ABSTRACT

GENDER, YOUTH AND VIOLENCE

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In this presentation I will discuss some of the preliminary findings from a study organised by the Women’s Research Centre in Iceland on “Gender, Youth and Violence”. The focus of this study is the relation between gender and violence and how these affect the experiences of young women and men. The theoretical viewpoint is social constructionism and its understanding is that violence is socially and culturally constituted. The research methods consist of: quantitative and qualitative content analyses exploring how representations of violence in popular media aimed at young people are gendered; and interviews (with groups of young women and men) to evaluate how violence affects young people (14-20 years old) and their ideas about gender and violence. I will discuss some of the main trends found in this study but then focus specifically on the analysis of school magazines (written by young people, 16-20 years old, and aimed at their peers). How do these magazines construct femininity and masculinity and how their notions of power and force are sexualised. Many of these representations of gender and violence are at the level of fantasy. I will try and address the question as to what extent we can say that these fantasies of power are fantasies of gender identity. I will look to the interviews with the young people for some clues to that question and try and shed some light on the role fantasies and actual experiences of violence play in their lives.