Jokela connection

Shattering social ties and the risk of violent virtual identities

Atte Oksanen analyses two Finnish cases of performatve violence, Myymanni bomb detonation (2002) and Jokela highschool shooting (2007) from the perspectives of social psychology and cultural studies.

Majority of people in society are weak-minded and ignorant retards, masses that are like programmed robots and accept voluntarily slavery. But not me! I am self-aware and realize what is going on in society! I have a free mind! I am actually godlike. (From the Natural Selector's Manifesto)

Jokela highschool shooting was an extreme example of the effects of the economic recession of the 1990s. Rather, Finland was pushed in a direction in which global competition was the intrinsic value (Siltala 2007).

Children especially were among the losers in the new situation, as social benefits meant for children and families were cut (Bardy et al. 2001). New forms of work-organization have indeed caused more work pressure, tighter schedules, and more competition in workplaces that probably has its consequences in home-life (Blom 2001; Kinnunen & Mauno 2002; Kinnunen et al. 2001; Kivimäki 2001; Sallinen et al. 2003; Siltala 2007). In addition to this, families have to move more than before as a result of the short-term employment contracts imposed upon them, which might mean that children have fewer opportunities to establish long-term friendships. Local networks are also breaking up. Small schools are shut down and bigger schools are concentrated in the growth areas (Bardy et al. 2001: 69–79).

The Nordic project Ineqaul Childhood: A Comparative Study of Children’s Life-Chances and Well-being in the Nordic Welfare States concentrated on the effects of the 1990s recession in Finland. The data comprised 1,173 children aged 8–13 in Tampere (Finland, n=473), Trondheim (Norway, n=339) and Uppsala (Sweden, n=361). Six different kinds of questionnaire for children and one questionnaire for the teachers were used to gather the data. The questionnaires relate to children’s well-being, their social worlds, daily activities and relationship with their parents.

Although the findings of the Ineqaul Childhood project should not be generalized, since it is not a representative sample of children in Finland, Sweden and Norway, they hint that Finnish children might have more psychological and social problems than those in Norway and Sweden. Depressive mood is more common among Finnish children (Oksanen & Näre 2006, 30–35). The results are based on the Children’s Depression Inventory, one of the most widely-used self-report measures for the diagnosis of children’s depression. Other Finnish studies also suggest that a depressive mood among children and youth is relatively common (Kaltiala-Heino et al. 2001, 159–160; see also Kaltiala-Heino et al. 1999).

Those children who tell that they don’t play at all have more social problems than their peers who tell that they are still playing.

Finnish children cease to play earlier than their Nordic counterparts, and hence might have a shorter childhood. In the Finnish data from the Ineqaul Childhood project, those children who say that they don’t play at all have more social problems than their peers who say that they are still playing (Oksanen 2004). Some problems are especially highlighted in the Finnish data. For example, body dissatisfaction is really common in Finland and the data suggests that bullying and aggression is a problem (Oksanen 2005, 2006a). The bullies are usually boys, but their victims are both boys and girls (see tables 1 and 2).

One of the crucial findings of the Ineqaul Childhood project is that in the Finnish data children have less adult contacts and their relationships with their parents and other adults are weaker than in the Norwegian and Swedish data (Oksanen 2006a). This is important, since a good relationship between parents correlates particular-ly with welfare. The data suggests that meaningful and trusting relationships with adults and parents are crucial for establishing a balanced identity. Age is an especially important factor in this. The older the children in the Finnish data, the more criticism they express of their parents. They also report that they are not talking to their parents about their joys and sorrows. Age does not have a similar effect in the Norwegian and Swedish data of the Ineqaul Childhood project.

Violence and the defensive ego

Comparative studies conducted in the 1970s suggested that social bonds were weaker in Finland than in other Nordic countries (Allardt 1976). This aspect of Finnish society is often dismissed by the fact that Finnish people communicate increasingly on the Internet and are active users of mobile phones. This issue is complicated, since social relations can function socio-psychologically in various ways and unconscious aspects of social involvement are difficult to pin down. Communication per se does not mean emotional involvement. I argue that on-line communication is a less affective and less cerebral way of communication than normal face-to-face interaction in which unconscious body language also creates communi-cation with the other person.

Various socio-psychological and psychoanalytic theories relate violence to the failure of the interaction. Roy F. Baumreiter (1997) relates violence to a favourable but unstable view of
Performativitet i ungdomskulturen

Very limited and he was bullied in the according to the final police report teachers do not try to integrate pupils also be that since loneliness is not long as the child comes home from blame himself for his own passivity Gerdt was probably bullied at school as a parent. He even recounts that in industrial music one's own destructiveness. The defensive ego and violence directed to others is more often related to masculinity than to femininity.

Both the Myyrmanni and Jokela cases are dramatic examples of the lack of social intervention. According to his father, Armas Gerdt (2004), Petri Gerdt had few friends in school and hardly had any friends. The father blames himself for his own passivity as a parent. He even recounts that in Finland everything is going well as long as the child comes home from the school with good grades. It might also be that since loneliness is not seen as a cultural problem in Finland, teachers do not try to integrate pupils who are left alone.

