Gender-based school violence

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Abstract

School violence is a complex social phenomenon that differs in its appearance among students according to their different features, such as gender. According to the results of many surveys, boys are involved in violence more often than girls. According to the theories by P. Bourdieu and J. Butler, this differentiation is related to the formation of gender identity and the reproduction of gender discrimination. The present paper examines the ways in which students' use of violence contributes to forming their gender identity, and how it is articulated through students' statements and derogatory remarks. The sample of the study was 389 students. The questionnaire and the semi-structured interview were used as data collection tools. According to the survey, boys are to more likely manifest physical violence and, to a lesser extent, malicious rumors than girls. Students interpret the extent and type of violence they exhibit in biological / physical terms. Boys claim that it is their "nature" and that it is not "right" for a girl to exercise physical violence. Through statements and derogatory remarks made by boys and girls of this survey, it is shown how the various types of school violence illustrate how gender identity is formed and how gender discrimination is reproduced in a given social environment (i.e. in the Municipality of Ioannina, Epirus, Greece).

Key words: school violence, gender, gender discrimination

Introduction

The school operates as an institutional "microcosm" and is, to a degree, a reflection of the "social reality" surrounding it; one might say it takes on the "colour" of the neighborhood or city where it operates. Thus, when violence and crime are observed in the wider school community where the school is placed, violence is also likely to occur at school (Panousis, 2018: 23), however, mentions that the child the only violence that transfers is that s/he has experienced in the society (family included) to school.

Defining school violence is important in order to be studied and be tuckled upon (Thanos & Bouna, 2015). However, it is difficult to delineate it because school violence is a socio-cultural arbitrariness, since same behaviours are sometimes evaluated as "violence" and sometimes are not evaluated at all. Behaviours that were considered delinquent decades ago, by today's standards they are not; how we understand delinquent behaviour from time to time confirms that abusive behaviour is a social construct (Daskalakis, 1985; Giotopoulou-Maragopoulou, 1984; Thanos, 2012a: 19-20). Indeed, when school violence is discussed it is important that the terms "school violence" and "delinquency" are clarified, as they are conceptual categories that are "in a process of being constantly re-thought of and redefined" (*Herewith, any translation from the works written in Greek by Greek scholars is made by the authors of the present article, unless otherwise indicated*), since young people's behaviours that are defined as violent and delinquent change through time (Avdella, 2015).

Various (theoretical) approaches to the concept "school violence"

School violence and/or school delinquency is a "complex" and "complicated" social phenomenon, and is a scientific subject of research in Greece that is still being "studied" and

"constructed" (Artinopoulou, 2001: 85). According to Thanos (2002: 15), because of the different scientific fields that have studied school violence / delinquency, in the literature there are several terms that are used to describe the social phenomenon of violence, such as: "delinquency", "antisocial behavior", "deviant behaviour", "behavioural problems", "violence", "aggression", "school bullying" etc. Conceptual approaches to school violence and delinquency depend on the theoretical approach from which they are analyzed. In most studies, the definition of school violence and delinquency are analyzed using a causal approach. In sociology and criminology, theoretical approaches are divided into two groups: those of consensus and conflict (Thanos & Tsatsakis, 2015).

According to the **consensus approach**, delinquent behaviour is considered as the behaviour that violates school rules (Thanos, 2012a: 30-31). As school violence is defined as: "the imposition of the will of one or more students on another student (s) and the cause of harm or injury" (Artinopoulou, 2001). Almost all surveys use the consensus approach without mentioning it and making it clear (Thanos & Bouna, 2015: 377-386). In contrast with the consesus approach, the **conflict approach** defines school violence and delinquency as "an arbitrariness" and "according to the importance given to that particular behaviour in a given social and cultural environment" (Daskalakis, 1985: 19).

School violence is a complex phenomenon because it occurs in many forms (Thanos, 2012b) The forms have different frequency and intensity with each other and vary with students' **gender**. Moreover, many forms of violence are used in a "play mood", which, nevertheless, should not be underestimated (Kourakis, 2018). Many factors contribute to the manifestation of school violence, such as: family, school, mass media, gender, etc., and each factor has its own weight. The definition of school violence is a social construct, because its definition depends on the socio-cultural context and the "hierarchical" relationships between social subjects/students (Daskalakis, 1985; Georgoulas, 2015˙ Thanos, 2012b).

