

*Violent masculinities and
school shootings in Finland
- an analysis of the Finnish media discourse-*

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Research on Previous Shootings

- ▶ US based (Consalvo 2003; Elliot et. al. 1998; Garbarino 1998; Klein 2006; Newman et. al. 2004)
 - Few connect violence with issues of gender; most US shootings committed by white men students in suburban middle-class neighborhoods (one woman as perpetrator - Louisiana Technical College, February 2008).
 - non-hegemonic masculinities of boys, atypical clothing, ‘geeks’ with good grades - targets of homophobic peer ridicule (Klein 2006c: 46-7; Kimmel and Mahler 2003: 1447-8).
 - Through shootings, the perpetrators attempted to resist the pressures they were subjected to - actually reproduced the hypermasculinity.
- ▶ Finland - new field of inquiry (Hoikkala and Suurpää 2007)

Theoretical background (I)

A) Violent reproduction of gender

- ▶ Shepherd (2007; 2008) 3feminist approaches to violence:
 - violence against women
 - gender violence
 - violent reproduction of gender

B) 'Family violence' in Finland

- 'family violence discourse'- emphasized the relationship between perpetrator and victim as the most important cause of domestic violence (Kantola 2006; Nyqvist 2008; Ronkainen and Näre 2008)
- 'partnership violence' (lähisuhdeväkivalta)

Theoretical background (II)

▶ C) Masculinities and violence

- Idealized masculinities (Connell 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005)
- Media ‘provides men with a set of performances of maleness through objectifying women, achieving sexual success and finding pleasure in violence, gadgets and fashion which negotiate traditional maleness’s loss of status.’ (Matheson 2005: 64)
- ‘Bad masculinity is, to some extent, feminized by being associated with the irrational; but it is not sufficiently feminized to take it out of the continuum of masculinity.’ (Hutchings, 2008: 33)

Methods and data

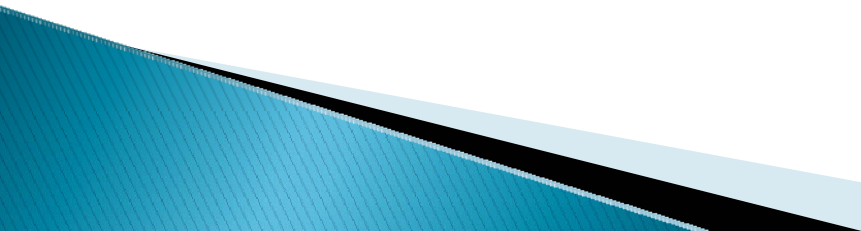
- ▶ Helsingin Sanomat (**HS**) (Finnish-language newspaper in Finland)
- ▶ Hufvudstadsbladet (**Hbl**) (Swedish-language newspaper in Finland)
 - 67 articles (violent shooting, school shooting, stricter gun laws, army, communal sense - or need for a tightly-knit community).
 - to provide an analysis of the discourse on violence in Finland, particularly the one around the school shootings.
 - limited the focus of analysis to articles published November 2007 and November 2008
- ▶ Findings: the discourse of **HS** and **Hbl** was regulated and dominated by the Finish male figure whose rational use of violence defended and preserved the state.

From gender-blindness to gendered accounts in Finnish media

- ▶ the silencing of the perpetrator's gender
 - Auvinen - vaguely called a 'young person' (**HS** 9.11.2007d; **Hbl** 8.11.2007d); 'young man' in contrast to an adult man (**HS** 8.11.2007h; **Hbl** 8.11.2007c)
 - the hegemony of gender neutrality breaks: Saari's school shootings in Kauhajoki (**HS** 24.9.2008b; **Hbl** 24.09.2008a)

- ▶ the dominant focus was on the individual
 - psychological accounts (**HS** 8.11.2007h; **HS** 28.9.2008c; **Hbl** 8.11.2007c)
 - depression (**HS** 9.11.2007h; **HS** 24.9.2008b; **Hbl** 8.11.2007e; **Hbl** 6.11.2008)

Gendered constructions of the Finnish school shootings (I)

- ▶ Feminisation and masculinisation - intricately entwined.
 - ▶ Feminised - (students, teachers, politicians and military drop-outs, and institutions - the school system, the welfare state and the legal system). Portrayals - victimisation, powerlessness, instability, emasculation in the lack of action, control and rationality.
 - ▶ All these connected to violence, an account of the dominant associations between violence, masculinity and femininity in Finland.
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Gendered constructions of the Finnish school shootings (II)

- ▶ Auvinen – under the guise of a calm and shy guy, a hate-driven man
 - despised equality, tolerance, human rights and political correctness (**HS** 9.11.2007g)
 - favoured rigid gender roles and adhered to social Darwinism - ‘humanity is not worth saving, but just killing.’ (**Hbl** 8.11.2007e)
 - narcissistic and self-destructive personality (**HS** 8.11.2007g; **Hbl** 9.11.2007b) - a deviation from the Finnish masculinity ideal
 - wearing a t-shirt reading ‘Natural Selection’ and a leader jacket long to the ground at the time of the shootings (**HS** 8.11.2007g) **vs.** stabilising manly ideal - Criminal Chief Inspector Tuominen, (**Hbl** 10.11.2007b)

Gendered constructions of the Finnish school shootings (III)

- ▶ Gun issue:
 - nationalistic and militarised Finnish masculinity upheld - warnings of emasculation that would accompany a gun ban
 - Hunting - a part of the traditional Finnish way of life, justifying the imperative to teach the Finnish young men to use rifles and shotguns (**HS** 10.11.2007a; **Hbl** 25.09.2008g)
 - The ban of hunting weapons deprive boys of a ‘brisk hobby’ in the ‘pure’ outdoor air, also a form of ‘free, truly effective therapy’
 - Calls for gun control were a pacifist plot designed to weaken Finland’s capacity for self-defence (**HS** 14.11.2007)
 - Guns do not kill, but people, the right to carry a gun is true a sign of democracy (**HS** 19.11.2007; **Hbl** 25.09.2008a).

Gendered constructions of the Finnish school shootings (IV)

- ▶ Saari - a peripheral masculinity, a misanthropist striving for personal freedom.
 - humanity is in general ‘mindless dead meat’, he proclaimed that only ‘the gifted few’ were worth living (**Hbl** 24.09.2008b)
 - mental instability - preference for heavy-metal, portrayed him as a ‘young man confused about his identity’ (**Hbl** 25.09.2008d)
 - Saari’s military service was suspended - a possible explanation (the underlying assumption: the army - a standard against which a man’s behavioural maturity is measured in terms of the rational use of violence)

Some concluding remarks

- ▶ The aim - to analyze the construction of Finnish masculinities and femininities that underpin the school shootings (feminist research on violence; critical studies on masculinities)
 - ▶ In particular - the emerging dichotomy 'rational and responsible men's violence' (Finnish army) vs. irrational, hate-based violence (perpetrators of school shootings)
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