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Title: 'Intersections of gender, sexual orientation and gender-based violence in Hungarian secondary schools.'

Dorottya Rédai, PhD, Independent Scholar

T +36302484883 | E redaidori73@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper addresses the intersections of gender, sexual orientation and school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV), and enquires into students and teachers' perceptions of gender-based violence (GBV) among students in Hungarian secondary schools, their personal opinions, attitudes and experiences on GBV, and institutional responses to GBV in these schools. It specifically aims to find out how three types of GBV, sexual harassment of girls by boys, same-sex violence and homophobic violence, are perceived and handled. The paper is based on data from semi-structured interviews with 30 teachers and 3 focus groups with students in 3 Hungarian secondary schools in the framework of the project "*Developing Gender Equality Charter Marks in order to overcome gender stereotyping in education across Europe.*" Exploring discourses about cases of violence according to the gender and sexual orientation of the targets has revealed teachers' and students' ambivalence towards what was considered to be violence. Different types of GBV were approached differently and mostly on an individual basis. These differences reflect a lack of awareness and an ambivalent mixture of ideas of staff and leadership about gender inequalities in general, and lack of understanding

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the intersections of gender and sexuality with school violence, which potentially influences the implementation of institutional policies to tackle gender-based violence.

Keywords: school-related gender-based violence, sexual harassment, homophobic violence, same-sex violence, Hungary

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Introduction

The paper explores school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV), with a focus on sexual harassment of girls by boys, same-sex violence and homophobic violence, and how these types of violence are perceived and treated by students and teachers in Hungarian schools. It is based on qualitative data collected in three Hungarian secondary grammar schools in 2017-2018, in the framework of the project *Developing Gender Equality Charter Marks in order to overcome gender stereotyping in education across Europe* (GECM). I focus on these categories because they were the most common types of violence mentioned by respondents, and it was revealed that they may not receive equal attention by school staff. I address the gender dimensions of SRGBV, which, apart from sub-Saharan Africa, have received relatively little attention in international scholarship and policy-making on school violence and bullying (UNESCO 2015). The paper contributes insights to a barely existing literature on the topic in Central-Eastern Europe. By analysing these three specific types of SRGBV among peers, I attempt to map intersectional vulnerabilities to school violence and the specific local educational context which influences teachers' individual and institutional responses. Discussing sexual violence against students by teachers and gender-based violence among teachers is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is important to point out their existence in all the three participating schools.

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In recent years, school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) has gained increasing attention among education scholars, policy-makers and school management (see: RTI International 2016). SRGBV is difficult to research, partly because of the sensitivity of the issue, and partly because of hierarchical power relations in schools. In this paper, SRGBV is defined in the broadest sense, to include all forms of aggressive, threatening or unwanted verbal, psychological, physical and sexual behaviour "that is based on gendered stereotypes or that targets students on the basis of their sex, sexuality or gender identities" (RTI International 2016: 2). SRGBV is understood to be behaviour "through which traditional gender roles and sexual identities and behaviours are policed and reinforced" (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2009). It is very important to study SRGBV because it perpetuates gender inequalities (RTI International 2016: 2), "interferes with a student's educational opportunities" (AAUW 2011: 6), and affects children's physical and psychological health, and academic performance (UNGEI-UNESCO 2013: 7, Swearer et al. 2010).

The research study where the data for this paper come from was conducted with the purpose of collecting information on the local context regarding gender equality in the three schools which participated in developing and piloting the Hungarian version of the Gender Equality Charter Mark (GECM).[1] It was important to learn about how teachers, the school leadership and students think about gender issues and how the institutions address these, in order to create a GECM which is relevant on a local and national level

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and is in conversation with actual situations, problems and possibilities in schools. The topic of gender equality is currently very controversial in Hungary, which I will discuss later. Regarding school violence, in the recent years there have been some NGO- and university-based initiatives to work with schools, but these do not specify gender-based violence.[2] Violence, bullying or harassment is not mentioned in the current National Core Curriculum (2012) and Frame Curricula (2013). There is little academic work on school violence in Hungary, and gender-based violence is not addressed. However, SRGBV is a frequent topic in the media, and the experiences of teachers we have been working with in this project underline the necessity of policies and practical interventions to tackle school violence in general and gender-based violence in particular.

The interviewed teachers in all three schools labelled their school as 'liberal', 'progressive' and 'inclusive'. This implied that they had an inclusive approach towards racial/ethnic minorities and sexual minorities, were offering integrated education to young people with disabilities and special education needs, and were critical of the anti-gender,[3] nationalist, centralising and divisive politics of the current government. However, when it came to views about gender in their school, discourses were diverse and mixed, often contradictory and revealing a superficial awareness of gender inequalities in schooling or conservative views about 'gender roles', unquestioned heteronormativity, and a lack of reflection on power relations. This manifested in discourses about GBV, and in individual and institutional responses to cases of SRGBV. There was ambivalence among teachers

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and students about what was to be considered violence. Cases of sexual violence against girls by boys were responded to when they came to light, but the disapproval of violence was mixed with victim-blaming and denial and often lacked awareness of gendered power relations. Homophobic violence was unanimously condemned in principle, but its gendered nature was not understood (see: Pascoe 2007), and in many cases, 'tolerance' towards LGBT people implied ignoring their existence or potential problems in school, or accepting them conditionally, and perceiving them from a heteronormative and patronizing position. Same-sex (non-homophobic) violence received attention only if it disturbed whole-class group dynamics, it was typically trivialized and naturalized as part of 'growing up girl/boy', and, similarly to the other two types of violence, its genderedness was unreflected in many cases.

