

A society of harassment?

Harassment, an internalized mechanism of the neoliberal society

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Abstract

“Harassment” is a term you certainly hear often. At school, at work, in the street, on his phone screen, this word seems to have crept into all places of our life. He is one of those things dangerous by their imperceptibility. We live in a society in which conformism reigns and where difference is rejected. A problem that you don't see, you might think it doesn't exist, so it's important to open your eyes to this phenomenon that surrounds us.



We live in a neoliberal society. Neoliberalism can appear to be a difficult object to define and understand. It is characterized by a legitimation of the rise in power of large multinational companies, particularly in the context of the globalization of our economies. Neoliberalism is at the origin of the deregulation of the economy, linked to hostile and skeptical discourses with regard to the regulation of the activities of market actors, of socio-economic inequalities between individuals, and is hostile towards the state and public authorities. In neoliberal society, we are all in constant search of performance and efficiency. We constantly evaluate each other. This evaluation involves looking at others overflowing with judgments and preconceptions. Conformism is king and the difference pointed out. This exclusion of difference is one of the causes of harassment.

Harassment is a repetition of words and actions that have harmful consequences on the physical or psychological level of a victim. It is a form of violence that is invisible and difficult to anticipate. Moral harassment is manifested by repeated acts which have the object or effect of violating rights and dignity, impairing physical and / or mental health, or compromising the social and professional future. The definition seems clear, but in reality it is difficult to prove it, even though it has very serious consequences for the victim. The law makes no exceptions to the nature of the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, nor the environment in which the harassment takes place. Whether it occurs within a couple, between colleagues, neighbors, students or others, harassment is reprehensible in all situations. The sanction is defined according to the extent and frequency of his actions. Although national and international institutions fight against harassment, this form of violence remains very widespread, because it is invisible. It is therefore important to explain the causes of this harassment and how neoliberalism influences these mechanisms.

This article mainly refers to French law, which is rather exemplary on the subject. France has nothing to envy its peers when it comes to the fight against harassment, although improvement is obviously always possible.

Bullying at the heart of secondary socialization at school: the tyranny of conformism

School bullying, a misunderstood social violence

Harassment begins at a young age. Indeed, one of the most common and harmful forms of bullying involves school. *“About 1 in 10 students experience (...) problems with bullying while just over 1 in 20 can be considered bullying of concern”¹.*

According to UNICEF, we speak of bullying *“as soon as a child is the object of criticism, insults, racketeering and repeated violence on the part of one or more students”²*. It should be noted that we also speak of school bullying when this kind of behavior takes place on the part of a member of the teaching staff on a student. School bullying can have a serious impact on the child who is the victim. It can lead to lifelong disorders, school phobias and push these children to suicide. According to Eric

¹ DEBARBIEUX, E. (2016). *L'école face à la violence : décrire, expliquer, agir*. Malakoff: Armand Colin.

² UNICEF. (2019). Le harcèlement scolaire. *Unicef.fr*. [online] Available at: https://www.unicef.fr/sites/default/files/fiche_thematique-myunicef-le_harcelement_scolaire.pdf. [Accessed 23 Oct. 2020].

Debarbieux, a French teacher, the mechanisms corresponding to school bullying are so-called “ordinary” violence but which deserve to be taken into account. The dangerousness and the consequences of this “micro-violence” come from their repetition. They tend to affect the mental health of the students concerned, sometimes leading to depression and even suicide attempts. They also lead to a negative opinion of the school, as well as absenteeism, lack of trust in teachers and poor performance. For Patricia Mercader and Jean-Pierre Durif-Varembont, harassment is violence between peers since harassment brings together a set of behaviors between adolescents. The behaviors accompanying school bullying concern “*the banal, harmless behavior, conversations, jokes, pushing and beating, parades and struts, which are practiced in the playgrounds, in the corridors, in the school canteen*”³. The “banality” of these behaviors and forms of ordinary violence leads the pupils who are victims of them not to interpret them as violence and thus not to denounce them.

