

# **Belonging and violence: Adolescent girl's identity performance**

**Helena Louhela**

Gender Studies, University of Oulu

## **ABSTRACT**

Adolescent girls' self-identities are easily built-in relation to their close ones, and girls tend to speak of themselves as in connection with others. This relationship-oriented definition of selfhood can offer a sense of well-being, but alternatively, it can produce a vulnerability and a dependency, especially if the interaction of the relationship is unequal or violent.

This article focuses on how violence and belonging can entangle with each other and appear in an institutionalized girl's identity performance within the lifespan. The attention is especially on one friendship and its harmful impact on the girl's identity performance. The data was collected by half-structured interviews during the years 2013-2017. The theoretical framework of the study – a feminist reading of the theorization on identity, belonging and the politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2011) from an intersectional analytical perspective are essentially part of the analysing method of the longitudinal case study.

In line with Yuval-Davis (2011), identity is considered as individual or collective stories that people tell about themselves and others, and through those stories they review, and in some cases perform, who they are. The potential lack of belonging to safe environment during childhood can heighten the girl's risk of getting involved with unhealthy relations. Belonging following from peer support and acceptance, can lead for adjustments in a girl's own identity performance according to the values and rules of the peer/peers. Belonging to a group where violence is normalized, increases tolerance and acceptance for violence but it can also paradoxically provide a sense of safety.

**Keywords:** Case study, gender violence, longitudinal research, politics of belonging, sexual violence