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The sexual aspect of mobbing in schools in the relations between the head and the teacher: nature, manifestations, implications

Today we are observing a shift in the paradigm of reform, which goes from innovation to schools' organisational development. This entails, among other things, the tendency to grant the schools and the teachers more autonomy and responsibility by respecting their rights and supporting them in becoming subjects in the education system (Potulicka 2006, p. 8). The growing independence of schools and the expansion of the scope of personal liberty are among the reasons why this change is most visible in the relations between the head and the teacher. Naturally, such a vision of school also implies that more and more attention is dedicated to these interactions. It is necessary to bear in mind that the teacher acts as an employee who is dependent on their superior, i.e. the headmaster or the headmistress of the school. When approaching the issue in this context, it is important to stress that the teachers are exposed to numerous risks, which are typical of their employment relationship, e.g. sexual harassment or mobbing. These in turn are considered unethical phenomena whose occurrence in a workplace threatens the subjectivity of the human-worker, and violates the constitutional right to dignity and the respect for freedom.

Although the awareness among society regarding psychological (and sexual) harassment in the working environment is growing, the literature on this matter continues to underperform in terms of representing, demonstrating, analysing, and explaining the mechanisms that govern the causes, the process, and the results of this phenomenon. For these reasons, the content of the present article is dedicated to mobbing in workplaces, to sexual harassment, and to what is closely related to discrimination on the grounds of gender in the working environment. The following paragraphs will describe the subtle manifestations of the sexual behaviours of perpetrators, which will be approached as a particular dimension of mobbing.

Every unethical workplace behaviour or hostility among co-workers causes a disturbance to the subjective relation between the employees, which in turn affects the humanising nature of work. The view that humans hate their work,

as they feel it imprisons them and cheats on them, becomes increasingly widespread (Furmanek 2008, p. 105). The contemporary working situation of teachers, who face mass redundancies, triggers humans' survival instincts, which elicit an array of the worst, and the most dehumanising behaviours. This leads to occupational stress and pathological behaviours in both the head-teacher, and the teacher-teacher, relations. The representatives of pedeutology are engaged in an interesting debate on the issue of employees as subjects of work. It includes, *inter alia*, carrying out studies that link the risks the teachers are exposed to with the difficult working situation in schools (Kopciewicz 2011; Pyżalski 2010; Merezcz 2010). Furmanek has also contributed to this debate with a stirring idea consisting of approaching the threats, and even the pathologies of working life, as a form of enslavement through work and an alienation of work. The World Health Organisation forecasts that the globalisation and the introduction of new technologies and solutions will aggravate depression and stress among the employees. Given the fact that we live in an ageing society, and that the highest stress is reported among the employees in the 45-55 age group (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work 2009, p. 22), the level of stress is bound to grow. The research carried out by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work reveals that stress affects most deeply the workers of the healthcare, transportation, communication, and education sectors. The psychosocial stressors – as they are referred to in the report – in the profession of teachers include, among others:

- high pace of work, related to pressing deadlines;
- pace of work induced by external requirements;
- unexpected interruptions of work (i.e. free time between classes);
- maladjustment of the workplace to teachers' needs and skills;
- mobbing and sexual harassment.

The notion of mobbing is both multidimensional and multiform, hence it is necessary to keep in mind its interdisciplinarity. The terminology proposed by Polish literature on the issue of mobbing is based on foreign publications from the 1980s and 1990s. Therefore, rather than fully relying on the described theoretical and research achievements, caution is advisable, as there is a risk of an overly literal transference and introduction of certain terms with regards to educational theory and practice without prior scientific research in the relevant field, which I consider a *sine qua non* condition. To better comprehend the essence of mobbing, it is important to understand and present terms which the literature links closely to this pathology, but does not consider as its integral part. These conceptual categories are referred to as discrimination and sexual harassment.

As Agata Lankamer and Patrycja Potocka-Szmoń rightly observe, it is necessary to take into account two factors when discerning discrimination from permanent violence. Discrimination is a singular act, not a process as in the case of mobbing. Secondly: in the event of a court trial in relation to mobbing, the burden of proof lies with the employee, while in discrimination cases it is the employer who needs to prove that the differentiation between the members of staff was based on objective and not discriminatory criteria (Lankamer, Potocka-Szmoń 2006, p. 12–13).

