with violence talk, the young people often stressed loyalty to one's own group. This was visible both in the accounts of violence in the reform school and in free time. In the reform school, the collective nature, the instrumentality of violence, and the loyalty among the young people were most clearly manifested in conflicts between the residents and the personnel.

The descriptions of violence in the reform schools were based on the juxtaposition and mistrust between the residents and the staff as groups, a feature more broadly connected to the so-called closed institutions (e.g., Goffman, 1987). The young people reported examples of how members of the staff had caught hold of them roughly, trod on someone's hand, twisted "your arms so they nearly fell off" (H14), torn their clothes, and so on. Violence against the personnel requires that the young rely on each other and that groups are stable. Solidarity among the young is illustrated by the story of how a resident had to be isolated: While the personnel were carrying this out, several others went to help their mate to prevent the isolation by force (H3).

Especially in the context of leisure time, loyalty associated with the use of violence seemed to be manifested in that it is not always possible to abstain from violence without being excluded from the group. These situations are governed by a set of norms of which

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our interviewees were conscious but which were revealed to us outsiders only selectively. However, we got the impression that running away from threatening situations clearly means letting your side down and is certain to bring on the contempt of the others: "If you do run away from some situation, you'll definitely get to hear that 'fuck, you're a bit of a coward you are, chicken, going away like that'" (H7). "Cowards" may have to face violent sanctions. Even those who do not hide their fear will participate in gang conflicts. Joining a crowd is in the nature of a contract that one cannot break without consequences. No one wants to be branded as a coward, for this is not compatible with the masculinity represented by the boys. Offensive names are also given to opponents who lose and retreat, who are regarded as "yellow bellies" and "clowns" (H3). This manner of speech undoubtedly strengthens one's own group and creates team spirit.

Violence Creates Social Order

Violence was referred to as a means for creating social order among the young people and other people. The young people spoke of, first, the gender issues, second, intimate relations, and, third, residential life from the point of view of such social order, which was shaped by the use of violence.

In the accounts of both boys and girls in the focus groups, most violence was more clearly committed by boys than by girls. The focus group situation provided a good starting point for studying the views of violence held by both boys and girls, and the views held by both were very similar. We assume this to be a sign of the clear-cut gender boundaries and the use of violence as part of masculine and feminine practices. The violent toughness of boys often appeared as a matter of course. The boys spoke about it as, for instance, a way of gaining personal space, although sometimes they also spoke about the negative sides of having a violent reputation, for example, that it may cause difficulties in finding a job. However, the position of girls in violent situations is essentially different from that of boys. The duties of girls in a gang fight were defined in the same way regardless of the narrator's sex. According to the narration, the girls are part of the situation but not necessarily part of the violence; rather, their task is to intervene at least when the violence becomes dangerous. The conciliatory role of the girls was emphasized by expressions repeated frequently during the interviews, such as "separating by force" and "intervening."

Violence was discussed also as a tool to create social order within intimate relationships, especially, violence related to heterosexual relationships, coupledom, and romantic involvement, with a logic of its own. Many interviewees disapproved of violence against girls and women, and boys did not confess that they had committed such acts. Nevertheless, the young also described situations where a boy had hit a girl. Some of the boys even considered that "to some extent" it is justifiable to use violence to subdue a girl or a woman, "but not to fucking beat their heads to a pulp" (H3). In an interview with three boys, the following was said about the equality of violence between the sexes:

Mikael: You've got to have the kind of equality that if a woman hits a man then you'll just hit her back.
Pietari: Mmm.
Mikael: That's what I think is right . . . . Like you shouldn't think that women are special in any way, except that of course they're more frail and smaller, but still there's nothing to it.
Tarja: What about if the woman hasn't hit first?
Mikael: Well then you mustn't hit her.
Pietari: Well I don't know really. If a woman hits a man, then all you'll have to do is . . . .
Mikael: Well of course you shouldn't deck her. (H7)

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These boys felt that the comparative physical weakness of women does not call into question the equal use of violence except in the sense that the male should not "deck her." Violence was perceived as a means of winning the struggle between equal partners. The woman defined as equal is not a "true victim," who is often thought to be somehow weaker than the perpetrator of violence (e.g., Karlsson, 2003, p. 44).

In the young people's talk, violence seemed to define positions related to equality, particularly in regard to relationships within one's own generation. In contrast, it was strongly claimed by the young people that the children should be protected from parental violence just because of their position as children in that particular relationship as the social order of the cross-generational family relationships was such that violence against children was never right.