In the following section I will draw up a conceptual framework for the paper by reviewing some relevant literature, then I will discuss the research methodology and the challenges related to the hostile political environment towards gender equality. This will be followed by an analysis of interview excerpts from students and teachers in three sections based on the three types of SRGBV the paper focuses on.

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Conceptual framework

Definitions of school-related gender-based violence and its types are varied in the international literature. Many studies use the terms ‘sexual harassment’ and ‘homophobic bullying’, the former term mostly referring to male-to-female sexual harassment. Carrera et al. (2011) argue that in current literature bullying tends to be conceptualised in restricted ways; the bully and the victim are described in a pathologised binary, and an essentialist view of gender difference or a gender-blind view is often adopted. Ringrose and Renold (2010) are similarly critical of current psychological bullying discourses, arguing that such developmental discourses “obscure social power and hierarchies, including gender positionings and relations” and “when they do address gender they reinvoke and/or legitimate existing gender stereotypes or essentialised norms of masculine and feminine difference” (2010: 577). Hungarian academic literature on the topic is scarce and relies on this critiqued pathologising, developmental, individual and gender-blind approach to bullying. I assume that an intersectional inquiry into various types of SRGBV and how teachers and students relate to them in a given school would contribute to a better understanding of SRGBV and to reflection on potential ways to tackle it.

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Few papers discuss how various types of violence co-occur in a school environment and how or why their perception, reception and handling may differ. Chambers et al. (2004) found in their study of a similar scope to ours that whereas teachers were aware of homophobic bullying in their school and found it a severe problem, they were not concerned with what the authors called “misogynistic bullying” (2004: 565), i.e. gender-based violence against girls by boys. Teachers considered boys’ harassment of girls to be a “mutual exchange of hostilities” (2004: 568) or naturalized boys’ behaviour as ‘immaturity’ (see also: Anagnostopoulos et al., 2009), and blamed girls for their ‘sexual maturity’ which they understood to provoke sexual harassment by boys.

Ringrose and Renold (2010) introduce the term “normative cruelties” to refer to “the ways performing normative gender subject positions invoke exclusionary and injurious practices (for instance, being a physically tough, violent boy, or a mean girl) that are taken for granted” (2010: 575). In our study teachers were often deploying this normalizing discourse of ‘doing girl’ and ‘doing boy’ unreflectively, which downplayed the severity of violence involved in such behaviours. I apply the concept of ‘normative cruelties’ when I discuss this specific form of same-sex violence by girls and boys.

Chambers et al. (2004), Sundaram (2016), and Pomerantz et al. (2013) discuss how a (neo)liberal, individualized approach to GBV leads to pathologising perpetrators, blaming victims and not allowing space for girls to report or complain about sexist/misogynist violence in schools. As a number of scholars working on neoliberal/postfeminist

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constructions of girlhood (e.g. Gill 2007, Fahs 2014, Rédai 2019) have pointed out, neoliberal/postfeminist discourses position girls as (sexually) empowered and agentic individuals, while at the same time, gender dichotomies are reinforced and male sexual licence and expressions of hegemonic masculinity are left unquestioned. This individualizing approach does not allow for the critiquing of male dominance, power imbalances and gender inequality as a society-wide issue beyond individual performances of gender. Also, I argue that this individualist approach works against applying a whole-school approach to tackle SRGBV.

Another face of the same (neo)liberal individualist approach emerges when it comes to homophobic violence. When 'diversity' is celebrated as the individual (sexual) differences of everyone, all people are presumed to be "equal and entitled to acceptance" (Chambers et al. 2004: 572). DePalma and Atkinson (2010) argue that schools in the UK tend to address homophobic bullying as a severe problem but it "continues to be cast as a particular problem rather than as a systematic institutional manifestation of cultural bias, and this can leave room for institutional oppression on the grounds of sex, gender and sexuality" (2010: 1670). That is, schools focus on responding to individual acts of homophobic bullying instead of dealing with institutional heteronormativity.

Anagnostopoulos et al. (2009), Chambers et al. (2004), and Meyer (2008) discuss teachers' (non-)intervention in cases of SRGBV. In their study of a US school, Anagnostopoulos et al. (2009) found that teachers intervened in cases of sexual

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harassment when they found those cases severe. However, they thought that most cases were subtle and therefore it was difficult to intervene. Teachers did intensive interpretative work to determine whether a given utterance was a joke or teasing, or an offensive, malicious statement (2009: 529-530). Teachers mostly responded when the female targets of male sexual violence were not in an intimate relationship with their perpetrator but felt ambivalence about intervening in cases of heterosexual dating violence and homophobic bullying (2009: 535). In the former case this was because they generally saw the couple as "mutually constructing the violence" (2009: 537); in the latter case it was because they saw the targets of homophobic bullying as responsible for being bullied, either because of appearance (especially boys seen as 'too feminine') or 'unsociable' behaviour.