With regards to teachers, the discrimination on grounds of sex that may imply the development of sexual harassment is an interesting phenomenon. The question of sex, especially in the context of occupational hazards and access to the labour market, is a relatively new and dynamically developing issue. According to the Educational Research Institute report, the sector is dominated by women, who represent approx. 80% of all employed teachers. It appears that the feminisation of this profession is one of the causes for women to suffer violence in their working environment. According to the research by D. Walczak (2012) and the European Risk Observatory (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work 2009), as well as the data collected by the Stowarzyszenie Antymobbingowe w Bydgoszczy (Bydgoszcz Anti-mobbing Association), sex is not a factor for experiencing stress or violence in workplace, but it does, however, affect the interpretation of its perception. In 2005, 23.3% of men and 21% of women in the EU reported experiencing stress. The share of victims of violence, both among women and men, is proportionate to the number of persons employed and also grows proportionately. For heads of schools who resort to mobbing, sex is not the dominant category. According to the Educational Information System, women represent 76.8% of all heads of schools, while the remaining 23.2% is male. As in the case of the victims, the number of perpetrators is proportionate to the employment structure. In her 2012 report, Walczak indicates that "... everything depends on the personality of the teacher and their contacts with the students" (Walczak 2012, p. 105). The respondents and the heads of schools defined the aspects in which the subtle differences between teachers of the two sexes were visible. These include the following (Walczak 2012):

- greater authority of a male teacher;
- difficult contact and limited trust of pubescent girls toward male teachers; (unwillingness to share secrets, distance);
- sexual innuendos of male students with respect to young female teachers;
- in the face of the increasing number of children from broken families, the presence of both male and female teachers plays an important pedagogical and educational role;
- men fear being accused of harassment;
- women are more meticulous, while men tend to be more focused on specific tasks;
- women are more systematic and timely, and therefore they care more about documentation;
- women are more empathic, and it is easier for them to understand the situation of the students, while men tend to have issues with this aspect;
- women react to various situations more personally;
- woman gossip more often, which spoils the atmosphere in the school;
- women complain more;
- men are better at handling stress.

The aspects listed above should constitute a step forward in scientific investigations on the assessment of occupational risks in the context of the sexes. This is not as relevant for the superior-employee relations in the educational sector as

it is in other professions, especially those dominated by men holding managerial positions, e.g. the health service, where discrimination on grounds of sex can play a key role. The research on bullying against girls, conducted by Lucyna Kopciewicz, seems particularly intriguing. The authoress points to the disinterest of educational authorities and accurately notes that “[...] the curricula and professional development programmes do not take into account the issues of emancipation and anti-discrimination” (Kopciewicz 2011, p. 181). Referring to earlier research, she indicates that no preventative actions or any other initiatives are undertaken to address sexual harassment in schools or the matters of sexual stereotyping, androcentric language and school communication. The most visible manifestation of discrimination on the grounds of sex is the sexual harassment. As of the 1 January 2004, the Labour Code lists the notion of sexual harassment, which is understood as “any unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, or in relation to the sex of an employee, with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of an employee, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive atmosphere; this conduct may include physical, verbal or non-verbal elements” (Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment 2009, pp. 2–3). Apart from physical contact, i.e. “groping”, other manifestations of this phenomenon include:

- staring;
- “jokes” with sexual innuendos;
- comments on clothing and appearance;
- double entendre gestures;
- sexual proposals;
- erotic allusions;
- comments on talents or the lack of such in relation to one’s sex;
- placing images or posters presenting female or male nudes in common spaces (e.g. office rooms).

There are two types of sexual harassment: the so-called *quid pro quo*, when a superior offers the employee a raise or other privileges in return for sexual services (Warylewski 1999, p. 176) and abuse through the creation of a hostile working environment. The latter refers to a situation in which an employee feels harassed by their colleagues, e.g. a woman whose male colleagues put images of naked women on the walls. It can be asserted that sexual harassment is treated as a violation of human dignity in the workplace (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions 2002). The European Commission defines it as “unwanted sexual conduct or any other behaviour that refers to gender, which violates the dignity of women and men in their workplace. The definition includes: unwanted, inappropriate, or offensive conduct; conduct that affects the decisions associated with employment; conduct that creates an intimidating, hostile or humiliating working environment” (Agency for Safety and Health at Work 2009, p. 62). The third study on working conditions revealed that 2% of respondents have experienced sexual harassment in the past 12 months.

Women are far more exposed to harassment than men (4% vs. 2%), especially in professions dominated by men (Agency for Safety and Health at Work 2009,

p. 62). European studies also show that 30–50% of women and approx. 10% of men have experienced some form of sexual harassment or unwanted sexual conduct in their workplaces. Men perceive harassment as less offensive and experience its negative consequences less frequently (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions 2002). In Poland, 1 out of 20 women admits having been the target of inappropriate sexual behaviour (Wenzel 2007, p. 8). Sexual harassment is a phenomenon that eludes simple diagnosis, as its victims feel guilty of its occurrence, which discourages them from disclosing it. Additionally, the targets' social environment often considers (e.g. the school environment) them complicit in the occurrence of the situation. The reasons why victims do not seek assistance include, *inter alia*, the fear of losing their job or the fear of stigmatisation in the working environment.