In addition, violence was needed in residential life to create social order: In an institution, newcomers and also young residents were said to be bullied. Residential age matters. This may be a kind of initiation rite of which frightening stories were told.[3] Talking about violence at school and in an institution, boys especially described conflicts between young and old residents, often containing physical violence. According to them, the conflicts are based on biological age, that is, the older boys bully the younger ones or the young ones "goad" (H13) their elders:

> Well it's like a way of passing time for the bigger ones that they bully the little ones. Then when the kids come at you, then you swing them round a bit, dust off the floor with them and that's supposed to be fun then. (H14)

Violence may also be based on the length of stay in the reform school. As early as in the 1950s, Finnish researcher Kaarlo Helasvuo (1954) wrote about pennalism or the ways in which the older members of a community oppress the younger ones. He detected certain forms of it in the lives of university students, in intraprofessional practices, in the social hierarchies of street gangs, in military life, and in boarding schools such as reform schools. He interpreted it as a feature of social hierarchies and noted that its forms vary from one collective to another. He studied violence among "institutional boys" and regarded pennalism as one form of social relationships among the boys (Helasvuo, 1954, pp. 12-24). Similarly, our interviewees described this type of bullying as primarily occurring among boys.

The concepts and experiences of bullying at school, outside the residential context, were common as well. Squabbling may be regarded as normal interaction among boys, whereas bullying occurs also among girls but is often less visible to outsiders than is that among boys (Lehtonen, 2003, pp. 159-160). Age also had an effect on the possibilities that the young person has for solving his or her status as a victim: The youngest boys told us that it is difficult to tell anyone about being bullied as that may easily give one the reputation of a rat (i.e., they had to follow the social order created by violence).

Violence as Problem Solving

As one dimension of instrumental violence, the young people described violence as a solution to difficult situations and problems. The relationship to violence was goal oriented: Violence was used to bring about change. In the focus groups, change was sought particularly in violent situations inside the family, in personal feelings of unhappiness and a subordinated position in the institutional life.

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The young spoke a lot about their personal experiences of family violence. The most personal narratives were related to violence in close relationships. They showed that young people lack means and are subjugated in violent situations occurring at home and in close relationships, but at the same time, they revealed attempts to intervene in some way (see Eskonen, 2005; Oranen, 2001). Boys, in particular, talked about having tried to use violence in violent situations at home to constrain the violent person (generally the father or stepfather). The purpose of these attempts was often to defend the mother as the victim of violence. Whether a violent situation could be solved by resorting to yet more violence depended on the young person's size and strength as compared to the opponent's.

In the following extract, boys talk about the difficulties in defending their mothers. They stressed their lack of power—sometimes it was not even possible to run away—but equally, the interviews occasionally revealed a show of their power. The strength of the young came into its own when the violent father or stepfather was badly drunk. At such times, kicking and beating sometimes stopped a violent situation.

Johannes: Once when my dad was about to strangle me then I did, like . . . . I don't know of course whether it was any use because dad threw me away, but I did try all sorts of things when I was little.

Ilari: Well I've also . . . when my stepfather was gagging my mother then I went and kicked him in the ribs and . . . once we were really that close to fighting but of course it's quite obvious that an 11-year-old against someone who's about 48 . . . .

Leo: It's like poor odds . . . an uneven match?

Ilari: Mmm.

Tarja: How old were you Johannes when you did that?

Johannes: I suppose I might have been 9.

Ilari: I must have been about 9 when I kicked my stepfather in the ribs and, the time we nearly came to a fight, I was 11 then. (H14)

In the previous extract, the two boys constructed together such a view that stopping violence in close relationship by resorting to more violence was regarded as acceptable if there was the slightest chance of succeeding. However, violence as a means of solving problems in this context was only possible to a limited extent: The young people were absolutely certain that parents must never be violent toward their children.

The same norm of violence use, related to age and position, concerned institutional violence. It was thought possible to solve problems related to subjugation, negligence, and abuse by resorting to violence in the reform school. However, violence could only be accepted when used by the young. The personnel were not considered to have the right to resort to violence in any situation whatsoever.

Violence as used by the young people was a last-resort means of solving problems, but at times, in certain situations, and by some of the young, it was felt justified and possible to use it. One simply had to get used to subjugation, negligence, and abuses. However, there were situations in which the young wanted to have a say in how the institution was run. In such cases, violence was a special means, considered as the only one possible, to change a situation experienced as difficult. In the following excerpt, the three interviewees express a strong conviction about this. Before this excerpt, they had talked for some time about institutional violence, which led the interviewer to ask about violence as an instrument.