According to the final police report of the Jokela case, Petka-Eric Auvinen was a shy and silent guy who was interested in radical and controversial ideologies. His social networks were very limited and he was bullied in the school. Auvinen was suffering from minor panic attacks and fear of public appearances. He had been planning the attack since March 2007 (Kekusrikosopolvi 2008).

The avatar of Petri Gerdt/RC on the Ketokemia forum. Both Gerdt and Auvinen found a channel on the Internet to socialize with people who were thinking in the same way. While Petri's father describes his son as kind and polite in everyday life, his net role was far more aggressive. Under the name RC, Gerdt talks about slaughtering people. The signature of this self-assured bomb expert RC is a quotation from the song by Tupac Shakur "Hail Mary": "I ain't a killer but don't push me / Revenge is like the sweetest joy next to getting pussy.”

Enacting a violent identity

The school shootings in the United States have fuelled the discussion on youth in crisis since the 1980s (Acland 1995). The Safe School Initiative from 2000 reports 37 high school shootings, involving 41 attackers since 1974. All attackers had a single motive. The motive to kill is a destructive act in itself and strongly suggests the breakdown of the boundary between reality and fiction. The Jokela case on the other hand is even more disturbing, since the killer seems to have absorbed all the information from the previous school shootings and the media panics they caused. There are countless references to various cultural products, but it seems like the media attention would be directed: Don't blame the movies I see, the music I hear, the games I play or the books I read. No, they had nothing to do with this.

More than half the shooters had revenge as motive

In 2007, the Pekka-Eric Auvinen sent a “Multimedia manifesto” containing video, writings and photos to NBC by mail before the fatal shooting on April 16th 2007, in which he likens himself to “ Martinez like Eric and Dylan” The Columbine killers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold.

The Jokela case is a perfect example of performative violence (Närä 2008). Pekka-Eric Auvinen had copied the style of posture from Cho, posing with the gun, for example. Immediately after the shooting he got not only a huge amount of publicity but also a lot of appreciation. Various YouTube videos admired his acts. A month after Jokela, on December 6, 2007, a 19-year-old killed eight people in a shopping mall in Omaha, Nebraska. He left a suicide note saying that he was going to be famous. This case suggests that our culture, which worships celebrity, is itself highly problematic.

The Myyrmanni accident remains a mystery. Petri Gerdt's father assumes that his son did not purposely detonate the bomb. However, carrying a loaded gun is a destructive act in itself and strongly suggests the breakdown of the boundary between reality and fiction. The Jokela case on the other hand is even more disturbing, since the killer seems to have absorbed all the information from the previous school shootings and the media panics they caused. There are countless references to various cultural products, but it seems like the media attention would be directed: Don’t blame the movies I see, the music I hear, the games I play or the books I read. No, they had nothing to do with this.

More than half the shooters had revenge as motive

The sociologist Frank Furedi (2004) claims that current culture is saturated with the discourse of psychological problems. We live in a therapy culture where depression and other psychological problems have become part of everyday life. The main problem is, however, that psychological talk remains only talk. Furedi argues that psychological discourse is masking real sociocultural and political problems. The problems are individualized and often fixed by medical solutions. We live in a therapy culture where celebrity is an obsession but this does not mean that we have too much of it. We do not lack communication. On the contrary, we have too much of it. We lack creation. We lack resistance to the present. (Deleuze & Guattari 1996, 108).

In the current context, this criticism of media culture where celebrity culture where celebrity is an obsession does not seem too far-fetched.

In the end there is no one way of explaining the Jokela and Myyrmanni cases. Both relate to the virtual identities that can turn out to be lethal wherever other face-to-face social relationships are complex or absent. Another cultural component is Finnish masculinity, which is often enacted in violent school shooters. The videos of Auvinen could also be interpreted as a violent masculine drama. Unfortunately the media often glorifies and highlights these kinds of dramatic representation.

Social issues such as bullying in schools and depression among youth are also key factors in trying to understand these cases. Studies related to social capital often underline that these problems can be overcome by social interaction (Elliott 2008). Unfortunately the Myyrmanni case was an example of social repression in Finland. Building up social bonds and trust is not possible if the community takes these cases as individual and does not recognise the social problems associated with them.
Figure 1: Depressive mood in Finland, Norway and Children among 9–12-year old children (%)

The results are based on a version of CDI with 26 questions and cut-off score 13.

Table 1: Bullying in Finland, Norway and Children among 9–12-year old children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Finland</th>
<th>Norway</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t bully others</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullies</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t bully others</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullies</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The data is based on a sample of 2,552 children (Finland), 3,420 children (Norway) and 1,380 children (Sweden).

Table 2: Victims of bullying in Finland, Norway and Children among 9–12-year old children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Finland</th>
<th>Norway</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other children do not bully</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied by other children</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other children do not bully</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied by other children</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The data is based on a sample of 2,552 children (Finland), 3,420 children (Norway) and 1,380 children (Sweden).

References:


Blom, Raimo (2001): Youth, Subjectivity, 2006) he analyses Haavautuva minuus (Wound- ture. In the doctoral dissertation Oksanen has studied social and Social Psychology, University of Tampere, Finland.