Although the Polish and the foreign literature explore sexual harassment as an independent pathology of working life, there can be a causal link between this kind of abuse and the phenomenon of mobbing. Once a woman or a man refuses their superior to carry out a sexual act, they can fall victim to the ensuing antagonistic behaviour. The European directive on equal treatment (Directive 2002/73/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2002 amending Council Directive 76/207/EEC) prohibits sexual harassment in the workplace, considering it to be a form of discrimination. The key elements of workplace policy against sexual harassment include such activities as:

- a clear, context-relevant definition of sexual harassment;
- detailed provisions on preventative measures;
- a procedure for filing complaints and designation of a person responsible for their handling;
- protection and support to harassed employees;
- sanctions for persons guilty of harassment;
- supporting initiatives, such as dedicated training programmes and education of persons responsible for the implementation of the procedures (Agency for Safety and Health at Work 2009, p. 63).

The issue of mobbing should be analysed from different, interdisciplinary perspectives, without disregarding the significance of the humanities, or the social (psychology, sociology, pedagogy) or legal sciences. Also, pedeutology and general didactics that focus on the context of labour studies contribute to the interesting achievements and experience in this field. The perspective of labour pedagogy plays a particularly important role in the debate. In Poland, mobbing became a subject of attention in the second half of the 1990s, and saw a significant growth of interest after the accession of Poland to the European Union. Yet the quality of knowledge and research in the field remains unsatisfactory. Therefore, there is a prevailing need for its expansion and of raising awareness with regard to this phenomenon. This can be achieved by collecting information from other fields of science and by use of the works of Polish and foreign scholars.

Psychological violence¹ is an interdisciplinary, multidimensional term, which causes the analysis from the sole perspective of pedagogical science to be inadequate and incapable of securing an objectivity of observation and assessment. The issue of mobbing attracts scholars from numerous fields, such as psychology, sociology, pedagogics, and other labour-related sciences. These disciplines also set the context in which this paper will attempt to define the causes, the process, and the impact that mobbing has on the working environment. Heinz Leymann is one of the researchers who created a solid theoretical basis for approaching the issue. He views moral harassment as a hostile, unethical, and systematically repeated conduct aimed against one or several persons. Mobbing renders the targets helpless and deprives them of their capacity to defend themselves. Also, the victims will remain in such a situation for as long as the mobbing activities continue. Such conduct takes place very often (statistically at least once per week) and continues throughout prolonged periods (statistically at least half a year). The high frequency and the extended time of exposure to hostile behaviours cause psychosomatic and social harm in the victims. Notably, in order to be considered mobbing, the conduct that is considered hostile and unethical needs to take place over a specified time and at a specified frequency. Such an interpretation of mobbing eliminates singular occurrences of such behaviour and points to the continuous and periodic nature of the violence. What provokes the debate is the time period included in this definition (at least half a year). The question whether such a precise criterion should be employed for diagnosing mobbing in the working environment remains open. Although current literature on psychological harassment does not focus heavily on this provision, for many institutions that support victims this requirement is indispensable for diagnosing mobbing. Meanwhile each person has a different "threshold of tolerance" to experiencing negative behaviours and it is this subjectivity of perception that lies at the base of the controversies.

French researcher Marie F. Hirigoyen offers a more in-depth perspective on the issue. She expands Leymann's concept by adding a psychological background for the use of psychological violence in order to locate the sources of the broadly understood psychological manipulations of other persons. In her interpretation, moral harassment includes all abusive behaviours (gestures, words, acts, attitudes) that, through their repetitiveness or systematic nature, violate the dignity and physical or psychological integrity of an individual and constitute a threat to their future professional career and degrade the atmosphere in the workplace (Hirigoyen 2003, p. 11). Doubtlessly, the author points to two highly important components, which will constitute the basis for my further considerations. As a starting point, Hirigoyen selects the repetitiveness of activities, which distinguishes singular violent acts from permanent psychological violence, while noting simulta-

¹ Both in Polish and international literature there is an on-going debate on the harmonisation of the terminology related to psychological violence in working environment. For the purpose of this article, the notions of mobbing, psychological harassment and moral harassment will be used interchangeably and treated as the same working life pathology.