Tarja: So violence seems to be a bit like an instrument for solving things.

Jouko: There's nothing else that counts here. If you get soft with the staff here, like letting them shoot their mouth at you as much as they want, then that won't lead you anywhere at all.

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Things just get a lot more difficult, see if at some point you go and show them that we can also fuck them off, meaning that we can also make things difficult for them and then they are able to behave just like that or maybe they're just scared that next time it's going to start much more easily if it has once [started] . . . . Like once we dealt with one of the staff here . . . . I mean it's good if you give them another walloping the next day, rather than maybe after a week. Meaning, then they know they had better be quiet, at least shut up for maybe 2 weeks and behave themselves.

Leo: Like you notice that that has an effect, your attitude, on how the staff behaves?

Jouko: Well they blackmail us with the rules and such, but we turn it around and blackmail them with our fists. We don't really have anything else besides that. (H3)

The young people talked about violence as a solution to problems in institutional life in a collective way. They spoke of themselves as a group who shared the same subjugated and powerless status. Violence was not the solution of an individual but of a collective problem. The solution was also looked for collectively: The young spoke of themselves as a group when using violence in situations of the type described above.

The young also spoke of violence as a personal issue. In such cases, violence was hoped to bring a solution to feeling bad. Violence was then only directed at oneself. For instance, slashing one's arms had been experienced as calming, as is described by the girl in the following passage, after speaking about vomiting for the same purpose. However, for her, this is only a temporary solution.

Päivi: So you don't think like you're hurting yourselves or that that was violence?

Wilma: Well maybe, but all the other things I've done to myself. I've slashed my arms fairly often and such. Then we've been thinking, or talked about it with the staff here too, that there's really no point in hurting yourself when it's talking that helps you best.

Päivi: Then what is it that you think about, I mean if you hurt yourself?

Wilma: You think that you can get rid of the bad feeling.

Päivi: That you could get rid of it.

Wilma: But you don't, not really. It only lasts for a moment, but then you just have the same feeling again. Or it might actually be worse.

Päivi: But there is a feeling of relief, like?

Wilma: When you make yourself hurt. Many times, what we've done is that we've first slashed our arms with these iron knives and then poured hot water or salt on, or things that really hurt you badly. And when the hurt goes away, then the bad feeling comes back. Many times worse. (H9)

Expressive Violence

In our interviews, descriptions of expressive violence came up considerably less frequently than instrumental violence, which was regarded as legitimate violence shared by the majority of young people. We have traced three dimensions of expressive violence in young people's talk. First, it was characterized as disapproval, "madness." Second, it was utilized in the talk about emotions. Third, expressive narrative means presented themselves in the talk about fictional violence that was seen as one of the ways available to the young people for describing how they deal with their feelings of anger. The next three sections, considerably shorter than the section discussing instrumental violence, will analyze these three dimensions more closely.

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Violence as Madness

In this kind of focus group talk, violence is not an unregulated activity. Uncontrolled and arbitrary activity is not likely to enhance one's social status or appreciation but rather causes contempt. Our interviewees distanced themselves clearly from violence regarded as uncontrolled, and people who resorted to it were called, among other things, "loonies," "weirdoes," and "freaks" (H6, H11). The kind of speech that creates otherness in violence by the use of such words as *mad* or *crazy* is a way of neutralizing one's own violence and a justification: "You've got to carry something because Helsinki [the Finnish capital] is full of crazies" (H11).

> Päivi: If someone is known to be violent . . . what do you call them then?
> Yrjö: You say that that's one crazy guy.
> Kukka-Maaria: Yes, crazy.
> Yrjö: Crazy.
> Kukka-Maaria: You hear this, that he's crazy, hitting just everybody. A crazy guy.
> Päivi: Does that really mean that they are mental?
> Lennart: Hell, that he's a weirdo, smashing the face of just anyone . . . .
> Kukka-Maaria: You say just one wrong word, and the next thing you know is a fist in your face. (H6)

The young people reported that the cause of violence by these "crazies" was that one looks stupid or is wearing the wrong kind of clothes. Their violence was not rational or instrumental but expressive, unpredictable, and therefore contemptible. The notion is, however, that such violence exists even though it is not practiced or experienced by the young people themselves.

Violence and Emotions

Emotional talk linked to violence had different contents depending on the context. Personal childhood experiences of violence in the family could arouse strong feelings of anger, bitterness, and revenge, whereas the feeling of fear linked to violent gang conflicts was subjected to various neutralization attempts, as described above. Group coherence and internal loyalty create an internal feeling of security. According to the young people's narratives, the anticipation of violence is seen in the carrying of weapons, which is also a way of creating a feeling of security and alleviating fear. Violence increases group cohesion and thus brings satisfaction to group members.