Chambers et al. (2004) had somewhat different findings on teachers' interference in SRGBV in the UK. In their study, teachers were aware of the severity of homophobic bullying in their schools but showed no concern for male-to-female sexual harassment and identified girls as 'the problem' in terms of sexual behaviour. Teachers stressed individual responsibility for one's own actions, which made misogynistic bullying invisible. Meyer (2008) analysed how external and internal influences, perceptions and responses affected how teachers responded to gendered harassment in Canadian schools. She found that administrative support, workload demands, a lack of training on SRGBV, school policies, social norms and values of the school, teachers' relationships with

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colleagues, students and parents, and teachers' personal social positioning influenced their responses to SRGBV. What teachers felt in general, because of these barriers and despite motivators, was that "sexual and homophobic harassment have been normalized as aspects of everyday school culture and are often not questioned or approached by educators from a critical or feminist perspective" (2008: 567). Teachers felt especially helpless in addressing homophobic name-calling and reported dealing with only the most severe cases of GBV.

Research methodology and challenges in the face of the governmental "war against gender"

The three schools sampled for the research are located in Budapest. It was very difficult to recruit schools for the project; we only managed to find interested schools in the capital, and even there it took a long and intensive search to find them. Schools and teaching staff in general are overburdened and not interested in external projects. Projects about gender equality face especially strong rejection, which can be partly explained by the general lack of awareness of gender inequalities in education, both among academics and education practitioners. This lack of awareness and interest is exacerbated by the current anti-gender propaganda of the political leadership of Hungary. As Grzebalska and Pető (2018) argue, this 'war on gender' is a foundational element of the neo-conservative

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political turn, which has taken over Central-Eastern Europe and some other parts of the world in the past 5-10 years. The anti-gender propaganda has infiltrated every level of Hungarian state governance in the past years and has reached the level of rewriting school curricula to eliminate gender content, and more recently, banning gender studies master programmes (see: Rédai and Sáfrány 2019). School management, formerly done by local governments, was centralised in 2013 and subsumed under a bureaucratic body called Klebelsberg Institution Management Centre (KLIK), under the Ministry of Human Resources, which supervises and instructs school directors, greatly reducing their autonomy. I believe that in the current political climate KLIK can have a negative influence on schools' engagement with gender-related issues and projects, i.e. school directors may not want to endorse such a project because of KLIK's control. Our research team approached the leadership of dozens of KLIK-controlled schools, and school directors rejected us in every case, citing various reasons, but some openly said it was because of the topic. Therefore we ended up working with three independent schools, one a private school (School 1) and two managed by a teacher-training university (Schools 2 and 3). School 1 was established in the early 1990s, School 2 and 3 have operated in their current form since the 1950s. The university-managed schools provide the space for teacher trainee students of the university to do their pre-service teaching practice. They are elite schools where top intellectuals of the future are educated. Thus, our sample is not very

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diverse in terms of class and ethnicity, therefore we could not study the intersection of class, ethnicity and SRGBV.

In each school we interviewed 10 staff members, including teachers, directors and/or deputy directors and the school psychologist. The individual interviews were semi-structured, with questions following the template designed by the research team. Each interview lasted for approximately one hour, was audio-recorded and transcribed. We also conducted a focus group with students in each school, lasting 2-3 hours, with questions following the template designed by the research team.[4] The group discussions were audio and video recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were manually coded and are verbatim but do not contain stutters, pauses, interruptions or fillers. The quotes included in this article are from the transcripts. Consent forms were signed by staff, students and parents. Ethical approval for the research was granted by Central European University prior to starting the interviews. All the focus groups and the teacher interviews were conducted in Hungarian, except for one teacher in School 1, who was a native speaker of English. The excerpts are my translation. As the interviews addressed a number of issues besides SRGBV,[5] we did not indulge in the topic as deeply as if it had been the specific focus of the study. However, the topic came up in relation to various other topics as well, and I believe we gained important insights about SRGBV as it occurs in the specific context of our research sample.

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Analysis

In this part I will discuss research findings in three sections, each one focusing on a type of SRGBV: sexual harassment of girls by boys; same-sex violence among students; and violence against LGBTQ students by peers. Types of violence are commonly categorised according to the type of the violent activity (e.g. physical, verbal, etc.). Physical violence was reported to be rare in these schools; most reported cases were verbal and cyber harassment. Thus, I have found it more efficacious to focus on what gender the victim and the perpetrator are and the sexual orientation or gender identity of the young people targeted by school violence.

1. Sexual harassment of girls by boys

In the case of violence against girls by boys, the teachers in all three schools claimed that such incidents rarely happened and were not tolerated. The types of violence teachers and students were aware of were mainly face-to-face and online verbal sexual harassment. In School 1 teachers said that GBV was not common, at least in the presence of teachers. Some teachers pointed out that they could not control what happened outside the classroom and on the internet, so GBV may be more common than what they were aware of. However, they pointed out that violence was against the ethos of the school, and when cases of violence occasionally occurred, there were mechanisms

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in the school to handle them, including mediation, the School Court[6] and expelling. Nevertheless, as is visible in the following quote, the violent behaviour of boys tended to get relativized or treated as adolescent hormonal outbursts by some teachers.

