Special Issue Editorial

Youth, violence and equality: Perspectives on engaging youth toward social transformation

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Childhood and youth are developmental stages representing both opportunities and challenges. Although youth, to a large degree, represents a time of risk exacerbated by inequalities of gender, age, class, sexual orientation and other differences, it may also represent a time of transformation and an important opportunity for engaging toward social change. This special issue emerges out of a collaborative project titled, "Engaging South African and Finnish youth towards new traditions of non-violence, equality and social well-being", funded by the South African National Research Foundation (NRF) and the Academy of Finland. While this special issue focuses on work in the South African context, the collaborative project asked questions about both the South African and the Finnish contexts in an effort to address questions such as, to what extent work (research and practice) with youth addresses the key imperatives of (un)employment, age, generational tensions, violence and gender inequities in these two contexts. It also asked about the dominant discourses on youth, sexuality, gender, race and other forms of social difference informing work with young people. The project brought together researchers and activists working on issues of gender and sexuality; violence; income, racial, cultural, gender/sexual, health, age/generation, and other forms of social (in)equality; and social well-being among young people in the south and north. We approached this work through a transdisciplinary framework with the aim of critically reflecting on and learning lessons about policy, practices and programmes on engaging young people towards social change.[1]

Research with young people has documented intersecting concerns of relationship inequalities, sexual and other types of violence, and discrimination, with associated negative outcomes such as sexually transmitted infections and reproductive health concerns (Bhana & Pattman 2009; Msibi, 2012; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2013). Dominant and continuing patterns of male control over sexual encounters and women's sexuality are emergent

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across a range of contexts and fuel continuing patterns of violence (Shefer & Foster, 2009). Within this work, and across a range of local-global contexts, heteronormativity has been problematised as the site for continuing inequalities.

At the same time there has been a proliferation of interventions for young people, including school-based interventions, community-based programmes and activism. Critical research has shown how some of the intervention work with young people may be limited through a focus on risk and the reproduction of problematic or missing discourses on sexuality and sexual agency, female sexuality in particular. HIV intervention in South Africa, for example, has focused on imparting knowledge about HIV and sexual risk, placing emphasis on changing individual behaviour while ignoring the social contexts in which young people are located. A further critique of such interventions is that they lack a consistent and critical focus on gender and gendered power dynamics. In addition, current intervention work has tended to represent one-dimensional images of young men/boys and girls/women failing to attend to the complexities of young people's lives and the multiplicity of identifications they may have with femininities, masculinities and other intersections of identity.

The importance of engaging young people around issues of gender and sexuality is therefore evident, but there is also an imperative to move away from research centred on viewing young people's lives through a risk paradigm toward a shift in focusing on what young people themselves deem as important and to understanding the multiple and intersecting contexts in which they are located. Shifting away from the risk paradigm framed through an adult 'eye' might enable us to attend to the positive aspects and identifications young people might have with gender and sexuality, desire and pleasure. Additionally, the experiences of those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning (LGBTIQ) young people are also largely excluded from research. More work is needed on diverse groups of young people and their gendered and sexual experiences, lives and social contexts.

In this special issue we reflect on the dominant discourses emerging on young women, young men and young sexualities in current research, activist and programmatic interventions, with a focus on the range of continuing problems of violence and on efforts that might contribute to social transformation and equality.

In the first paper in this issue, Boonzaier and Zway draw on work from a participatory research project with young women who identify as lesbian or bisexual. Within the increasing attention given to work in the local context on black lesbian lives and subjectivities, they specifically address the silencing of work with young people, focusing on a group of young women between 13 and 17 years of age who identify as lesbian or bisexual. The

participatory photovoice project aimed to not only foreground the knowledge of the young women themselves, but also to challenge the almost inevitable linking together of black lesbian subjectivities with the notion of risk (such as risk of 'corrective rape'), an issue especially relevant in work with young people and sexuality. Boonzaier and Zway make the argument that centring the notion of 'risk' "tells only one kind of story about the lives of young people who identify as LGBTIQ and feeds into heteronormative discourses and the pathologisation of those deemed 'other'". The work shows how the young women resist not only the discrimination they experience from teachers and others, but also the construction of their lives as defined by 'risk' and victimisation. Their photo narratives and discussions about their lives illuminate the complex negotiations of identity they engage in, in the face of circulating narratives of safety, violence and community.

The issue of safety (and lack thereof) within a particular university community re-emerges in the paper by Ngabaza, Bojarczuk, Masuku and Roelfse, titled, 'Empowering young people in advocacy for transformation: A photovoice exploration of safe and unsafe spaces on a university campus'. Ngabaza and colleagues similarly attempt to challenge the widespread focus on risk and sexual danger in local and global work on campus safety by foregrounding, in a participatory photovoice study, the young people's own constructions of safety and lack of thereof. The authors draw on photo narratives about safe and unsafe spaces on campus collected by a third-year undergraduate class. The researchers in the study interestingly gave the students access to other students' photo narratives, providing them an opportunity to reflect on how their own constructions of safe or unsafe spaces on their campus may resonate (or not) with those of other students in their classroom. Students also presented their findings to the class and the work was exhibited for the entire student body and other stakeholders at the university to advocate for participatory discussions about injury and violence prevention – amplifying the importance of the social change element so fundamental to photovoice methodology. The findings show that a range of social identifications, notably based on gender, race, citizenship and class intersect with students' constructions of what may be deemed a safe or unsafe space offering a broadened understanding of safety and implications for violence prevention on campus.