The International Convention on the Rights of the Child ensures that “*States Parties take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is effectively protected against all forms of discrimination (...); to provide the child with the protection and care necessary for his or her well-being (...)*”⁴. In fact, institutions, teachers and parents find it hard to notice the bullying, fail to spot the signs and often act too late. The issue of conviction is also complex because although this harassment has very serious repercussions on the victims, the culprits are minors, sometimes very young. This type of harassment nevertheless constitutes a criminal offense in France. Any adult student, any teacher, or any member of the staff who morally harasses a student over 15 years of age risks 1 year in prison and € 15,000 in fines⁵. If the harasser is a minor, the penalties are of course less severe and if he is under 13 years of age, he will have to face educational measures or sanctions for juvenile offenders. Finally, his parents remain civilly liable for the damage caused. But how can we get there?

Between games, jokes and violence: a misunderstanding around adolescent codes

The discrepancy and misinterpretation of adults towards student behavior are key elements that would shed light on why bullying in school is difficult to detect. Adults will tend to view forms of bullying as a game, “a normal way of doing things in their group”⁶. Banished as if they were adolescent-specific ways of communicating, these behaviors are in reality violence and persecution. It is also generally easier to recognize acts of violence between a member of a group on an exogroup person⁷, rather than between two members of the same group of peers. This confusion between normal gestures and attitudes in adolescent culture and those that constitute violence makes it difficult to anticipate and report bullying. This confusion shows the importance of understanding the mechanisms and processes that lead to and incite harassment. The social codes of adolescents are formed in reaction to the peer group. A teenager will adopt the codes of this group and internalize them. They will rely on these codes according to a duty of

³ DURIF-VAREMBONT, J-P. MERCADER, P. LECHENET, A., & GARCIA, M-C. (2016). *Mixité et violence ordinaire au collège et au lycée*. Toulouse: Erès Editions.

⁴ Articles 2 and 3 of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child.

⁵ Free translation - Article 222-33-2-2 of the French Penal Code : “The fact to bully a person through repeated remarks or acts aiming or having for effect to damage their living conditions and translated by an alteration of their physical or mental health, is punished with 1 year incarceration and a 15 000 € fine when those facts have caused a complete inability to work inferior or equal to 8 days or when they did not cause any inability to work.”

⁶ *Idem*.

⁷ In relations between groups, the exogroup is the gathering of individuals who do not belong to the group we are talking about.

conformity around characteristic identity elements such as clothing or even a language, distinctive elements of belonging to this group. The language further deepens incomprehension between students and teachers who do not recognize themselves in the evolutions of language which modify the criteria of normality and imply a trivialization of violence. Thus, teachers may take offense at certain insults used by students as a joke or emotional mockery.

Peer group socialization: the scourge of conformism

The peer group is a central part of socialization. It is a specific culture that produces values different from those created by school or family. This socialization by the peer group is complex because the adolescent is built up both under the influence of it, in the form of a relief from conformity, but also against it in the form of a resistance⁸.

We would be wrong to think that school is a place of perfect equality between students or that hierarchization only takes place from the world of work. Prioritization between peers begins at school and represents symbolic violence at the heart of the bullying process. This is a sharp classification between students who constantly assess each other according to specific criteria. These criteria are once again a matter of compliance with aesthetic, economic, intellectual or behavioral standards⁹. These standards are also constantly evolving. Matching these changing standards takes an ongoing effort. Although some adolescents become critical of this conformism and seek their individuality, failing to meet these criteria generally involves severe social sanctions, which are nonetheless invisible since they are intrinsic to adolescents¹⁰.

Violence between adolescents produces an effect of social control between them which is exerted through remarks, insults or stigmas. It is about controlling one's attitude, behavior and relationship with others. Normalizing peer behavior is a call to order for others, which organizes the functioning of the group and maintains tension. This control makes it possible to ensure security of the rank granted to the group in the hierarchy put in place. This hierarchy is particularly present among girls, who are instilled with a strong competitive spirit, going in the direction of gender stereotypes. This social violence is often masked by the obligation to take comments and insults with humor: "you have to laugh to break free from the ever-threatening stigma" and accept the social control and the relations of domination that result from it¹¹.