> I think [School 1] is a unique, non-representative sample in this respect. (…) But it can happen with some adolescents that they run around like testosterone bombs, and they take a dominant role and speak the language of force rather than cooperation. *(male teacher, 61, School 1)*

Besides testosterone, age is cited as a factor in violent behaviour. According to one teacher in School 1, kids of the 14-15 age group don't understand the difference between bullying and teasing:

> I think, this 14-15 year-old age group doesn't comprehend what we call bullying and what can still pass as a joke. So this is a very very difficult question, it is awfully hard for them to grasp. They often don't feel and don't understand what the problem is with posting a photo of someone in an embarrassing situation on Facebook. Or why it sucks if I send a message to someone calling him a stupid faggot. (*male teacher, 37, School 1)*

An older boy in the focus group of School 1 suggested that what could be considered harassment at a younger age may be "vehement courting" in his age group (age 18-20), and called girls responsible for making themselves targets of sexual harassment:

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> I don't know what the difference between harassment and vehement courting is, we are 19-20 years old already. Girls expose their breasts, [wear] miniskirts on purpose, I can't imagine that they didn't think they would be grabbed – okay, that's really harassment, but let's say, be commented on. *(E., male student, 18, School 1)*

Teachers said it was often difficult to find out about acts of sexual harassment, especially if it was cyber-harassment. When such a case emerged, however, there was a strong reaction, both from students and teachers. In School 1, there had been a case in the previous school year of a year 9 boy (age 15) sexually harassing year 7 girls (age 13) via chat messages. The case came to light accidentally and was taken to the School Court, and there was a debate about whether the boy should be expelled from the school. He eventually wasn't, and respondents said he stopped the abusive behaviour. Thus, it seems that holding the abuser publicly accountable in front of the whole school can be an effective solution and message to other potential abusers.

> At the end of last year there was a really brutal (…) case. (…) And (…) the usual situation, that the girls didn't dare to tell anyone, because if she at age 13 starts to tell anyone, she will be the slut and stuff. (…) And they were typically not the kind of girls who would behave very provokingly or differently. (…) and it was a big scandal, the boy was very seriously condemned [by his peers]. Like how dare he

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> molest younger, weaker girls and insult them with such messages. (…) all the girls were really scared about [consequences]. The typical victim-blaming, she felt bad as a victim, and this had to be dealt with, like "it shouldn't be you who feels bad because he is a stupid boor who doesn't know what to do with his hormones". *(male teacher, 37, School 1)*

In this excerpt there is a mixture of various discourses of sexual harassment: we hear of girls' widespread fear of reporting abuse, slut-shaming, an implicit blaming of ('certain types of') girls for violence, a protective discourse about "younger, weaker girls", victim-blaming, self-accusation, and the male hormones discourse. There seemed to be an agreement that the case was unacceptable and it was dealt with, but the perpetrator was not framed as someone abusing his power but someone who cannot handle his adolescent male hormonal excess.

In the focus groups we showed a picture to students where a boy was depicted showing around a sexualized photo of his (ex-)girlfriend to his pals. This picture generated discussions which revealed that many of these students, both girls and boys, who had feminist or gender-conscious views on other gender issues, tended to blame girls for their irresponsibility or irrationality to send sexual photos of themselves to their boyfriends, and they were divided about the question whether at all or how much the boy was responsible for spreading the photos on the internet (see also: Dobson and Ringrose 2016). This approach was the most prominent is School 2, where conflicting views, including victim-

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blaming, surfaced in the following discussion in the students' focus group. Most probably, it is not coincidental that in the same school, most interviewed teachers also shared the view that although sexual violence was not acceptable, girls should know that it would have consequences (i.e. harassment from boys) if they dressed or behaved sexually 'provocatively'.

> 'One has experience. It's up to her if she can say yes or no. (…) If she didn't send it to the right person, it means she didn't think it through. She has to count on that, this is something one can foresee, one can think about.' *(K., male student, 16)*
>
> 'But when you are dating a guy, you aren't preparing for like "we're gonna break up and I won't send the photo to him, because I'll get into trouble".' *(L., female student, 16)*
>
> 'If you have a boyfriend and he asks you, you don't have to do it, why doesn't he come and see it live?' *(they laugh) (M., female student, 16)*
>
> 'Yes, of course, it's her responsibility too, but I rather see it as victim-blaming to ask why she trusted the guy who had her over. It's not a smart thing to do, sure. (…) But if my phone gets stolen, is it my fault?' *(N., female student, 19)*
>
> 'I agree that it's the fault of both of them. It is about 50-50% if you send it to your boyfriend. If you send it to a random person, it's all your fault.' *(I., female student, 16)*

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In School 3 the students voiced similar arguments. In addition to rationality, maturity, agency and trust, they brought in the essentialized notion of females and males functioning differently, differences in educatedness, and sexual double standards. However, unlike the young people in Dobson and Ringrose's (2016) study, in the following conversation there was no consensus among the respondents that the breaking of trust is natural male behaviour, and in both groups the analogy of becoming a victim of a crime came up.

> 'I've met a case when the boy was talking about their sex life to all his classmates. This was humiliating, especially for the girl. This is unfair, they should discuss what they can share with others.' *(V., female student, 17)*
>
> 'What you were talking about is a 100% vulnerable situation. But if I post a photo on Facebook, that's a conscious decision. I have assumed responsibility by handing it to him, he can handle it as he likes. I practically offer him a surface [for abuse].' *(Z., female student, 17)*
>
> 'But I trusted him!' *(R., female student, 17)*
>
> 'I wanted *him* to see it, I didn't post it on my Facebook page!' *(V., female student, 17)*
>
> 'There may be boys (…) for whom it is easier if they talk about it. It depends on the person, but maybe the male brain functions differently.' *(R., female student, 17)*

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> ‘One has to be mature and prepared not to have it happen. But there has to be trust that such a thing cannot happen.’ *(U., female student, 17)*
>
> (…)
>
> ‘It’s as if you told a secret. Showing the picture to others is like revealing a secret.’ *(W., male student, 17)*
>
> ‘It’s also a question why she would send such a message on Facebook or Snapchat. If somebody loves her why does he expect to see it? It’s not her fault. It’s like you go out on the street and a terrorist shoots you. It’s not your fault.’ *(R., female student, 17)*