neously that mobbing begins by emotional blackmail between two individuals in working circumstances. As for the interpretation of mobbing, a definition by two Polish scholars is worth noting, i.e. the approach proposed by Agata Bechowska-Gebhardt and Tadeusz Stalewski. The authors define mobbing as “unethical activity that is irrational from the standpoint of the goals of the organisation, and consists of long-lasting, repetitive, and unfounded abuse of a worker by their superiors or co-workers [...] with the aim of intimidation, humiliation, and limiting of their capacity to defend themselves. Although the perception of this phenomenon is subjective, it is intersubjectively verifiable. It is a multiphase process in which the perpetrator applies an array of manipulation methods, ranging from the most subtle and imperceptible to the most drastic ones, that result in victim’s social isolation, self-depreciation, a sense of guilt, helplessness, and rejection by co-workers, which eventually lead to high stress and somatic and psychological diseases” (Bechowska-Gebhardt, Stalewski 2004, p. 14). The definition above points to the aspects that reveal the complexity of this phenomenon. These include, among others:

1. the process nature of the phenomenon, which indicates that conflict situations, their posterior phases, and the eventual psychological terror, form a sequence of consecutive events;
2. the subjective nature of the phenomenon that can be verified intersubjectively;
3. groundlessness, i.e. mobbing takes place irrespectively of any specific complaints with regards to the performance of the victim (targets include persons who represent a potential threat to the perpetrator/person who resorts to the psychological terror);
4. the multi-aspect and internally diversified nature of mobbing, i.e. numerous factors that shape the occurrence and the process, which include: personality, qualifications and professional competences, cultural and social factors, and position in the workplace hierarchy;
5. manipulative dispositions – Hirigoyen holds that the perpetrators are extremely proficient in manipulating persons who they choose to convert into scapegoats. They subtly win over others, and create their own positive image in the eyes of their co-workers. They manipulate words in order to reach their own objectives (Hirigoyen 2003, p. 16).

When examining the *homo unius libri*, one inevitably sees the deficiencies of the scientific standpoints. The résumé of current literature distinguishes the elements of mobbing that in the light of contemporary theoretical and research approaches should be extended.

Thus far the literature has indicated that:

1. mobbing originates exclusively from conflicts (Leymann), and its causes include social factors, the personality of the head of the organisation, as well as the particular position of the victim;
2. the perpetrator undertakes their activities consciously;
3. the time factor is necessary to define mobbing (at least throughout half a year, once per week);

4. physical and sexual violence are considered a form of mobbing;
5. a victim cannot become a perpetrator of violence;
6. entire responsibility for the situation lies with the abuser.

It should be noted that caution is advisable rather than fully relying on the current theoretical and research achievements, as there is a risk of an overly literal transference and introduction of certain terms with regards to the educational theory and practice, especially in the face of lacking scientific research in this scope.

The extension should, above all else, include the following issues:

1. mobbing stems from an open conflict (Heinz Leymann), from a hidden conflict (Marie F. Hirigoyen; Susan Forward), as well as from the disruption of communication between the individuals in the school due to specific dispositions of the perpetrator;
2. the head of the school may undertake their actions both consciously and unconsciously (in the case of an emotional blackmailer);
3. while varying resistance to stress causes discussions over the time factor, the activities that are considered mobbing must take place periodically and in a systematic manner;
4. physical and sexual violence are not to be considered mobbing;
5. a victim of a manipulator (mobbing) may place themselves as a target as a result of the accumulation of anger, frustration, or powerful experiences;
6. to initiate their game, the manipulator must find a person who will permit it, i.e. a person susceptible to emotional blackmail (Kokot 2011, pp. 17–18).

A 2013 quantitative and qualitative study² identifies and classifies manifestations of mobbing behaviours taking into consideration the sexual innuendos produced by the perpetrators of violence – an issue which has not been adequately explored or defined by the current literature in the field of mobbing-related studies. The narratives of the teachers are consistent in reporting the presence of sex-

² The quantitative and qualitative study was carried out in 2013 at the Kujawsko-Pomorski Section of the B. Grabowska Anti-mobbing Association in Bydgoszcz. The research covered general education teachers. The statistical analysis that was carried out indicated that 46 respondents did experience or continue to experience mobbing, while 86 did not suffer from mobbing. Considering the fact that the sample consisted of 132 persons it is both surprising and troubling that almost one third of persons that contacted the B. Grabowska Anti-Mobbing Association in Bydgoszcz were exposed to mobbing. Out of 30 teachers that were invited to participate in the narrative interviews (after prior phone conversations), 10 teachers declined definitively and 20 persons agreed to participate in the study; 6 of these persons withdrew several days after the interview date was established and 4 resigned after the preliminary phase of the interview. Eventually 7 interviews with general education teachers who were experiencing mobbing were conducted in person. A refusal or a withdrawal from an interview happens quite frequently and is typical of persons recently exposed to mobbing or those who are undergoing the adjustment phase of pharmaceutical treatment in a psychiatric therapy. The persons who turned to BGAA and withdrew shortly afterwards were emotionally dysregulated, highly tearful and neurotic. They feared that someone might overhear them and pass on all the information to their superior. They suffered from a paranoia of sorts, fearing that literally everyone in the room knew the headmaster and would surely report only the bad things that were said about him. Such state is typical of victims of violence. Therefore, under such circumstances the refusal to participate in a study, and specifically in the interviews, is unsurprising.