Cyberbullying: when hatred has no limits

With the democratization of social networks, harassment has found a new playground. More than ever, we are harassed at all ages but also everywhere, all the time. Cyberbullying is defined as harassment "*committed through the use of a communication service to the public online or through a digital or*

⁸ BARRÈRE, A. (2013). *École et adolescence : Une approche sociologique*. Bruxelles : de Boeck.

⁹ DURIF-VAREMBONT, J-P. MERCADER, P. LECHENET, A., & GARCIA, M-C. (2016). *Mixité et violence ordinaire au collège et au lycée*. Toulouse : Erès Editions.

¹⁰ BARRÈRE, A. (2011). *L'éducation buissonnière: quand les adolescents se forment par eux-mêmes*. Paris: Armand Colin. [online] 30 nov. 2012. Available at: <https://journals.openedition.org/rfp/3724> [Accessed 24 Oct. 2020].

¹¹ GODENIR, N. (2019). *De la socialisation des adolescents au harcèlement scolaire*. [online] 16 oct. 2019. Available at: <http://www.provincedeliege.be/sites/default/files/media/15162/7.%20De%20la%20socialisation%20des%20adolesce%20au%20harc%20C3%A8lement%20scolaire%20-%20N.%20Godenir.pdf>. [Accessed 2 Oct. 2020].

*electronic medium*¹². As regards harassment, it has the status of a crime in French law. When someone is a victim of this kind of behavior, they can request the removal of the posts from their author or the platform used. Once again, France seems ahead. A law was indeed adopted in June 2020 aimed at combating hate content on the internet. However, the latter is not unanimous, some fearing a limitation of freedom of expression on the internet. Like any form of harassment, cyberstalking consists of humiliating, intimidating, spreading rumors, insults, threats, defamatory remarks, etc. repeatedly. The publication of a degrading or humiliating photo or video for the victim, digital identity theft or hacking are also forms of cyberstalking. This phenomenon mainly affects adolescents who are the most present on social networks and are not necessarily aware of the repercussions that a publication can have. Cyberbullying can leave consequences for those who have been the victim of it, similar to those of other forms of bullying: anxiety, sadness, loneliness, insomnia, loss of self-confidence, social phobia, etc.

Harassment: psychosocial mechanisms of abusive relationships at work

In an idea of harassment prevention, it is necessary to see harassment as more than a simply individualistic construction of social relations between a victim and his/her persecutor. Rather, it is about highlighting the social environment that surrounds these two figures. This environment corresponds to a collective dimension which is part of the new management methods. We must broaden our approach to harassment as the result of a rise in arbitrariness or even ostracism, a hostile rejection of a member of a community by his peers as a characteristic of professional contexts, even of society. Nowadays.

Harassment at work: what the law says

Once you reach adulthood, you might think that you are done with bullying, that by growing up, by maturing, you would no longer allow yourself to humiliate a person, but this reality is very utopian. The professional environment is a place of significant moral harassment, which can destroy the career and the life of the employee who is the victim. Article L1152-1 of the French Labor Code explains that *“no employee must be subjected to repeated acts of moral harassment which have as their object or effect a deterioration of their working conditions likely to infringe their rights and dignity, impair their physical or mental health or compromise their professional future”*. Bullying at work can have different repercussions on the victim. It creates emotional instability (anxiety, frustration, loss of self-esteem, ambition, motivation), physical health problems (fatigue, lack of sleep), mental health (depression, social phobia, suicide), a loss of credibility (destruction of reputation, of confidence), or even leads to a loss of employment (by resignation or dismissal).

Bullying constitutes violence and is often carried out by one person or a group of people in the company. Moral harassment is often used to push employees to resign. According to article 222-33-2 of the Penal Code, *“the fact of harassing others by repeated comments or behaviors having as their object or effect a degradation of working conditions likely to infringe their rights and dignity, “altering his physical or mental health or compromising his professional future is punishable by two years” imprisonment and a*

¹² Article 222-33-2-2 of the French Penal Code.

fine of € 30,000". The World Labor Organization also condemns harassment at work, in a landmark convention on the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work adopted in 2019:

*"The term "violence and harassment" in the world of work refers to a set of unacceptable behaviors and practices, or threats of such behaviors and practices, whether they occur on one occasion or repeatedly, which are intended to cause, cause or are likely to cause physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, and includes gender-based violence and harassment."*¹³

Harassment at work is therefore widely condemned, at state and even international level. However, this phenomenon is far from exceptional.