What is interesting about these discussions is the notion of girls’ agency. Girls’ active expression of their sexuality via such channels as sexting was not understood by any of the participants to be an agentic self-expression. However, girls’ agency to make responsible decisions about their sexual self-expression was highlighted. Girls were not really seen in these discussions as victims but active agents who made wrong decisions and faced consequences. Whereas most respondents reframed the victim-perpetrator discourse, they did not subvert the heterosexist framework within which girls’ sexual self-expression is regulated by expected reactions from boys. Instead, they used the neo-liberal/post-feminist discursive framework of girls being sexually agentic, self-responsible and the gatekeepers of boys’ sexual behaviour (Fahs 2014, Allen 2012).

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In Schools 1 and 2 gender-based and other bullying was dealt with on a case-to-case basis and, as the teachers and students said, students received quite a lot of prevention initiatives in the form of interactive programs, such as action theatres and workshops. Victims of sexual harassment sometimes approached their form tutors or the school psychologist in all three schools. Some teachers, like the one in the following quote, felt he had no resources to handle GBV cases.

> (…) there was a story in my class recently, a guy was said to be feeling up girls at parties, but because nobody has come up to me to report and discuss it, I can't really do anything. (…) We would sit down and "look, I was told you were feeling her up", "no, I wasn't", "but that's what they say", "but I wasn't", and that's where the conversation would end. *(male teacher, 37, School 2)*

In School 3 there was an institutional response to some of the harassment cases, either by the form tutors of the perpetrator's class, or by the leadership.

> About two years ago we had a verbal harassment case, through internet, older boys started to hit on and ask for sex from younger girls. They didn't leave them alone, and then they were following them on the corridor, too. I know that such concrete cases were stopped by the former leadership. *(male school director, 36, School 3)*

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> We had two such cases in the past few years. The form tutors almost immediately knew about them. (…) And both times – it was Facebook harassment and the like – we summoned the kids and made them think through what they were doing. (…) And also, both times we talked to the staff, like "colleagues, you will pay attention to this, and if it happens, this is how you handle it, take the topic to the tutor group lesson" (…). (…) So we did try to respond on an institutional level. *(female deputy director, 48, School 3)*

What is common in these narratives (and the ones in the following two sections as well) is that acts of violence are seen as individual behavioural or development-related problems; the question of social power and positioning and male-biased sexual culture is not brought up, i.e. the intersection of gender and school violence is not recognised and taken into consideration As Sundaram (2016) argues, the "failure to explicitly recognize gender as underlying violence will result in a continued focus on (and understanding of) violence as individual(ised) choice." This, in turn is likely to result in the continuation of "gender-blind behaviour management and conflict resolution" efforts in schools (2016: 668).

2. Same-sex violence among students

Although, according to teachers, same-sex violence and bullying was not very common in any of the three schools, from the stories they told this appeared to be the most

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common form of SRGBV. The question was rather *what* they considered violence, not whether it occurred. Typical examples included boys' position fights to create a 'pecking order', girls' 'meanness' with other girls, including slut-shaming. These types of violent behaviour were not treated as equally severe, much of it was trivialized or naturalized as 'normative cruelties' (Ringrose and Renold 2010). Physical violence was considered more severe than verbal and emotional violence, and as a result, girls, who were viewed as rather verbally and psychologically violent as opposed to boys who were seen as more physically aggressive, were treated more lightly for their violent behaviour.

Stories from Schools 2 and 3 revealed performance anxiety as a factor potentially initiating aggressive behaviour, both among boys and girls. This cause is specific to these elite schools, where excellent academic performance is expected from all students. However, attributing the aggression to performance anxiety was offered as a psychologizing explanation which was not necessarily accompanied by reflection on power relations in these schools. This highlights the importance of recognizing the institutional factors behind school violence. The following two conflicts were eventually resolved by the two form tutors of the class involved. The stories are similar: in the first one boys get bothered by a boy and start to bully him, in the second, the same happens with girls.

> There was a boy who was a very good student, very smart, very well-read, but socially not so eminent. (…) he only recognizes knowledge, and if somebody

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> doesn't know what he knows, he loudly expresses [his disapproval]. And this started to bother some boys, quite understandably, and we sat down to talk with the boy (…). And he understood it very well and stopped this behaviour. However, the others were still hurt, and they started to bully him. *(male teacher, 25, School 2)*
>
> (…) there is one girl who is very smart, a very good student, but that takes her a lot of effort. (…) And she asks questions in class when something is not immediately clear for her. And after a while, (…) it was especially girls who were bothered by her not understanding things immediately, and they expressed it loudly. (…) We had a long discussion [with these girls] and in the end it came out that they would also want to ask questions but they don't dare to, because they also got booed for that earlier. And it turned out (…) that they felt they had to perform very well and that made them tense. *(male teacher, 25, School 2)*

According to teachers, performances of masculinity included position fights among boys in order to establish a 'pecking order', especially at the beginning of their school life. These fights were occasionally violent. In the two elite schools, the fight for hierarchy was about intellectual capacities, i.e. who were the smartest or best performing boys, and this type of violence was not understood by teachers as gender-based, that is, their notion of what gender-based violence was did not include violence based on competing for a dominant masculinity position.