It should be noted that school violence is approached by many disciplines and the mainstream approach depends on the position the discipline has in the hierarchy of disciplines (Panagiotopoulos, 2012: 176). The research on violence and delinquency as a whole is not clear, there are many ways of analyzing it and sometimes the conclusions of the research are unclear, and are not actually reflected in reality (Panagiotopoulos, 2018: 25). Indeed, the theoretical approach and methodology used in the research on school violence influences the results themselves (Georgoulas, 2015).

In recent years, school violence has started being examined in relation to socio-cultural characteristics, and special emphasis has been given to the student's gender and to the gendered dimension of school violence as well as to delinquency in general (Kourakis 2006). The majority of studies on school violence indicate both that boys are more frequently involved in violence cases than girls and that boys are different from girls in the form of violence they display. Boys tend to show physical violence to a higher extent, while girls exhibit social and verbal abuse (Giotopoulou - Maragopoulou, 1991; Thanopoulou, Fronimou & Tsilimigaki, 1997).

A historical overview of the concept: "Gender"
Second-wave Feminism

The concept of gender was primarily dealt with by feminists, especially from the "second" wave of feminism onwards, which broke out at the same time as other social movements did, such as the Civil Rights movement for Blacks in the USA in the 1960s etc. With the emergence of the "second" feminist wave, and the development of Women's Studies, gender emerged as a central term for the analysis of and research on social sciences, and, more specifically, the study of the factors, "mechanisms" that form, "construct" women and men, and how the biological characteristics of sex are identified with the individual's gender identity (Bakalaki, 1997: 19).

At that time, Simone de Beauvoir's (1979: 293) quote: *"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman"* played an important role, implying that the characteristics of "masculinity" and "femininity" that correspond to the biological categories of "man" and "woman" are cultural constructs. Gender relations are not given but are changed "historically, from the meanings that people give to the world around them and on the basis of which they organize their action" (Avdela, 2006: 94)

The importance of this distinction between the biological sex and the social gender is essential and rejects the assumption that cultural norms of manhood and femininity are also normal, that is, they are biologically determined. It also seems that the acceptance of this distinction (biological and social) serves to adopt the assumption that gender differences are socially constructed and, therefore, can change. "… the [biological] factors ... are not in themselves sufficient to interpret the wide variety of gender roles between individuals ... ... but social factors will be those to determine how or if such predispositions will have an impact" (Turner, 1998:32).

Third-wave Feminism and Gender Identity

The "third" wave of feminism, spanning from the late 1980s to the late 20th century, is the entry of feminist thought into its "porstructuralist and deconstructive moment" (Athanasiou, 2006: 85). Feminists of that period distanced themselves from the other two waves of feminism and their limitations, without undermining their contribution, by reflecting theoretically and taking a critical apporach (Karakoulaki, 2013). The category "woman" became the subject of discussion and debate in the 1980s, and started being considered as a socially and culturally constructed concept, historically defined through power relations. Gender identity was not regarded as something fixed and unchanging or as something that belongs to the physical order of things; it is rather considered as something "fluid" and "contingent" (Campbell, 2000: 532; Athanasiou, 2006).

Gender-based violence: Definition(s) and a historical overview

Gender-based violence is a blatant violation of human rights with various serious implications for the wider life of a community and a wide range of impact on the physical, sexual, reproductive and mental lives of all parties involved, whether it be men or women (Department of Health, 2005: 6). Gender-based violence is an affecting, general term that refers to any discrimination or harmful behavior directed against both women and men, due to their gender or sexual orientation, as well as against women and girls due to their inferior position in society. Violence agents can be members of the family or community as well as individuals acting "on behalf of" cultural, religious or state institutions. According to Sklavou (2008: 43), gender-based violence is defined as the violence perpetrated on women by their partner and can be called **covert domestic abuse**.

Until the 1970s, the sciences involved in gender-based violence were only trying to explain "male" violence, and women were left out of the "sphere" of their interest (Apospori, 2006: 37). Since the 1970s, women's movements have denounced violence against women and fought so that all forms of violence against women - such as: abuse by their spouse/partner (sexual, physical, psychological, financial, verbal), trafficking in women for the purpose of sexual/economic exploitation, rape and sexual harassment in the workplace - would be recognized (Maruani, 2006: 196). Nevertheless, in recent years, there has also been an increase in female crime, which can be attributed to the fact that the woman is now moving into "public" life and is claiming rights and possibly "practices" that were once considered "male" (Milioni, 2006: 469).