Moral harassment: psychosocial mechanisms of abusive relationships

First, it is necessary to see harassment as a process employing abusive relationship mechanisms. Moral harassment can be characterized by three basic aspects. A first aspect is what the American socio-economist Albert Otto Hirschman calls "the Exit". In economics, he shows that individuals have different choices when they are unhappy with a product. The first choice is Exit, a silent reaction when the customer simply changes products¹⁴. In sociology we translate it by the ability to leave the abusive relationship for a healthier relationship. However, we notice a great difficulty for individuals to leave the relationship or to challenge it because of the power relations and the dependence involved. The second fundamental aspect is the disbelief of the entourage who, instead of acknowledging the suffering of the victim, looks for the causes of the abusive relationship in their behavior. For example, in the context of street harassment, the entourage justifies the harassment by the "inadequate" dress of the woman victim. Finally, the last aspect is the guilt felt by the victim himself. Studies have shown that many trauma victims blame themselves and take responsibility for what happened to them. These three aspects are common to all forms of moral violence, but in order to understand moral harassment in the specific context of work we must take into account the impact of the evolutions and changes which take place in the professional field and which promote persecution.

Harassment, a symptom of new managerial methods

Harassment could then be considered as a symptom of these considerable transformations in the organization of work but also in its precariousness. However, contextual factors are often dodged in the various legal and psychological approaches to harassment. These approaches focus more on the so-called "perverse" behavior of people or on the consequences, notions such as an assault on the dignity of the victim, rather than on understanding the processes that would have created these abusive relationships. We can notice a paradox between the emergence of these issues of moral harassment and the attributes of the neoliberal system in which we operate. This system focuses on purposes which are in reality very utilitarian with a search for material interest whatever the price to pay while the speeches transmitted refer to terms such as subjectivity, speeches on motivation and social relations. This material interest contrasts with an over-sensitization of individuals resulting from different factors: the psychologization

¹³ First Article of ILO Convention on Combating Violence and Harassment at Work, adopted by the 8th Conference on June 21th of 2019 in Geneva.

¹⁴ HIRSCHMAN, A. (1970). Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press. Available at: <https://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674276604> [Accessed 25 oct. 2020].

of social relations, the emergence of the figure of the victim, but also the rise of many political aspirations and the recognition movement.

What about the context of managerial changes? There is a great tension between autonomy and heteronomy. New managerial methods want to give employees more autonomy (more flexible working hours, a variety of contracts, remuneration). This autonomy is actually biased because it is subject to efficiency constraints, the pressures to produce beyond expectations as well as dependence on having a job. According to Boltanski and Chiapello, the new labor mobilizations tend to promote self-restraint, empowerment and the empowerment and mobility of workers which constitute an obstacle to the formation of collectives and solidarity between employees at work, to ensure better efficiency¹⁵.

We can also see a phenomenon of employee sacrifice for the benefit of the company. The managerial system pushes the “fight for places” to its climax by individualizing careers and rewards that encourage employees to transfer their own ideal of excellence to the company. Thus, the survival of the company becomes more important than that of their colleagues or more important than their own survival. Employees agree to accept abusive relationships or persecution, as long as it keeps them in the company. The utilitarian pursuit and dependence on work and related relationships take precedence over the survival and mental health of the individual.

It is important to reconsider the passivity of those around the harassed person. In fact, the entourage, hitherto considered a contextual element of secondary importance, in fact plays an essential role in the perpetuation of the harassment. His passivity accentuates a hostility, processes of sidelining the victim who finds himself in a social vacuum. But this passivity also reflects a form of acceptance and complicity in the act of harassment, which justifies taking into account the entourage as an integral part of the phenomenon and not simply as a form of indifference. Harassment is therefore not a simple relationship between the victim and his torturer, but also involves the collective¹⁶.