The issue of exclusionary violence and bullying on the school playground is addressed by Emmanuel Mayeza in the following paper. Mayeza asks about the construction and policing of gender on the school playground, specifically in relation to the performance of masculinity amongst footballing boys at an under-resourced school in the Durban area. Mayeza expands the notion of where learning about gender takes place to beyond the classroom, positioning the playground as a key learning site "where children constantly regulate, monitor and evaluate each other's gendered performances". The author takes a child-centred ethnographic approach with the six- to ten-year-old children in the study,

arguing that adult-child power relationships should be democratised in order to engage with children as experts on their social lives. The work shows that children's gendered performances on the playground (specifically through the notion of who is allowed or not allowed to play football) are monitored and policed through violence and bullying. Football acts to symbolically produce and police distinctions between girls and boys, and hierarchies amongst boys, limiting children's possibilities for play. Mayeza importantly provides prevention implications and, amongst them, argues that teachers should attend to the important operations of identity that manifest themselves on the playground and that a relevant life orientation programme should foreground children's own knowledge and understanding about gender, bullying and gendered violence.

Learners' experiences of the Life Orientation curriculum is an issue picked up by Shefer, Kruger, Macleod, Baxen and Vincent in the final paper in this issue, which analyses the talk of Grade 10 learners in nine diverse schools in the Eastern and Western Cape. Shefer and her colleagues' research responds to the problems already identified in the sexuality education curriculum in Life Orientation in South African schools, specifically its silencing and the lack of ability to effect positive changes in the sexual and reproductive health and gender and sexual norms and relations of young people. The work finds that the lessons young people receive in sexuality education through Life Orientation reproduce the very discourses and practices that are meant to be challenged. The researchers find that young people construct the messages they receive around sexuality as punitive and disciplinary, involving 'danger, disease and damage'. These messages at the same time silence a discourse of sexuality as pleasurable and potentially empowering, inhibiting the development of sexually agentic young people. Importantly, teaching about sexuality is also found to reproduce the very gender binaries that are implicated in a range of negative sexual and reproductive health problems, gendered relations and violence, specifically the idea that men are powerful and potentially dangerous and women are vulnerable and must take primary responsibility around sexual relationships. Shefer and colleagues end with envisioning a sexuality education that serves the needs of young people, acknowledges their own sexual agency and ultimately contributes to transformation toward gender equality, non-violence and well-being.

REFLECTIONS ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF THESE ARTICLES FOR THINKING ABOUT VIOLENCE AND FOR DEVELOPING PEDAGOGIC INTERVENTIONS WHICH ENGAGE WITH THIS.

There is a history of scholarship, influenced by feminism and queer studies, which has raised concerns about the prevalence of forms of violence relating to gender and sexuality in everyday social relations in the home, school and workplace. This work draws attention to

the operation of gender power relations in various social contexts and how these underpin, produce and are exemplified in forms of violence. It also critiques the ways such relations are naturalised and normalised through patriarchal and heteronormative discourses. Following this line of critical enquiry, the articles in this volume pose questions about the nature of violence and what gets recognised and defined as violent or not.

They do so by engaging with particular groups of young people who are marginalised in various ways through normative constructions of gender, sexuality and youth. In this research the young people are addressed as potential authorities and knowledge producers about their social worlds and, at the same, are encouraged to reflect upon themselves and their everyday lives through their participation in various kinds of research activities including photovoice, drawing activities, loosely structured interviews and combinations of these. How these research activities were used to generate data about the participants, and how the researchers tried to engage with them as active agents with desires and vulnerabilities and as multidimensional and sexual beings, carry important implications, we suggest, for developing appropriate pedagogic interventions for highlighting and addressing forms of violence.

These include homophobic bullying and misogyny and the symbolic significance football holds in school, the gendering of safe and unsafe spots on campus and how these circumscribe the movements of various students. They also include the 'violence' perpetrated by particular kinds of public discourses and intervention and educational programmes, such as forms of life orientation in schools, which criticise sexual violence by problematising teenage sexuality per se and especially teenage women who express sexual desire and teenage women who identify as lesbian. Such interventions and forms of education contribute to stereotypes of men as subjects and women as objects of (hetero) sexual desire and to gendered forms of policing identities and marginalisation through sexuality.

In contrast, the kinds of participatory research practices in these articles may exemplify models of good pedagogic practice or ways of relating to and engaging with young people to explore and address social issues and social problems, and the significance they attach to these in their narrative accounts as particular and diverse learners or students.

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