The concept of gender-based violence has been described as the most "democratic of all crimes"; meaning that it can happen to any woman/man from any man/woman, anywhere (Department of Health, 2005). Gender-based violence can be analyzed at two levels: one is the violence that men exercise against women, and the other one is female crime.

Approaches to gender-based violence usually adopt the causal approach without, however, pointing it out (Thanos, 2017b). Gender is perceived as a causal factor in the manifestation or non-manifestation of violence by students. This approach does not take into account the hierarchical relations between the sexes where men/boys are dominant and women/girls are dominated (Thanos & Bouna, 2015 & 2016; Maragoudaki, 1995; Panagiotopoulos, 2012: 173, Sianou, 2006a & 2006b). The causal approach neither underlines nor takes into account "the contribution of the expression and performance of violent behavior to forming, reinforcing and reproducing gender discrimination" (Thanos & Bouna, 2016).

According to Welzer-Lang, (1992), male domination is evident nowadays, with society assigning men "noble" functions and women "inferior" duties and functions. Violence starts from domestic "male" violence, rape, labor violence and dominant and/or domineering violence, due to the retention of powers that men have conferred upon themselves at the expense of women.

Gender-based school violence

In recent years, along with the growth and development of gender studies within the context of reproductive approaches, there has also been a tendency to approach gender-based school violence. Boys do not exhibit violence to a greater extent than girls just because they are boys (the cause) but, by performing violence, they form and reproduce their gender identity (Thanos & Bouna, 2015). On the one hand, there are forms of violence, such as social violence, which girls express more frequently than boys, a fact that indicates that the frequency of violence does not only concern boys but also girls. On the other hand, although physical violence is practised almost exclusively by boys - according to research results in Artinopoulou, Babalis & Nikolopoulos, 2016, there are, however, some forms of physical violence such as "wooling off", "scratches with nails" practised almost exclusively by girls (Kapari, 2013).

Various forms of violence, like all social practices of social subjects, are *pereformative acts of gender* (Butler, 1993), thus contributing to forming and reinforcing gender identity and reproducing gender discrimination. In the case of school violence, the performance and reproduction of social characteristics, such as students' gender, are effected, on the one hand, with the manifestation of different forms of violence and, on the other hand, with the frequency and intensity of these forms (Thanos & Bouna, 2016).

By manifesting different forms of violence of different frequency and intensity, male and female students perform gender roles, thereby enhancing their gender identity and reproducing gender discrimination. Consequently, when it is claimed that boys exhibit primarily physical violence, it is shown that forms of physical violence perpetrated by girls are not taken into consideration. Therefore, in order to study how gender violence contributes to forming and reproducing gender identity, it is necessary for all the individual forms of violence to be studied.

Research Methodology

The sample of the research is 200 students (100 male students & 100 female students) of the 5th and 6th Grades of thirteen elementary schools in the Municipality of Ioannina and 189 students (100 male students & 89 female students) of the 1st Grade of eleven Junior High Schools in the Municipality Ioannina. The research was conducted in advanced classes, because it was thought that children from 11 to 13 years of age have largely formed their character and personality. In addition, this age covers a period during which children's socialization is in progress, and, thus, children have understood what kind of behavior adults expect from them to exhibit in accordance with their gender (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2008). One additional reason was that, according to most surveys, school violence is on the

rise at these ages (Artinopoulou, Babalis & Nikolopoulos, 2016). Random sampling was used to collect the questionnaires (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2008). The tools used to collect the survey data are the questionnaire and the focus groups. Initially, there were four in number, two focus groups in two primary schools and two focus groups in two high schools, (36 students in total) in order to record detailed forms of school violence by the same students. The questionnaire was constructed based on the forms of school violence that emerged from the focus groups.

Discussion of the Results – Interpretation

Violence among peers at school and how it is related to gender identity formation as well as how it reproduces gender discrimination in the school environment is a subject that has been little studied in Greece, and, if so, gender has been examined as a factor/a variable within the context of consensual / causal approaches (Thanos, 2017a, 2017b; Pechtelidis, 2010).

Moreover, what is very significant in the present research is that the social subjects - i.e. (male and female) students themselves (of the Elementary and Junior High Schools of Ioannina) - mentioned in detail all the forms of violence they encountered, and they themselves classified them in the following types, as discussed below.