On the individual level, collective violence serves aspirations to status and occasionally creates "good feelings" in the members after victorious conflicts. The pleasure experienced after violence is, in fact, a deviation from the externalization of emotions generally linked to violence.

> Leo: Yes, what does it feel like then [after a fight]?
> Björn: Well like, I don't know, you may have a good feeling in the way that . . . you feel up in the air, not flat at all, like you were a winner . . . don't know, in fact you feel a bit of rage, maybe rage, sort of energy flowing and you feel that. (H12)

The quote emphasizes the personal character of the feeling, although violent conflicts take place between groups. The example shows not only an individual feeling of pleasure but also a masculine emotional state that stresses physical experience and power. It resembles most closely the emotions experienced after a victorious match in team sports. In many

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other contexts, the boys also talked analytically of controlling the feelings of fear and of the complex emotions experienced in various aggressive situations. According to them, the feelings of fear, anger and suspense help them to keep cool in and around fights, but at times, one's head can "shut off," leading to uncontrolled behavior. Similar observations were made by Jack Katz (1988) in studying the attraction and significance of violence in the criminal subcultures or gangs of young men.

This narrative comes close to what Willem Schinkel (2004) has referred to as "autotelic violence," which he defines as "a violence that is its own goal in which means and end are melted together" (p. 19). According to him, this aspect has been neglected in social scientific research on violence, even though it is widely represented in popular culture, in violent films and computer games, for example, as something pleasurable. The large consumption of these materials reveal that violence is "willed by people" (p. 20). Also, our interviewees talked sometimes eagerly about fictional violence in this sense, which we will turn to next.

Fictional Violence

Fictional violence came up now and then in the narratives as one mode of violence. It means imagining violence in a way or another. The young referred, for instance, to a collective game where they imagined the hanging of a disliked staff member. The game was started by a creaking branch near the smoking area, which sparked off a fictional, violent solution to a difficult relationship with the staff member. Fictional violence was also linked with the media (watching violent films), but the dominant element was self-expression. Music and making music were popular with our interviewees. Especially the writing of music and lyrics acted as a channel for expressing violence. The lyrics could receive such a violent interpretation in performance that the staff forbade them from being performed. Therefore, many wrote lyrics in secret.

The following passage concerns a boy talking about the links between writing lyrics and violence. It shows that fictional violence is very much in control by the boy.

> Tarja: So doing that, writing lyrics and songs and . . . .
> Jesse: I write pieces.
> Leo: Do you feel that that's sort of your way of getting rid of the aggression?
> Jesse: Yes. That's my way. Only way I've got. I don't get rid of them by violence.
> Leo: So you write lyrics and that?
> Jesse: Yeah.
> Leo: Do you write poetry, like?
> Jesse: I do. What I like writing is like little horror stories.
> Leo: What about, do you keep them in your desk drawer or what?
> Jesse: I've got this exercise book, I write them in it. The stories.
> Leo: Do you write them for your mates or . . . .
> Jesse: For myself.
> Leo: Could you tell me one story or a plot, just briefly.
> Jesse: I don't know, see they're pretty psychedelic like, or they just talk about how a skeleton, or like I say a fleshless man, a fleshless man tries to steal watches in this story and you've got to protect it like you mustn't let him. Yes and then I play the guitar in the background. Like that. That's what I do. (H15)

Fictional violence may have a great individual significance in institutional life, for imagination may be used to transcend the limits posed by institutional space and rules. In focus

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group interviews, however, fictional violence only came up tangentially. It may be a form of violent activity that is considered so personal and secret that it cannot be spoken about to an outsider. What was interesting was that although in the above passage a boy spoke about the importance of lyrics, it was only girls who spoke about the fun of having collective violent fantasies. Fictional violence is thus both individual and collective in nature, but it may also have a gender-related dimension.

Conclusions

In social theory, violence tends to be understood as a characteristic of interpersonal or structural relations. The violence is portrayed as a relatively isolated and isolatable exception to normal life (Hearn, 1998, p. 204). In the talk of young people, however, the collective nature of violence was strongly highlighted. This dimension of violence is easily overlooked if violence among young people is defined as an exception by using explanations such as illness, a pathological phenomenon, or a manifestation of immorality, as is often the case.