ual, if not perverted, conduct in the contacts with this kind of perpetrators. While the literature on the subject associates sexual perversions with the pathology of sexual harassment, Leymann sees these activities as mobbing, when addressing the issues of mobbing. Moreover, inadequate attention is dedicated to the directions and the moments of occurrence of pathological behaviours. This means that the study reveals manifestations of sexual behaviours only in the case of perverse narcissistic individuals – an issue that has not been identified in the research conducted thus far. Hirigoyen contributes greatly to this matter, as she defines the perpetrators of violence as perverse-narcissistic individuals. The goal is not to stigmatise the heads of schools by unambiguously defining their guilt, but rather to define a certain set of behaviours that is typical of the abusers. In the Polish language the word “perverse” indicates a degeneration or distortion, pointing to deviations of psychological reactions in terms of drives in the sphere of thoughts and feelings, e.g. sexual perversion. Pinel’s works (1809), a breakthrough in the understanding of perversion, relate all the pathologies to a multiplicity of instincts. Pinel defined perversions, antisocial behaviours, or kleptomania as “...manias without delirium” (Hirigoyen 2002, p. 122), while the word narcissism owes its functioning in literature to Sigmund Freud who used it in 1910 in his research on homosexuality³. The DSM-IV international manual of mental disorders does not list narcissistic perversion among personality disorders (though it does, however, contain a category of narcissistic personality). As Hirigoyen points out, referring to the works of Kernberg (1975), the narcissistic pathology is convergent with what we describe today as a narcissistic perversion. Kernberg describes it in the following terms: “a sense of greatness, extreme egocentrism, and a complete lack of empathy. Still such individuals seek admiration and approval. These patients feel a particularly strong envy towards persons who they imagine to possess things which they themselves do not have, or towards those who seem to enjoy their life. Not only do they lack emotional depth and are incapable of understanding the complex emotions of others, but also their own emotions do not display much variation, and manifest themselves in a form of short, quickly subsiding bursts” (Hirigoyen 1975). The scholar mentioned above accurately attempted to capture the essence of the perpetrators of moral harassment by assigning their *modus operandi* to specific categories. Due to inadequate terminological solutions offered by the literature, for the purposes of this article, the selected behaviours are referred to as “dispositions”. The studied teachers note that an abuser with such dispositions:

has an overgrown ego, that is... I’d say it’s a larger version of Narcissus. (interview 3)

and uses the language to, *inter alia*, degrade a woman to a role of an object.

³ Freud borrowed this term from the works of Paul Näcke. The word “narcissism” was taken from Ovid’s myth, which depicts a narcissistic man who believes that he can find himself in the act of look at his own reflection in the mirror [Freud 1991, p. 273 and further].

But other than that he was famous for his dirty jokes. About women too, in general he was a real champion in this regard. I've heard he had a substantial repertoire. (interview 6)

He wanted to be funny, but these jokes were erotic, sexual. So this was the subject of the jokes, and younger teachers, the girls, would at first giggle, laugh. I'm very sensitive to this matter; after all I've had a long teaching career. (interview 3)

Referring this type of dispositions to the profiles proposed by T. Beck and A. Freeman, D. D. Davis draws a clear picture of a narcissistic personality. For such persons the strategy consists of, *inter alia*, pursuing splendour, riches, high power, and prestige. They are fiercely competitive towards persons who they consider to usurp the rights to such high status (Hirigoyen 2002, p. 47). Their main emotion is anger when they do not receive the adequate admiration, and in the case of unmasking, they easily succumb to depression (Hirigoyen 2002, p. 48). This description of the dispositions of the abusers should pave the way for further research and analyses, especially in the context of the psychological and psychiatric sciences. Also the issue of the intentionality of mobbers' actions and their awareness of the damage they inflict requires further analyses. Thus far, the literature on mobbing often presents a view that mobbing undertaken by the abuser is always intentional and conscious. Possibly, such an approach is justifiable to a high degree. However, the teachers who participated in the study point to the unconscious aspect of such conduct, and it seems that psychology and psychiatry can offer some insight on this matter, especially in the area of personality disorders. It appears that personality factors can determine the intentionality or the non-intentionality of mobbing activities – a fact that requires detailed research and interpretation by means of scientific studies. It should be reiterated that sexual violence and mobbing represent separate pathologies, which can, however, retain causal links. What is striking, though, is the conformity of the narratives of the interviewees. Each of them who faced this type of abuser (i.e. only a narcissistic-perverse type) pointed to the sexual and perverted manifestations. This thread requires, in a longer perspective, a more thorough investigation in the scope of the humanities, social, and medical studies. At this stage it is appropriate to stress that each person possesses traits that can be considered perverse or narcissistic. The typical ones include e.g. the need for admiration or lack of criticism. If they appear individually and incidentally, they are harmless – according to Hirigoyen, every human has a grain of perversion in themselves (Hirigoyen 2002, p. 121). This only becomes an issue if these traits appear alternately and periodically. What differentiates a narcissistic person from a person who simply behaved in a wrong way is the sense of guilt related to the harm that has been done. Although sexual harassment can affect both men and women, it is women who experience it more frequently. Among other things, this is caused by the socio-cultural patterns of education. Women are usually brought up in the spirit of submissiveness to male