Types of gender-based school violence
Verbal violonce/abuse

In the general category of verbal abuse, students reported 66 forms that could be classified in the following three major categories:

(1) *Vituperation / Teasing* which is the largest category and relates to:
(a) External appearance (e.g. "*you are bespectaled*", "*you are fat*");
(b) Performance (e.g. "*you are useless*", "*you are a geek*");
(c) Mental ability (e.g. "*you are a thick-headed*", "*you are stupid*");
(d) Sexuality or sexual orientation (e.g. "*you're crying like a girl*", "*you are gay*");
(e) Behavior (e.g. "*you are a jerk*", "*you are a moron*"); and
(f) Other forms, such as (eg, "*call his/her mother names*", "*you are an asshole*"); and
(2) *Threats* which can be:
(a) Verbal (e.g. "*I will knock down your house*", "*I'll bring you my friends*");
(b) Physical (e.g. "*I'll put you in the bucket*", "*you'll die*"); and
(c) Psychological (e.g. "*I know where you live*", "*we'll talk tomorrow*"); and
(3)*Verbal and non-verbal ironies*. Verbal ironies can be expression like: "*no tears, no tights*", "*spoilspor*t", whereas non-verbal ironies are usually facial or bodily gestures, such as: face souring or the student points to his/her sexual organs with his/her hands.

Physical violence

In physical violence, students reported 55 forms that could be categorized as:
Blows: (i) involving an object (eg, "stone throwing", "ball striking"); (ii) with the rest of the body (e.g. "kicking", "(kicking at) the sexual organs"); (iii) manual blows (e.g. "punches", "wooling off"; and / or (iv) other (e.g. "burning", "haircut"); and
Pushing – squeezing that is related to pushing (e.g. "on the stairs", "on the back");
Squeezing, for example, "on the wall", "behind the school".

Social violence/abuse

In social violence/abuse, students reported 17 forms that can be classified as:
(a) Slander - spreading rumors, such as: "lying about you", "changing your story";
(b) Exclusion, for instance, in "play and activities", "put words in another child's mouth"); and

(c) Belittling, such as in derogatory verbal expressions like: "*you are carrying sickness*", "*you are not a man*".

Sexual violence or assault

In the general category of sexual violence or assault, students reported 5 forms of harassment, such as: "*grope*", or "*the sausages in buttocks*" [literally translated from Greek].

Electronic or online violence

Finally, students recorded 5 forms of online violence or violence through mobile phones, such as articulated in the following statements: "*when you're in the toilet, they shoot videos and upload it to Facebook*", "*[they] upload photos to Instagram without your consent*".

Types of gender-based school violence – Further discussed

In the following paragraphs, the aforemention types will be discussed in more detail, and it will be shown: (1) how gender identities and gender discrimination are expressed verbally and perfomed actively at school; and (2) how helpful are Bourieu's theories of the male dominance (2007) and Butler's theories of sexuality (1991) to interpret the results of the present research. On the one hand, Bourdieu's concept of male domination and the way it is imposed on subjects is a result of symbolic violence, which is practised through the purely "symbolic ways" of communication, whereas, on the other hand, Butler's concept of gender performance is based on the "regulatory" power of repetition through everyday practice, of being forced to belong to one of the two social genders. It will also be shown how male domination is communicated through students' statements and responses and how gender performance (i.e. to be a "boy/man" or a "girl"/"woman"), based the "regulatory" power of repetition through everyday practice, forces the students of the present research to to be a "boy/man" or a "girl"/"woman".

Verbal violence/abuse

Verbal violence/abuse as a whole is *"little frequent"* form of violence/abuse. In the individual types of verbal violence/abuse there can be found those that are *"frequent enough"* or *"very frequent"* ones. These forms concern appearance (*'fat', 'ugly'*, etc.), mental ability, school performance (*'stupid', 'retarded'*, etc.), sexuality (*'bitch / hooker'*), maternal insult (*'fuck your mom'*) and behavior (*'nerd/pussy', 'poncy'*, etc.).

There is a **statistically significant difference** in students's gender. On one hand, **girls** assess as *"frequent enough"* or *"very frequent"* forms of verbal violence/abuse those forms that are related to external appearance (*"ugly", "short"*, etc.), performance (*"dork"*), sexuality (*"tomboy"*), behavior (*"poncy"*), ironies ("souring face"), physical threats *("I will take your wool off")* and psychological threats (*"I will say it to your brother", "I'll tell you all your secrets"*, etc.). On the contrary, **boys** *"frequent enough"* or *"very frequent"* forms of verbal violence/abuse those forms that are related to threats (*"I'll knock down your home"*) and mental capacity ("*thick-headed*").