Sexual Harassment: Persecution for Dominance

Sexual harassment is very present in the workplace. It refers to “*the fact of repeatedly imposing on a person comments or behavior with a sexual connotation which either undermines his dignity because of their degrading or humiliating character, or creates an intimidating or hostile situation against him.*”

¹⁵ SANCHEZ-MAZAS, M. (2011). Enjeux éthiques et socialité au défi dans le phénomène du harcèlement psychologique. *Éthique publique*. [online] 10 mai 2011. vol. 11, n° 2 | 2009. p. 51-61. Available at: <https://journals.openedition.org/ethiquepublique/103> [Accessed 24 oct. 2020].

¹⁶ SANCHEZ-MAZAS, M. (2011). Enjeux éthiques et socialité au défi dans le phénomène du harcèlement psychologique. *Éthique publique*. [online] 10 mai 2011. vol. 11, n° 2 | 2009. p. 51-61. Available at: <https://journals.openedition.org/ethiquepublique/103> [Accessed 24 oct. 2020].

or offensive”¹⁷. Sexual harassment is different from sexual assault because it does not involve physical touching¹⁸. Most sexual harassment affects women.

The first such study came out in 1970 and showed that women sexually harassed at work were often secretaries or assistants to men hierarchically above them. Women have imposed themselves and have taken decision-making and managerial positions since these first figures. One would then think that sexual harassment in the workplace would disappear. However, an investigation published in *Daedalus*¹⁹ shows us a completely different truth. In the three countries analyzed, Japan, Sweden and the United States, women who supervise mainly men are 30% more exposed to sexual harassment than when the subordinates are women. In Japan, it appears that women executives are victims of jealousy on the part of men. In historically predominantly male companies (technology, construction, finance), female executives are seen as a threat to male identity. They harass to regain power. In general, the causes of this harassment are often the place that men give to women in society, not considering them as their equals. Still too few women file complaints of sexual harassment in the workplace, for fear of losing what they have been able to accomplish.

The law, however, is very specific and strict on the issue of sexual harassment. The United Nations and regional treaty systems have recognized sexual harassment as a form of discrimination and violence against women. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) defines violence against women as “*all acts of violence directed against the female sex, and causing or likely to cause physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including the threat of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether in public life or in privacy*” (article 1). Sexual harassment is therefore included in this definition. This Declaration encourages the development of criminal, civil and administrative sanctions, as well as preventive approaches to eliminate violence against women (article 4 (d-f))²⁰. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)²¹

¹⁷ Free translation - Law n°2012-954 of August the 6th of 2012 relative to sexual harassment: “The facts mentioned (...) are punished by 2 years incarceration and a 30 000€ fine (...) Sentences can be grow heavier with 3 years incarceration and a 45 000€ fine when facts are committed: 1° By someone abusing their position of authority conferred by their functions ; 2° Upon a minor of 15 years old ; 3° Upon an individual whose vulnerability, due to their age, illness, disability, physical or psychological deficiency, or a state of pregnancy, is visible or known to the perpetrator ; 4° Upon an individual whose particular vulnerability, or dependency resulting from state of social or economic precarity, visible or known to the perpetrator ; 5° By multiple people acting in the quality of perpetrator or accomplice”.

¹⁸ 5 body parts said to be “sexual” are: genitals, bottom, breasts, thighs and the mouth.

¹⁹ FOLKE, O. RICKNE, J. TANAKA, S. TATEISHI, Y. (2019.) Sexual Harassment of Women Leaders. *Daedalus*.

²⁰ Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women: “*Develop penal, civil, labour and administrative sanctions in domestic legislation to punish and redress the wrongs caused to women who are subjected to violence; women who are subjected to violence should be provided with access to the mechanisms of justice and, as provided for by national legislation, to just and effective remedies for the harm that they have suffered; States should also inform women of their rights in seeking redress through such mechanisms*” (article 4(d)). “*Develop, in a comprehensive way, preventive approaches and all those measures of a legal, political, administrative and cultural nature that promote the protection of women against any form of violence, and ensure that the re-victimization of women does not occur because of laws insensitive to gender considerations, enforcement practices or other interventions*” (article 4(f)).