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> Well, these ranking fights are very strong among boys. And there is the boorish macho type for whom it is very hard to accept (…) that there can be other hierarchies than the one that's in his head. And by all means he will attack those who don't match his set of values for some reason. Or those who stand out in some way, who don't go and stand at the back where they should be [according to him]. *(female deputy director, 61, School 1)*

> (…) there is a very strong rivalry in the [6-year strand] when they enter. (…) They all come from a situation where he was the king, because he was the smartest, this is why he came here (…). And here he realizes that there are at least ten others exactly like him, and then in that group they push around – sometimes literally – till the new hierarchy forms. *(male deputy director, 47, School 2)*

A teacher in School 2 was narrating how boys' fight for positioning had a negative impact on the whole class as a group. Therefore, even though there were no fights between girls and boys, the boys' hostility towards one another and their taking up too much symbolic space in the group formation process made the class climate negative for girls, as well.

> There was no competition [between girls and boys]. But among boys, there still obviously is, very much. A sort of pecking order or hierarchy is hard to form, and the whole class is suffering because there is still an ongoing upheaval because of this. *(female teacher,37, School 2)*

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Some teachers claimed that there were position fights among girls as well, but they were more ‘subtle’. The comparison of girls’ and boys’ fights for dominance again reflects a binary, essentialist view of gender and GBV, and the trivialization or naturalization of girls’ gendered violence (see: Ringrose and Renold 2010). The first following quote expresses a misogynistic view by suggesting that the type of violence attributed to boys is more acceptable because it is more open, but most respondents do not value one or the other more, they merely suggest that ‘girls are like this, boys are like that’. Besides suggesting that such violent behaviours are part of ‘doing boy or girl’, they also reflect a deeply held essentialist and heteronormative belief in gender complementarity, which was present even in gender-sensitive respondents’ talk. The assumption is that the two sexes complement each other, so the gender order is balanced, thus gendered power relations are not reflected on (see also: Rédai and Sáfrány 2019).

> (…) [girls] do it quietly, underground, under the surface. And that can be harmful. (…) Intrigues, manipulations. They are skilled at that. Boys do it openly, they might even fight. Girls don’t, they are rather “skilled” at being sassy. *(male teacher, 32, School 1)*

> Like girls are actively wicked, this cruel type. “I smile at her but I behave differently behind her back.” There are cliques, “you are my friend but tomorrow you are not”. *(female teacher, 37, School 2)*

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Another form of GBV (mostly but not exclusively) by girls targeting other girls is policing their sexuality and slut-shaming. I have found in this study and earlier research (Rédai 2019) that although girls are critical of sexual double standards, they still comply with it and are prone to impose it on other girls. One teacher in School 1 explained that in the sexual harassment case mentioned in Section 1, along with sexual harassment of girls by a boy, imposing sexual double standards and slut-shaming by other girls was also suffered by one of the harassed girls. She felt that the same-sex violence part of the case was not properly dealt with by the form tutors: it was trivialized, not treated as violence equal to that perpetrated by the boy, even though the targeted girl was traumatized by that, too:

> She was scared to tell, although she was obviously a victim (…). And the boy had had a girlfriend one year above, they were not together anymore, and she [and a friend of hers] started to threaten the girl in Snapchat messages (…). It was really awful, like "you dirty little slut" (…), "do you think you are cool when you are throwing your hair around?" Stuff like that (…). And this girl was way more shattered by the shittalking of the two girls than the messages of the boy. And this wasn't dealt with. (…) the girls got away with a "tsk tsk, this isn't the right thing to do". *(female teacher, 29, School 1)*

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Gender-based violence was not necessarily treated by teachers as a problem of power abuse but rather as a pedagogical and group management challenge:

> (…) when there are many clamorous or very loud boys in a class who keep the [pecking order] fight on the surface, girls often don't talk. So they rather choose the tactic of withdrawal (…). And teachers have to be very alert to this. So that such a group doesn't become dominant in a class. And so that it's not these loud boys that become the norm in the group. *(female deputy director, 53, School 2)*

This quote highlights the complexity of gendered pedagogical situations and shows how male peer aggression can induce girls' withdrawal, which will impact their class performance. The teacher recognizes the gender imbalance and acts to intervene and prevent aggressive boys' behaviour becoming the norm in the classroom. She does not openly acknowledge the embeddedness of boys' disturbing behaviour in gendered social norms and legitimized masculine power in the discussion but understands how the behaviour can impact girls' behaviour and performance.

3. Violence against LGBT students by peers

According to teachers, severe forms of homophobic harassment or bullying didn't exist in their schools, but they had varied opinions about how frequently and what kind of

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homophobic harassment occurred. Teachers argued that their school was open and did not tolerate hatred against minorities and they were united in their disapproval of homophobic behaviour. In School 1 teachers were especially proud of providing a 'tolerant' atmosphere for sexual minority students.

> There are a few homophobic kids. They usually bring this from home. And it slowly disappears by the end [of their studies]. It is very rare that a kid graduates from [School 1] and he is still a homophobe. There are many gay kids who are out. *(female teacher, 29, School 1)*

Nevertheless, teachers did not tend to find calling someone a 'fag' severe harassment, or not even necessarily an act of homophobia. Some teachers insisted that when students called someone a 'fag', it usually referred to something else, not their sexual orientation, and/or it was used as a swearword. None of the teachers problematized why it was 'fag' in particular and not something else that was used as a swearword; they did not seem to understand how labelling other people 'fags' is an act of dominant masculinity constitution in a heteronormative environment (Pascoe 2007). Teachers in School 2 especially seemed to consider it as a figure of colloquial speech or a phrase to tease peers with. By considering calling peers 'fags' an age-typical behaviour and differentiating it from acts of homophobic bullying, teachers and schools failed to recognize heteronormativity as an

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organisational structure and a cultural context which enables homophobic violence to emerge (see: DePalma and Atkinson 2010).