All students in the sample rate verbal violence/abuse as *"serious enough"* form of violence. This assessment made by students is because this verbal violence includes: offensive comments and behaviors and racist comments about origin, sexual orientation and other inequalities, which can be quite painful. Male and female students of the sample consider as *"very serious"* forms of verbal violence/abuse those that refer to: their sexual orientation and, in general, to sexuality, with expressions such as:*"bitch / hooker", "asshole", "gay", "hands-on-genitalia"* or gestures, when the student points to his/her sexual organs with his/her hands, etc., various inequalities including school performance, as in insults like: *"junk", "retarded"*, etc. and to the family members with sexual characteristics, such as: *"fuck your mom", "bastard"*, etc.

In order to be understood why verbal violence/abuse referring to family members, and,

more specifically, to mother (as in *"fuck your mom"*) is *"very serious"* for **boys**, it should be taken into consideration that "mother" stands for moral value for them, or she is a symbol of family honor and, consequently, of manhood, since manhood is defined in terms of ensuring the integrity of the 'female members' of the family (Avdella, 2002). Thus, the woman's honor is related to the reputation, prestige and status of the male member of the family who is supposed to defend.

Another interesting point that the present research has revealed is that **girls** have a higher average score than boys in their responses to verbal violence/abuse, a fact that indicates that they assess verbal violence/abuse more seriously than boys. This may be due to girls' greater sensitivity to issues of violence compared to boys who seem to be more tolerant.

Overall, however, verbal abuse is seen to be a non-gendered (or neuter) form of violence, that is, it is attributed to both genders. Only two forms of verbal violence/abuse are reported to be practised by **girls**: the irony of "*souring face*" and the threat "*I'll take your wool off*". This is due to the fact that violence is usually considered as a "male affair" because of boys/men's muscular strength, whereas, although girls/women show greater moderation and restraint in terms of aggression, are very picky on the appearace in general and, on 'hair', 'grooming' and 'nails' in particular.

Physical violence

In the present survey, physical violence as a whole is *"little"* frequent phenomenon, contrary to the results of other surveys such as: Newman, Holden & Delville, 2005; Kapari, 2013; Fakiola, 1994. This contradiction, however, is superficiaĺ because, as it is evidenced from more specific forms of physical violence, some are evaluated as *"frequent enough"* and involve blows, such as: *"kicks"*, *"scratches with nails"*, *"slaps/smacks"*, etc.

Both **male and female students** of the sample assess physical violence as a *"very serious"* form of violence. This assessment applies to almost all forms of physical violence. Exceptions are forms of physical violence that either are not very dangerous (e.g. *"pinching"*, *"scratches with nails"*, etc.) or are not so common (e.g. *"shoulder pull"* [literally translated from Greek], *"grips"*, etc.). How critical physical violence in terms of severity between girls and boys, there is a **statistically significant difference** not only in the forms of physical violence related to sexuality, as articulated in the expressions: *"boob"*, *"in the ass"*, etc. but also in forms that are considered "feminine", such as: *"scratches with nails"*, *"pinches"*, etc. **Girls** claim that physical violence as a form of violence that is "exclusively" practised by boys is the most serious. Here, it becomes crystal clear how Bourdieu's gender-dominated hierarchy (Bourdieu, 2007) is expressed and articulated verbally and through everyday practices in the school environment. At this point, it should also be noted that **the majority of the students** in the sample believe that all forms of physical violence are practised by boys except for *"wooling off or wagging"* and *"scratches with nails"* which are attributed to girls. Hair and nails hair are, on the one hand, are toiletries for girls/women and, on the other hand, girls/women "usually" have long hair and nails. Again, these articulated statements reveal: (1) how children's formation of gender identity is manifested verbally and in symbolic way, according to Bourdieu (2007); (2) how their actual performative acts Buttler, 1991) point to a socially constructed gender; and (3) how gender roles are inscribed in social subjects consciously or unconsciously and (re-)presented in their everyday practices (Panagiotopoulos, 2007).