dominance and the androgynous language it entails. It is also far easier to place them in a relationship of dependency. Having learnt non-aggressive behaviours in interpersonal contacts, women do not defend themselves, as according to the social norms, this would be un-feminine. In a statement presented below, an interviewee from the interview 1 describes the evening conversation she had with her headmaster on the matter of sex:

It was a girl from the second grade who came to me. She lived outside Bydgoszcz. We also had this very handsome boy in school, who was so aggressive that he was given individual teaching, as he was a threat to other pupils. But you know, at this age all that counts for a girl is looks, so she got infatuated with him. So, supposedly she went on soliciting him and this led to a sexual encounter, allegedly more than once, on the staircase of his house. And you know, I know the details, but it's hard to talk about it. The word got through to the headmaster. I don't know, I think it was the neighbours who reported on them. She was at his place, skipping classes. Allegedly, there were some hard-core, perverted pornographic things going on. At least the story said so. So, you have the teaching staff meeting, late evening, wintertime. At that time it was all good with us. No conflict. The meeting is ending. Empty streets. I was afraid of walking home in such situations – it's not a safe neighbourhood. And then he goes and says that I should stay. The school is getting empty, even his wife had left. We were completely by ourselves in this empty school. Oh, and this whole sex thing was, supposedly, with violence, completely perverted. As it turned out later, this was important. He invites me to his office, we sit in the office and he starts talking of the things he heard. Seemingly there was nothing about this conversation that could make me anxious, but at a certain point I felt fear. I'm sitting there and he starts talking. At first – it's not that easy to shock me with such talk – I jokingly commented, while listening about all this violence, that according to Brazilian tradition, if he hits her, he loves her. At that point I didn't know what he was driving at. I think I wanted to shallow the conversation. Hm... I'm still not sure if I should be talking about it, because I don't know if this was the actual nature of this event, or was it my sick, frightened imagination. And then he started telling me about it in an "aaaawful" great lot of details; the school is empty, it's just the two of us, and he tells me of these intimate situations, right off the bat he talks of all this perversion, violence, etc. And suddenly I realise that he understood my phrasing as some kind of acceptance of perversion. And he got so engaged in telling me the tiniest of details that, first thing, I started to wonder how did he know all that. Secondly, things got weird and I started to be afraid. I blabbed, maybe irresponsibly, I don't know. Such things happened quite often here, so my eyes didn't go wide open, I wasn't shocked that yet another girl... The air got stiff. I sunk deeper and deeper into the armchair and completely buttoned up. This was completely sick. And he's all like... and now all of a sudden he stops talking about Ewa, the schoolgirl, and he starts telling me a story about his friend from the university who had a husband who brutalised her and that this satisfied her sexually. And that's when I became really frightened and started dreading that this would not end well. I cannot explain rationally why. I don't know. I just asked him if that was it, and if could go. I didn't know how to make it end, because I could see he was getting turned on. (interview 1)

Violence, power, and mobbing become mainly the domain of perverse men. For the interviewed women it was mainly the sex-related jokes and touching that were the case, while voyeurism affected mainly girl students.

We wouldn't have him indulge in such foul jokes with us present, and it was only later that we've learnt that he once approached one of our younger colleagues, the youngest one. She had dyed her hair and she came to school with this newly dyed hair and he goes, and this was supposed to be a joke: "did she have all of her hair dyed?" That's what he told her. I've heard she was outraged. So you know... we didn't like that. (interview 3)

Each perverse human seeks dominance and power also through assigning others the responsibilities that, should things go wrong, can backfire on someone else instead of them. This type of person is never guilty of anything and "never gets his hands dirty". If a secret is revealed, they will come out impeccably clean. Such construction and camouflage of oneself remains an indicator of the diagnosis, which is related to the vision of a perfect man in the eyes of other teaching staff. The headmaster would spy on girls in the changing rooms when they were getting ready for their PE classes, and what's symptomatic, he only had classes with girls, and only those from the first grade of lower secondary school.