We suggest that both instrumental and expressive notions of violence should be taken into account when studying the meaning giving processes. Instrumental violence dominates young people's discussions, but at the level of meanings, it would be a serious omission to ignore the expressive sides of it. They are used as a way to negotiate violence and to tell about the pleasure and enjoyment related to it. Often, the instrumental and expressive interpretation merge with each other. On the other hand, the frustration-aggressive hypothesis emphasizes the emotions related to violence but seems to be unable to capture "the autotelic aspects of violence" (Schinkel, 2004) and pleasant feelings that it may convey.

The instrumental representation was employed strongly by the young people when they stressed their lack of power in different institutional settings such as school, family, and reform school on which they are, because of their position as young people, dependent or socially semidependent, as Andy Furlong and Fred Cartmel (1997, p. 41) put it. Violence of this type may spring from many different backgrounds, but the young people we interviewed stressed the use of violence as an instrument for being heard as young people or as customers of welfare services and residential care. Seeing violence as collective and instrumental leads to different institutional practices than when it is interpreted on the basis of special features in the individual, in which case violence is seen as the symptom of an individual pathological state. This should inform experts and authorities working with young people.

Having said that, we claim that the dominance of instrumental violence in young people's accounts takes us close to the so-called rational choice perspective in criminology arguing that crime (e.g., violence) is an outcome of rational decisions and strategic thinking. This approach is highly contested (e.g., de Haan & Vos, 2003), and also we take a critical stand toward its underlying belief in the always cognizant, calculating, and rational view of human nature. Still, from our point of view, the advantage of this perspective is the challenge it has presented to the traditional criminological theories that assume that criminals are fundamentally different from normal people. By emphasizing the instrumental interpretation of violence, our analysis presents the young people as active actors instead of deviant others. One may regard the young people's talk as a strong counterargument to opinions that stress the demonization of youth (e.g., Goldson, 2001; Muncie, 2004, pp. 3-7). Young people do not want to represent themselves as "monsters" and "savages without a will," although they have become the objects of adult social control and treatment because of their behavior.

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Our approach is prone to criticism above all for its potential to persuade young people to produce neutralizations to violence and therefore promote violence as a personal practice (Hearn, 1998). This criticism can be presented from the point of view of neutralization theory, for example (Sykes & Matza, 1957). Neutralizations are seen to work as mitigating circumstances or explanations as to why a deed that infringes collective norms is morally right. Our hermeneutic approach attempting to understand the young people's views and focus groups as a method can paradoxically turn into encouragement of violence by making various explanations sound plausible and acceptable (Honkatukia, Nyqvist, & Pösö, 2005). This dilemma also concerns broader level studies tracing personal or collective meanings of practices that transgress shared norms. The meanings attached to these transgressions often make them understandable and therefore excusable (Stanko, 2003, p. 13).

Violence spoken of is different from violence perpetrated or experienced. Although these data do not capture the entire range of violence, the image of violence constructed in the talk includes a powerful message: It is possible to talk about, test, argue for and against, and negotiate shared norms and morals in the reform school and to recognize shared experiences and viewpoints. On the basis of this study, an essential challenge is seen to lie in the identification of the multiple meanings assigned to violence in the lives of young people. Becoming more sensitized to the descriptions by the young, we learn more about the everyday nature of violence and about the cultural prevalence of moral views associated with it.

NOTES

1. Also, other concepts have been utilized to describe this division (e.g., violence as intentional and affective action). The former is linked with a view of violence as a means of wielding power by conscious practices of subjugation, and in the latter, violence is regarded as the expression of an involuntary emotional process or as a way of experiencing pleasure (Møller, 2000, p. 34; Sætre, 1997, p. 6).

2. Giving a voice is a methodologically challenging task that must be constantly reappraised (Plummer, 2001). We should not assume that the voice of the young people is waiting for us to hear it and that the researcher's task is to transmit and document the voice. Instead, researchers are involved in producing the voice—the existence of the study in itself guides the voice. Listening to the voice of the young in reform schools is also a methodological characteristic of the research: The reform school is a special physical, institutional, and interactive context from which to describe violence (situated knowledge; see Haraway, 1991). Our methodological choices are highly intertwined with various ethical aspects of our inquiry with which we have already dealt elsewhere (Honkatukia, Nyqvist, & Pösö, 2003) and that will not therefore be dealt with in this article.

3. These stories resemble the transition myths presented in a study based on interviews with British school children, that is, frightening stories among the young of what it is to go from primary to secondary school (Pugsley, Coffey, & Delamont, 1996, p. 61).

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