Social violence/abuse

Social violence/abuse appears to be *"little frequent"*. Overall, individual forms of social violence, such exclusion and spreading rumors are the *"most frequent"* forms of violence. There are differences between boys and girls, which are related to the performance and reproduction of gender discrimination. There is a **statistically significant difference** in some forms of social abuse, - which concern slander, such as *"that you copied/ cheated"*, *"that you love a c*hild/boy" and other derogatory comments related to exclusion, such as "you shop

from Chinese"("You shop from Chinese!" is considered a derogatory comment depending on the interlocutor's pitch of the voice; it is considered a derogatory comment because it signifies that the individual that shops "cheap" cloths, shoes etc from Chinese shops does not have enough money to buy "expensive" brand names, thus pushing the individual that is said to to (social) exlusion) - which are more often articulated and used by **girls**.

All forms of social violence appear to be *"very serious"*, except for the aforementioned two forms related to slander and exclusion which are considered as *"serious enough"*.The forms of (social) exclusion are assessed by the **girls** as the most serious. However, there are some forms that are "gendered" and used more often by **boys**. Expressions such as: *"you're gay"*, *"you are sleeping with a diaper"* express a boy's femininity, something that deviates from hegemonic physical patterns and understanding of 'masculinity'. Thus, whoever does not conform to these patterns is stigmatized (Butler, 2009). Yet, the present research have also shown that most forms of social violence can be "non-gendered" (or "neuter"), because they are equally used by **both boys and girls**.

Sexual violence/abuse or harassment

Sexual violence/abuse or harassment appears as *"little frequent"*. According to the students of the research, there were few (five) forms of sexual violence at school, which can be attributed to the small extent to which sexual violence has so far taken place in schools. The issue of sexual violence is a topic under discussion, because the boundaries of frequency and form of this type of violence cannot easily distinguished from those of physical violence, where wounds are more apparent. These blurring boundaries make the recognition of sexual violence more difficult, and this difficulty is intesified because the interpretation of the nature of sexual violence depends on each individual's subjectivity (Barnett, Manly, & Cicchetti, 1993).

There is **a statistically significant difference** between **the girls and the boys** in the sample of the present survey in relation to the frequency of some form of sexual violence. The **girls** refer to the expression *"the saussages in the buttocks"* that boys use as *"frequent enough"*, thus indicating that they consider it at least as sexual harassment, whereas they consider *"more serious"* forms of sexual violence those forms that are associated with the body, such as: *"grope"*, "*breast/boob grip"* etc.

What is interesting in the present survey is **all students** claimed that all forms of sexual violence, except for that of *"the saussages in the buttocks"*, are gendered forms of violence that **boys** *"more often"* use. Only one form of sexual violence that of "*the sausages in the buttocks"* seems to be **non-gendered (or neuter)**, because it is used by **boys** and **girls** in the same frequency.

Electronic violence

As one of the forms of school violence, electroni violence appears to be *"little frequent"*, according to the students' opinions of the sample. **There is no statistically significant difference in the frequency of forms** with regard to the students' gender, but it is observed that **boys** have higher mean frequencies than **girls**. As far as the importance of the electronic violence, all five forms of violence appear to be *"very serious"* related to the students' gender, and again there are no differentiations among them. Nevertheless, when the inside on the scale of *"very serious"* is examined more carefully, it is shown that **the boys** consider electronic violence more serious than **the girls**. On the one hand, in their leisure time the boys are involved in New Technologies, such as the play station and the tablet. If it is considered that the play station has games, mainly football, cars and war games, it seems to be no accident that **boys** seem to be more familiar with the technology (Thanos & Bouna, 2016: 101). On the other hand, **girls** are slowly discovering new ways to infiltrate "male-dominated" practices, and in this particular case of electronic violence, the only form that most girls are exposed to is social media, and, especially, to Instagram, where they can express themselves in words and images that are designed for boys.

Gender-based School violence as seen and expressed by the students – An Interpretation

School violence appears as a predominantly "male" privilege, and becomes apparent from the verbal responses given by the boys and the girls of the sample, as shown in their statements and their (socially constructed) beliefs in the man's biology.

"Boys use violence because in this way they solve their problems" claimed 32 **girls** in the 2nd Grade of Junior High School (in Ioannina, Epirus, Greece);

"To be born a man" 15 **boys** in the 6th Gradey of Elementary School attributed violence to the man's biology;

"Boys are tougher by nature" insist 2 **girls** in the 5th Grade of Primary School, thus attributing boys' school violence to their nature;

"Boys fight; they are stronger and competent", 25 **girls** in 1st Grade of Junior High School assert, thus emphasing the man's physical strength and courage;

It has come to our minds that boys can solve their problems only by force. It has come to our minds because we see them doing this, and so we are used to it", 52 **boys** in 1st Grade of Junior High School discuss about "male" habits; and

"... men have the upper hand in many houses, and so their child (boy) will learn to have the upper hand and can use violence", 15 **boys** in 1st Grade of Junior High School claim, thus revealing how social patterns of male identity are reproduced in the family.

