



Normalised violence – narratives of SA youth

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South Africa's legacy



Context

South Africa's structural violence:

- ▶ institutionalised
- ▶ chronic
- ▶ invisible
- ▶ normalised

Seen in malnutrition, unemployment, child abuse
assault, rape

South Africa today

- ▶ post war society
- ▶ Cultural *anomie* (deep value erosion) as a result of lack of social structures/rapid social change (Schlottman 2011:81)
- ▶ patriarchal ideology + *anomie* erodes even minimal patriarchal protection of women and children
- ▶ young people socialised into non-explicit dominant discourse of violence in homes, schools, media

Young people today

- ▶ Critical need for self-esteem (replacing institutions and cultural norms) esp young people who are poor in an affluent society (McDonald 1999:208).
 - ▶ Increased self-esteem key factor for developing resilience to violent context
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Resilience

- ▶ Not just ability to overcome adversity, but capacity to negotiate for needed resources to be provided in meaningful ways (Ungar 2004).
 - ▶ not western, individual-based concept but a social construct taking into account structural inequality and historical circumstances (Kolar 2011:425).
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This study

- ▶ explores the perceptions of young South Africans to conflict. Part of a larger study.
- ▶ shows how the conflict stories of a particular group of young South African adults reflect their normalisation of violence and the resilience they negotiate.

Social memory

- ▶ Collective lived experiences – what is remembered and kept alive
- ▶ “Landscape of social memory” (Lederach 2005:142)
- ▶ Re-negotiating (‘re-storying’) history and identities – past patterns and future potentials – what ‘could be’ (ibid:139–140)

Methodology

- ▶ questionnaires to obtain a conflict profile of the participants
- ▶ Oral and written narratives from 19 participants (Xhosa, 18–25 years)
- ▶ narrative analysis of each narrative
- ▶ Two series of group interviews (three months apart) to probe deeper meaning of narratives

Narrative analysis

- ▶ especially useful for exploring how different parties view a conflict (Johnston 2005:278).
- ▶ can look at nuances and allow thematic understandings of conflict processes
- ▶ both a research tool for analysis and a theoretical framework for what narratives explain about people and conflict (ibid:277).

Findings

- ▶ initial conflict profile: participants perceive their conflict situations as difficulties of interpersonal communication, trust and respect.
 - ▶ However, narratives reveal how embedded and normalised violence is in their lives – in their homes, schools and neighbourhoods.
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Theme 1 – Rapid escalation of verbal conflict to physical violence

- ▶ *'As I try to explain, the father jump for me with golf stick, before I know I was bleeding and I took my hockey stick and go to him and... I beaten him in his rib'*
- ▶ *... I asked nicely can you please turn [the tv] on again. He started swearing me and my sister and I took that hot iron and put it in his face, because I was very cross.*

Theme 2 – Absence of positive role models

- ▶ In **The Angry Father**, the father and uncle come to reprimand the narrator armed with a golf club;
 - ▶ the men in both **The Brother** and **The Boyfriend** are physically and verbally abusive to women;
 - ▶ in **The Hot Iron**, the uncle's behaviour is hostile and threatening
 - ▶ **The Job Thief** lies in order to give the narrator's job to his girlfriend
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Dominant social discourses

- ▶ *If you are working, as long as you are working you the owner of the house. It doesn't matter if you are young or not. Then let's say for instance, my younger brother is working, he is going to own the whole place while our parents are in there but I wouldn't like it if he says something which is very disrespectful to my mother. Then the conflict starts.*
- ▶ *They are used to people acting on conflict. You must fight back, otherwise you are a coward. So for me, sometimes it's not even about talking. You know, even when you keep quiet, they still want to argue. They don't want you to keep quiet and just do what they want to. They want to push you and say very harsh words. Some people want you to put a fist in their face when you are talking to them.*

Theme 3 – Feeling angry and powerless

- ▶ *‘the more I was trying the more things went wrong and [my aunt] would shout at me and say bad words that brings a person down ... that you can do everything, you can kill yourself, throw yourself in a building, run away from home ...*
- ▶ *‘and here I was so lost trying to figure out and truly I didn’t know what to do, all I knew was I hate what I’m seeing’*
- ▶ *‘She couldn’t speak to anyone about what happened to her for days. She hated men for a very long time because of what had happened to her. She wanted to die, couldn’t live with the fact that something like had happened to her.*

Resilience

- ▶ *... I touched the money and I feel it and feel it and I just put it in ... and I said I'm just gonna leave it like that ... I'm not gonna take it ... I know that I'm going to do something better for myself ... I was not raised like that*
- ▶ *I never really acted, like in terms of ... someone made me angry and .. I didn't really act in terms of be angry or hit him because it's the way I always approach myself*
- ▶ *I saw that there must be someone between me and her ... so that this conflict can end you know and I decided that I'm gonna be that person that's gonna just shut my mouth.*

Implications

- ▶ Much youth conflict is “manufactured in social contexts rather than embedded in individuals” (Semmler & Williams 2002:2).
 - ▶ youth are perpetuating patterns of violence that seem to have become a normative strategy for resolving conflict in South African communities (Farr, Dawes & Parker 2003:31).
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Conclusions

- ▶ Most youth violence in SA is more a result of dominant discourse of violence than individual criminal intent
- ▶ not easily reversible in the short-term
- ▶ prevention strategies need to take 'normalisation' into account
- ▶ young people need support to build self-esteem and construct resilience

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