> If a boy wants to offend another boy, calling him a 'fag' is the first thing he does. (…) It's not very typical but it does occur. *(female teacher, 29, School 1)*

> If [calling people 'fags'] occurs at all, it is really… within healthy boundaries, so they are teasing each other. So today it is used in colloquial language when it is absolutely not justified. (…) But [students] don't hurt or humiliate people because of that. It happens that they may know about someone that he's attracted to his own sex, but they would accept him equally. *(male teacher, 44, School 2)*

In fact, acceptance sometimes looked more like discreet ignorance or blindness towards LGBT people, and the respondents' views about sexual minorities were mostly heteronormative. Only LGBT *students* were mentioned, teachers' sexuality was a taboo. Whereas teachers in School 1 said there were quite many out LGBT students in the school, some teachers in School 2 and 3 believed that coming out was rare in the school because most students realized they were homosexual only towards the end of their secondary school years or later. However, in cases of students' being out, teachers thought that peers usually accepted them and homophobic harassment was marginal. Students, however, said that instances of homophobic name-calling by boys were quite

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prevalent in spaces where teachers were not present, especially in the male dressing room.

> We have it in our year, boys do it. They don't think about how bad it can feel. They pick on you in the dressing room, not face to face but so that the person hears it. *(F., male student, 17, School 1)*

In School 2 acceptance towards LGBT people seemed to be conditional. Here the most common attitude among teachers was that sexual orientation was a private matter, and the tolerant atmosphere of the school protected LGBT students as long as they did not expose their sexuality or gender non-conformity in school.

> It obviously matters how it appears in the behaviour of the given young person. Because if he is functioning and it doesn't have a provoking, conspicuous, aggressive form, it is easy to accept and we don't have to deal with it. *(female deputy director, 53. School 2)*

The students in the focus group in School 2 confirmed my impression that both they and their teachers had varied, and not always friendly attitudes towards sexual minorities:

> 'There is no problem with this in [School 2].' (*K., male student, 16*)

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> ‘I don’t agree. The LGBTQ posters were torn off. There was an initiative that there would be a discussion about perceptions of LGBTQ people, and they were torn off.’ (*I.,* f*emale student, 16*)
>
> ‘Two bisexual girl classmates of mine organized that. They were both out but it was not talked about. Their form tutor told them, “don’t get involved in such things, these are dangerous things.” It’s not possible to talk about this openly here.’ (*N.,* f*emale student, 19*)
>
> ‘I have been to LGBTQ events, they were organised by N’s classmates, and you could tell about personal experiences. One gay boy said that one of his teachers knew he was gay, and s/he thought he was wearing make-up one day, and s/he went up to him and told him that he shouldn’t do it, this is private, he shouldn’t show it off.’ (*L.,* f*emale student, 16*)

In School 3 the sample of teachers interviewed was different in terms of sexuality; the school director and one of the male teachers were known to be gay by many of their colleagues and probably by students as well, but it was still considered to be a private issue. The director of School 3 reflected on the quality of acceptance of LGBT people by heterosexual students and found it superficial, despite the official gay-friendly climate of the school.

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> Well, here you can talk about homosexuality much more naturally. There is a very very open, inclusive attitude towards it. On the other hand, I think that homophobia has been conserved in students. So, on the surface there is acceptance, but in fact, if we scratch it a bit, then there isn't. (…) So if it's in their own environment that somebody is outed or comes out, it's more difficult to… so there isn't direct bullying, but s/he becomes visibly isolated or more isolated than before. *(male director, 36, School 3)*

A teacher in School 1 narrated a similar experience. She thought sometimes students' accepting attitude went as far as accepting gay people in principle, but they expressed intolerant attitudes when they encountered the physical depiction of gay male desire.

> We watched the film 'Total Eclipse' about the relationship of Verlaine and Rimbaud. And there was a gay boy in that class (…). And they knew about him, it was absolutely open and they never hurt him because of that. But when we were watching the film and the two men were kissing, they went like "phew, how fuckin' disgusting, this is revolting, I will throw up." It was really embarrassing for the poor boy. So they accept it, but if they see it, it is still very strange for them. *(female teacher, 29, School 1)*

As much as I could conclude from the interviews, physical violence against LGBT people did not prevail in the three schools. However, similarly to misogynistic and same-sex

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violence, there was an ambivalent attitude to forms of homophobic violence, and the official 'tolerant', 'inclusive' ethos of the schools did not necessarily prevent the occurrence of verbal or emotional violence or ensure an inclusive treatment of affected individuals by all members of the school staff and peers. 'Milder', non-physical forms of homophobic violence tended to be tolerated, and the intersectionality of gender and sexuality with violence was not clearly understood.

Conclusion

This paper has explored perceptions of various types of gender-based violence and responses to them in three Hungarian secondary grammar schools, with the aim to find out how gender, sexuality and violence intersect in cases of SRGBV. The sample of schools was necessarily limited, but the institutional similarities and those of student population, school ethos and teachers' and students' awareness and attitudes to gender has allowed some patterns related to SRGBV to emerge.