How gender identity (i.e. the man's biological and physical strength ['masculinity'] versus the woman's softness" ['femininity']) is socially constructed and how gender discrimination is expressed verbally and through everyday practices are only fully fledged in the students' statements that follow.

"Boys are generally by their nature proud and do not tolerate much", say 43 **girls** in the 5th Grade of Primary school, thus confirming that these practices are taken for granted, whereas the historicity of their appearance, imposition, consolidation and reproduction has meticulously been silenced, thus legitimizing male domination as eternal and natural (Bourdieu, 2007).

"Girls have learned through customs to be more restrained, and we have become used to them (behaving like that)", claim 41 **boys** in 6th Grade of Primary School, thus illustrating how children's perceptions have already been formed by a regime of male domination, and are the result of their experiences in society;

"You are a girl, mom tells us," *"don't act like a tomboy"*, articulate 19 **girls** in the 5th Grade of Primary School; thus showing how a male-dominated society is inscribe in girls' phyche through everyday family practices.

"Boys don't cry", claim 22 **boys** in the 5th Grade of Primary School, thus revealing how articulated statements within the family context form "male" or "female" identity and delineate the boundaries of "appropiate" and "acceptable" social gender behaviors (Butler, 1991).

What is shown in the present research is that it is easier for girls to adopt "male" practices than boys to adopt "girlish" ones, because the girl can be identified with the "dominant" male gender (Bourdieu, 2007). A good number of girls/ women are very likely to adopt behaviors of military type, when there are conditions that allow this to happen, as expressed in the following statements:

"Girls beat boys because they know the latter can withstand it because they are men; boys don't beat girls because we know we can't stand it", say 13 **girls** in the 1st Grade of Junior High School; and

"Some girls beat us for no reason", claim 28 **boys** in the 5th Grade of Elementary School.

There are "reasons" for boys or girls' sexuality that reinforce boys' privileges and dominance over other boys and girls in order to entrench their masculine identity. The tough guys or hotshots exhibit and perform a pronounced heterosexual masculinity not only against

school norms but also against their passive, obedient, and compliant classmates (Pechtelidis, 2012) because they do not want to be called names, as in: "*Eh! We may be called 'wuss' and such names [if we don't perform like that] ...*", a statement made by 37 **boys** in the 2nd Grade of Junior High School.

How sharp gender discrimination, especially against sexual orientation, becomes is also illustrated when male students characterize other students as *"sisters"* and *"wusses"*, thus confirming their masculinity within the school context, which they believe is fulfilled through their somatization: *"'Sisters' do not fight back and run to the teacher ..."*, claim 3 **boys** in the 1st Grade of Junior High School. Apart from this type of gender discrimination, boys/men see sexual dominance as a means of imposition on girls/women, who must be subjugated and dominated by boys/men (Politis, 2006). They try to express their heterosexuality in various ways by either articulating the expression or by touching "*the sausages in buttocks and boobs*" in order to protect themselves from potential "castration", according to Bourdieu (2007), whereas the girl/woman, even in her own sexuality, adopts the male gaze (Athanasiadis, 2007: 21). Thus, masculinity is a form of performative act (Butler, 1991) that is realized through everyday practices in the school environment and in society.

Limitation of the study

Despite the limitation of the research that lies in the non-representativeness of the sample, and, that the sample of pupils comes from urban schools in the Municipality of Ioannina (Epirus, Greec), the research highlights how students' use of violence is articulated through students' statements and derogatory remarks and is exhibited through their own behaviors. These statements, remarks and behaviors illustrate, first, various types of school violence, and, second, how gender identity is formed and gender discrimination is reproduced in urban schools in the Municipality of Ioannina.

Even though the present study is limited in scope and in geographical area, it "unlocks a door" and shows for the first time how students of urban schools in a specific area of Greece practise and/or experience gendered-based school violence. The hope is this study to become a springboard for similar studies not only around Greece but around globe, so that there can be comparative studies on school violence and, more specically, on gender-based school violence.

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