Just like that, when the girls were changing for their school sports club classes. Just like that he would enter their changing room and talk while the girls were changing. I'm not accusing him of, God forbid, you know what, I don't have any proof. I think that he went overboard in that respect. He was simply contacting these girls, women you could say. He would just go there and talk to them, they would get dressed and talk to him and just walk around. A thing exactly like that definitely happened, hundred per cent. (interview 6)

It is reasonable to presume that the interviewee's refusal to carry out an order (the teacher refused to watch over the girls and stand in the doorway while they were changing for their PE classes) contributed to his dismissal. Firstly, the period between the occurrence of the situation and the dismissal was rather short. Simultaneously it would be an element of removing witnesses, who could threaten the abuser in the future and attest to their sexual practices.

And the headmaster tells we should actually be in the girls' changing room. I say, "in what way should we be in the changing room?" He says: "Please open the door and stand facing outside. The door is to remain ajar. The changing room is here, and I'm supposed to stand here. The door is to be open. These were his recommendations. (interview 6)

Although this is open violence, the perpetrator directs it towards completely subordinate persons, who have lost their credibility and are considered liars by the rest of the staff (as a result of the perpetrator's actions). The goal is to instil

in the victim the sense that they cannot do anything because no-one will believe them. Additionally, the girl students of the lower secondary school from the interviewee's story were usually troubled youths, from families where violence and pathological behaviour occurred on a daily basis. The headmaster's selection of persons was not accidental. He would see them on a regular basis and take them on school trips, even after they graduated.

We were in Kręgiel. They have these triangular Brda-type summer houses by the lake. And I know that two girl graduates were there. We were there with some lower secondary school class on a two- or three-weeks-long summer camp at the end of the school year. So there were these two graduates and he had a special, separate summer house for them. I know that he would visit them for conversations in the evening. They came there specially, they stayed there for the nights, and so on; they had finished school like two or three years earlier. This is not some figment of my imagination, you can ask my colleague with whom I worked, he works there. I witnessed that; the girls would just come over. So in general he had a good rapport with women, but not women, girls one could say. (interview 6)

I dare say that he didn't have such a rapport with his wife. I think that he either had a very limited contact, if he went on like that, because I cannot image it otherwise. I cannot imagine such situations. A guy in his fifties. I don't know, but you could tell he liked to work with the girls. (interview 6)

The headmaster initiated activities with sexual innuendos. Without female teachers' consent, he would touch them under the pretext of picking a speck of dust. The interviewee indicates that initially she had forgot about it, but this was the main reason for her avoiding the perpetrator. Such a statement is common for all the mobbed female teachers.

He's a smoker, I'm a smoker, so, unfortunately, I thought that before leaving I would have a cigarette with my friend. The head of the village joined us. I knew the head of the village as a decent man, so I didn't expect him to react to this kind of behaviour of the headmaster. So the headmaster goes up to him and says he'd join and that we're not going to have a smoke, but rather to have it off with Mrs Marta. I didn't know how to react. I looked at the head of the village, he looked helplessly at me and my friend, and we pretended we simply never heard it. He was a bit surprised that nobody laughed. So we went there and had this cigarette. (interview 4)

The activation of the "repression" mechanism is typical of targets of violence. Also in the context of sexual violence. For the perpetrator, any denial or refusal to stand such conduct serves as an impulse for revenge.

Was he a sleazy man? I'm not saying he was not handsome, ugly, or whatever, it was about his behaviour, the way he looked (?), a speck of dust here, a speck of dust there, it just irked me terribly. Wojtek (victim's husband) says "You go and tell him not to touch you anymore, or I will come and explain it in a different manner". So it's this

kind of behaviour. That's what I forgot about when I talked about these jokes. Because back then this was the cause. We started, at least we... avoided. (interview 5)

To understand better how men received "the weapon in the form of genitals" (Brownmiller 1975, pp. 14–15) and the consent for dominance in a time in which there is so much talk of equal treatment of men and women and the policy of coherence, it is necessary to go back to the period when sexual, physical, and psychological violence were considered a sexual fantasy of victims who brought it upon themselves. Women's hysterias, since the times of Freud (eventually he withdrew from the concept), revealed that the cases of rapes and sexual perversions were not incidental, but were in fact very frequent among the bourgeois milieus, which at the time enjoyed an impeccable reputation. The feminist movements and their activities managed to redefine this sexual act as an act of violence carried out at the will of a man and as a result of the intimidation of the victim, as opposed to the prior conviction that rape was a result of the woman's hidden desires. Also it was accentuated that the psychophysical consequences of sexual violence were to be related to post-traumatic stress caused by exposure to traumatic events. Acquiring such knowledge took years of struggle in a "male dominated world". This inspired other female researchers to continue their activities for women and children who suffer from sexual and symbolic violence. Although further and more detailed studies on headmasters' sexual violence against female teachers in the context of mobbing are necessary, it is also important to take into consideration the witnesses of this kind of violence and the reasons why they condone these actions, and why, in spite of being against such conduct, they chose to ignore actions that are punishable by imprisonment under the Polish legislation. It is worth to cite a statement by one of the interviewed teachers, who recalled the relations between one headmaster and women in the following way:

In the school there is the headmaster, the wife, and his lovers. Now, one of these lovers informs everyone who's new on the job that she lost her virginity to the headmaster, so she can do whatever she wants. And she can do whatever she wants. Because after having worked for so many years, I know that she can do whatever she wants. For him a woman is an instrument for bed. I'm certain. Never in my life have I met such a sexist. He's a sexist to me. Everyone can tell that each of them knows everything. The wife talks to the lover ... (interview 2)

The consequences of using mobbing can be related to the notion of post-traumatic stress syndrome, which describes the psychosomatic impact of long-term exposure to stress and trauma on the functioning of a person. It offers clear diagnostic criteria that are useful for diagnosing the experience of violence, such as rape, prisoner of war's stress, etc. The mentioned scholar rightly observes that this violence is specific, i.e. the scale and damage can be defined, especially since the conditions in which it took place are known. In the case of sophisticated psychological violence such conditions are not entirely met. Moreover, it should be noted that initially it is the victim who is stigmatised as the source of the conflict. This

implies difficulties in diagnosing e.g. the post-traumatic stress mentioned above. Hence, I agree with Herman that it is justified to introduce a definition of complex post-traumatic syndrome into the literature that would cover the entire range of psychosomatic states, not only the singular disorders (Herman 2004, p. 130). What a teacher who suffers from a mobbing-induced PTSD fears the most is that the difficult experiences might reoccur. This constant tension and waiting for an attack force the victim to avoid the perpetrator, the teaching staff, and persons who the victim sees as potential attackers. As a result, the school co-workers often see the victims as withdrawn persons who do nothing to counteract the pathological situation. Meanwhile, the victims focus all their strengths on survival. This remains imperceptible on the outside, as the perpetrator skilfully makes sure to deprive the target of autonomous and subjective relations with other persons. Living under a permanent pressure eventually motivates such teachers to consult a psychiatrist.

Thus commences the stage of sick leaves. The interviewed teachers recall this period in the following manner:

I couldn't cope emotionally and I took a sick leave. So, yeah, actually he was just toying with me. All this time he was just playing this wanton game of cat and mouse. Was it the feeling of guilt? Was it that he wanted me to fear him? Or... What did he want? Or simply to break me. Which he actually succeeded at. Once I took this sick leave I wrote him an application for granting a convalescent leave... (interview 5)

The victim's sense that the abuser continues to function alongside them exposes them to permanent fear and anxiety that the traumatic events will reoccur. Such conditions significantly reduce their capacity to function at work. Instead of defending themselves the victims want to survive. The stress they experience is so strong that it compromises the aspects that give subjectivity to human beings, i.e. autonomy, independence, the sense of agency, etc. Apart from the somatic ones (circulatory system, gastrointestinal tract, skin changes, etc.) the consequences of mobbing include other visible and dangerous effects for health such as changes in the psychosocial functioning of the teacher, i.e. the dysregulation of moods, reduced self-confidence, reduced self-esteem, etc.

Mobbing (and its sexual dimension) is a phenomenon that initiates a process of psychosomatic disruption of a teacher's functioning in school. It usually begins with single acts, which gradually gain intensity, causing negative effects in the body of the teacher, as well as the deterioration of their functioning in their working and private life. The consequences faced by the targets of mobbing include temporary exclusion from working life, breakdown of their psychophysical state or, ultimately, the termination of employment. Herman notes that "There is war between the sexes. Rape victims, battered women, and sexually abused children are its casualties. Hysteria is the combat neurosis of the sex war" (Herman 1997). The sexual dimension of psychological violence is a real and evolving threat for a teacher in their working situation. It transcends by far the ethical aspects, violating human dignity, which evidently affects the functioning of a teacher in a contemporary school.

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Summary

Sexual aspect of mobbing in schools in the relations between the head and the teacher: nature, manifestations, implications

This article is an exploration of the sexual dimension of mobbing in school relations. It maps the set of practices, manifestations and implications surrounding this kind of problem related to the teachers' work and looking at the pathologising aspects of teachers' identity.

Keywords

mobbing, school, teacher, power relations, sexuality

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