Respondents in all three schools were convinced that in their school gender-based violence was not as common as 'in other schools', and if it occurred, it was sanctioned. Anagnostopoulos et al. (2009) argue that intervention and prevention by teachers and school staff "will depend on how they interpret these interactions and their responsibilities for intervening in them" (2009: 521). We found that violence against girls by boys and

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homophobic violence (mostly boys against boys) was not officially tolerated but as long as it was not physical violence it varied which acts were interpreted as violence, and non-physical forms were present, especially in spaces out of teachers' sight. The most prevalent form of SRGBV was same-sex (but not homophobic) violence, towards which teachers had ambivalent attitudes; they tended to legitimize it as "normative cruelties" (Renold and Ringrose 2010), i.e. as part of growing up as a girl or boy, except when physical aggression was included. Both violence against LGBTQI people and against girls by boys were treated on a case-to-case basis, if at all, instead of reflecting on the deeper – and interconnected – social phenomena of gender inequality and heteronormativity. In fact, I argue that what prevented certain kinds of violence to be interpreted as gender-based violence or violence at all was the lack of understanding that the given violent act occurred at the intersection of gender and/or sexuality and violence as a larger structural pattern, i.e. that gendered patterns and imbalances of power were at the core of the given acts of violence and of much of school-based violence in general.

It was beyond the scope of the paper to discuss general attitudes to gender and feminism in Hungary or provide a detailed overview of the specific Hungarian political context, in which an open hostility towards gender studies and autocratic, centralizing education policy measures (see also: Rédai 2019; Rédai and Sáfrány 2019) make it very difficult to implement a school project about gender equality. Nevertheless, I would like to argue that the current conservative populist discourses denying the existence of gender as a social

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construction and essentialising binary sex differences, posing gender studies as a threat to the 'natural order of things' and promoting an exclusionary conservative and heteronormative family model not only constitute Hungarian popular thinking about gender relations but in fact have grown out of such traditionalist thinking, so widespread in Hungary (see: Dupcsik and Tóth 2014; Gal and Kligman 2000), and influence even those who are critical of the current political regime, like most interviewed teachers in the three schools.

Teachers called their school liberal and progressive and identified with a neo-liberal approach which values diversity and emphasizes individual responsibility. I would like to argue that when this approach is coupled with a strongly grounded binary and complementary approach to gender and essentialist ideas about differences between women and men, the result is that when sexual violence against girls occurs, girls tend to be held responsible for being violated, and boys' responsibility is not acknowledged or it is downplayed or considered to be equal to girls' responsibility. The same approach celebrates diversity and does not tolerate homophobic violence, but because of essentialist views about boys' and girls' differences and a developmental approach to adolescence, milder forms of such violence, such as homophobic name-calling, are not considered to be violence but age-specific behaviour that does not actually target homosexuality and will eventually pass (cf. Chambers et al. 2004). The same essentialising of gender dichotomy and complementarity allows same-sex violence to be

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naturalized and considered part of growing up girl or boy (see: Renold and Ringrose 2010).

The studies reviewed in the first part of the article found similar approaches and trends of handling cases of GBV in schools in different socio-political contexts, which points to the embeddedness of GBV in current societies in general and in schooling in particular, regardless of the socio-political specificities of the given society. Thus, if there was a willingness, Hungarian educational policy-making on GBV and other gender issues could greatly benefit from international studies and pedagogical initiatives on the subject. However, in the current political regime, it is only individual schools that may decide to engage with SRGBV from a critical gendered perspective, and the issue will likely not be addressed on a structural level in the near future.

Academic literature on gender and education and on GBV in Hungary is scarce. Our limited sample – besides demonstrating some of the possible pitfalls of school research in present-day Hungary – suggests that it would be important to expand research on SRGBV and its social context to larger samples which would reflect the gendered, ethnic and classed complexities of the Hungarian compulsory education system. It would also be important to explore the data of the present research study further in order to find out more about GBV between students and teachers and among teachers, and think about suitable methods of research in such a difficult area where even stronger resistance from schools and teachers to participate is to be expected.

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[1] Available in Hungarian at: http://nem.hu.anthropolis.hu/

[2] See e.g.: the Hungarian national report of the Against School Aggression Partnership (ASAP), which includes a non-exhaustive but detailed list of such initiatives, prevention programmes and guidelines: https://partnershungary.hu/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/magyar-orsz%C3%A1gos-jelent%C3%A9s.pdf

[3] By the term 'anti-gender' I refer to the neo-conservative-populist-Christian movement and political propaganda which demonizes gender studies, gender studies scholars and even the term 'gender' and aims to restore the traditional heteronormative family, push women back into traditional gender roles and make policy decisions based on misogyny, homophobia and transphobia (see: Grzebalska and Pető 2018). I discuss the impact of this on education and the project in the methodology section.

[4] In each school the staff members were recruited with the assistance of a contact teacher. The contact teachers sent invitations for the interviews to their school's mailing list, and they also participated as respondents. The student focus groups were recruited with the assistance of the teacher supporting the student representative body of the school.

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[5] The areas addressed included the school leadership; textbooks and teaching materials; extracurricular activities; subject and career choice; the physical environment of the school; relations and communication among teachers and students; and the relationship of the school with organisations offering inclusive education programmes.

[6] A disciplinary body consisting of teachers, parents and students, a forum for handling cases of violation of the school rules.

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