²¹ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women New York, 18 December 1979. Article 1: “*For the purposes of the present Convention, the term “discrimination against women” shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.*”

requires States Parties to take appropriate measures to eliminate such discrimination in all areas (Articles 7 to 16). In addition, the Beijing Platform for Action, paragraph 178 (b)²², recognizes that sexual harassment is a form of violence against women and a form of discrimination, and calls for ensuring that governments pass and enforce laws on sexual harassment and that employers develop anti-harassment policies and prevention strategies. Sexual harassment therefore seems to be one of the most supervised, international texts giving an example to the laws of the various signatory states. However, we can clearly see that women are still victims of this harassment everywhere.

The consequences of normative pressure: neoliberal alienation

According to French psychiatrist Olivier Labouret, neoliberalism is a conditioning of conformity and mass normopathy which results in duplicity, a double attitude among individuals. Everyone would pretend to adhere to increasingly unfair and sane criteria and standards, simply because one has to submit and conform to others.

Neoliberal propaganda

How does the neoliberal system succeed in enforcing conformity? According to Naomi Klein, a Canadian-American essayist, this is the result of the strategy of psycho-economic shock. This strategy consists of the systematic application of “cognitive-behavioral methods of submission”. A very barbaric term that groups together positive and negative reinforcement methods aimed at influencing the behavior of individuals to be submitted. This method is also known as the carrot and the stick.

The “carrot” corresponds to the exceptional propaganda of entertainment, consumption and techno-scientist propaganda (myth of progress, growth, improved performance...). This propaganda is operated through advertising marketing, television, ICT (information and communication technology), video games, etc. This ubiquitous advertising sets the standards of society. It is based on the cult of money, a promise of happiness and possession. In a sense, marketing enforces compliance: it indicates the latest trends, what to wear, what to look like to meet standards. Advertising, the brand phenomenon and even social media influence teenage standards enormously. Not wearing the same clothes as others or not meeting beauty standards becomes a factor of exclusion and harassment at school.

The “stick” is a policy based on fear, the enemy within and the scapegoat. In the context of abusive relationships at work, the “stick” method involves social destruction accelerated by the generalized insecurity of jobs, management through evaluation, a key model of the universal cognitive-behavioral psychologization of neoliberal submission. There is a psychiatric deterrent that aims to boost worker morale and where any failure is labeled “depression”.

Submit, quit, resist, or get sick?

In this society obsessed with conformism, individuals have few alternatives and choices of behavior to adopt: they can submit, quit, get sick or resist. Let's look at the criticisms of management through

²² Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, paragraph 178(b): “Enact and enforce laws and introduce implementing measures, including means of redress and access to justice in cases of noncompliance, to prohibit direct and indirect discrimination on grounds of sex, including by reference to marital or family status, in relation to access to employment, conditions of employment, including training, promotion, health and safety, as well as termination of employment and social security of workers, including legal protection against sexual and racial harassment.”

evaluation. Christophe Dejours, French psychiatrist and psychoanalyst discusses the fear of precariousness resulting in a phenomenon of “voluntary blinders”. In other words, submission appears to be a tactical choice when faced with the fear of losing one's job. Individuals are then once again ready to accept abusive relationships, including harassment, by submitting to compliance and standards. Thus, to submit would be the sick neo-subjectivity of neoliberalism.

What do we do if we don't submit? Some desert, others resist, and still others fall ill (burnout, depression...). There is an increase in professional suicides, drug use pathologies (addictions) and even hyperactivity. This utilitarian society which pursues material interest conditions a “conformist and consumerist narcissism” which seeks immediate satisfaction. There is like an obsession for competition and immediate profit (as we talked about in the new managerial methods with the “fight for places”). There is a denial of the depression and the vulnerability that is going to be projected into a scapegoat. The instrumentalization of others leads to the use of new modes of social control that combine opportunistic mental health policies, a behavioral ideology of competition or a race for performance.

It is therefore not simply a question of understanding the motivations that push an individual to harass another person according to personal criteria, but rather to understand harassment as a phenomenon of collective society. It is about understanding how these mechanisms and processes are internalized by socialization from adolescence and then reproduced in different ways (moral, sexual, street harassment) in adulthood. Harassment is the product of excessive conformism and an obsession with norms and standards, leading to the rejection of difference²³.

Street harassment: between denial and guilt of victims

Now let's talk about street harassment. It differs from sexual harassment because it is stealthy, it is not here an executioner and his victim, a process that will last over time. Although women can experience attacks every day, it is usually not the same offender. French law has condemned this form of harassment since August 2018. Real progress in the fight against gender-based and sexual violence: for the first time, these invisible attacks are condemned. French law stipulates that: “*constitutes a sexist outrage the fact (...) of imposing on a person any statement or behavior with a sexual or sexist connotation which is detrimental to his or her dignity because of its degrading or humiliating character, or is created to against him in an intimidating, hostile or offensive situation*”²⁴. In the law, we therefore speak of “sexist outrage”, because yes, it is indeed women who are overwhelmingly harassed in the streets. It is sometimes difficult for a cisgender man to imagine that it is so common. What woman has not heard her words denied by a man around her who refused to believe that every day she could receive comments, whistles, hear horns, if not insults in her path. All women in fact, whatever their physique, their outfit or their attitude, are attacked, and no, these comments are not compliments, they are made to frighten, to destabilize, to humiliate. The abuser does not take into account the reaction of the woman to whom he is speaking. Some people make an amalgam between flirtation and street harassment, only in flirting, one expects receptivity. Flirting is a game of seduction with a fundamental element, absent from any aggression: consent. The streets and public spaces thus become a threatening environment for women,

²³ LABOURET, O. (2013). Les mécanismes psycho-sociaux de l'aliénation néolibérale. *Groupe Société-Culture*. [online] 31 jan. 2013. Available at: <https://blogs.attac.org/groupe-societe-cultures/articles-cultures-anthropologie/article/les-mecanismes-psycho-sociaux-de-1> [Accessed 24 oct. 2020].

²⁴ Art. 621-1-I. LOI n° 2018-703 of august the 2018 reinforcing the fight against sexism and sexual violence.

they must ask themselves questions that they should not before going out, about their outfit, the behavior to adopt, and the streets to avoid. France has shown real progress by enshrining in law a penalty against such outrages. The perpetrators risk a fourth class ticket punishable by a fine of 750 euros to 1,500 euros in case of aggravating circumstances²⁵. An additional internship sentence to fight against sexism and awareness of equality between women and men may be ordered by the judge. However, this law remains difficult to enforce and victims still find it difficult to be heard and taken seriously. Movements are increasing to raise awareness of the extent of this harassment, to put the blame on the aggressors and no longer make the victims feel guilty and invisible.

We are all influenced by what is said and done around us, throughout our lives. The neoliberal society in which we live therefore has a huge impact on our behavior. We integrate the codes and standards. In neoliberal society, according to Michel Foucault's idea, we are witnessing a rise in power of the “*homo economicus*”, a rational individual guided by his personal interests, self-centered., which presents itself on the market with its own interests, and which is capable of anything to satisfy them. In neoliberal society, according to Foucault, we become “self-entrepreneur(.se)”²⁶. This process leads to very strong competition between individuals and this competition, accompanied by standards and codes, leads to harassment. Harassment is therefore a social phenomenon, a collective phenomenon. It is the product of this excessive conformism, of the obsession with standards which leads to the rejection of difference. It therefore seems fundamental to deconstruct these codes, to accept and understand that differences are riches.

²⁵ The abuse of the position of authority on a minor of 15, vulnerability, in gang, in a public transport, because of their sexual orientation.

²⁶ FOUCAULT, M. EWALD, F. FONTANA, A. SENELLART, M. (2006). *Naissance de la biopolitique : cours au Collège de France, 1978-1979*. Éditions Gallimard and Éditions Du Seuil. Paris.

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