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The Gendered Nature of Violence: Implications for Sustainable Schooling

by

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Strategies for Nonviolence in Education

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INTRODUCTION

- Theorisation of gender has been enlivened by social constructionist notions of gender as fluid, multiple and complex manifestations of human abilities and potentialities.

- However, there has been little application of such theoretical positions to empirical analysis of gender-based violence, especially within the

  schooling contexts.

- Nations Conventions on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, defines gender-based violence as any act that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women (and girls) including threats or acts of coercion, deprivation of liberty, private or public, in the family or community (reference?).

- Dominant constructions of gender are play a vital role in the perpetration of gender-based violence.

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INTRODUCTION

- Connell's (1995) insights on masculinities is important in understanding how gender plays a vital role in violence relations.

- Connell suggests that gender is constructed in the interplay between material and social processes: "The bodily process, entering into the social process, becomes part of history (both personal and collective) and a possible object of politics" (Connell, 1995:56).

- This moves us from an understanding of gender as merely a culmination of pathology of the perpetrator, towards an understanding of violence as part of a broader system of masculine hegemony, domination and ascendancy.

- A scheme which works in tacit but complex ways in the service of patriarchy or male dominance over females.

- Another dynamic involves the issue of non-hegemonic masculinities or those that do not conform to the dominant norm.

- For instance gay masculinities, which tend to be positioned at the lower end of the gender hierarchy among men (Connell, 1995).

INTRODUCTION

- Morojele (2011) has found that boys' and girls' policing and enforcement of dominant gender values does culminate in violence being inflicted on those who are perceived to be not real boys or girls.

- Or as those perceived to be otherwise contest the ostracisation and minority social positioning cast on them by peers.

- Another issue is the idealisation of gender values which pressure boys and girl to perform masculinities and femininities in conformity to the dominant discourses.

- The constant pressure placed on children to conform to constraining gender roles – which More (1996) refers to as nothing masculine fantasies, makes them feel inadequate (field, 2001).

- Moore (1996) argues that degraded gender relations and concomitant gender-based violence results from of the thwarting that occurs when boys and girls try to attain the mostly impossible and idealised values and performances of gender. For boys, such feelings of inadequacy are experienced as a form of emasculation, as they contradict dominant constructions of boys as powerful and potent (Simpson, 1992).

INTRODUCTION

- Boys tend to live in a state of tension with, and distance from, hegemonic masculinity – the very essence of their being and source of power and privilege.

- Consequently, they may resort to violence especially targeted at girls, young boys and other children who are perceived to be weak and vulnerable as an attempt to conceal their feeling of inadequacy and thus resuscitate their masculine sense of superiority.

- Although boys are compromised by the dominant gender discourse due to the pain that they have to endure to maintain themselves as 'real men', some tend to all the same be complicit in maintaining and benefiting from the 'patriarchal dividend' defined as "...the advantage men (and boys) in general gain from the overall subordination of women (and girls)" (Connell, 1995:79).

INTRODUCTION

- The study of violence within schooling contexts need to accounts on how gender might be a central feature in most incidents of violence that take place in schooling contexts.

- Thus, foregrounding as a critical factor the question of human identities in the nature of violent social relations..

- The possible adverse implications of this on learners' educational attainment, well-being and continuity with schooling cannot be overemphasized.

- This paper is therefore set to provide a critical analysis of the forms of gender-based violence within a schooling context from the point of view of boys and girls.

- It addresses how girls and boys experience and navigate dynamics of gender-based violence and what we can learn from these in order to imagine suitable strategies aimed addressing gender-based violence in schooling contexts.

METHOD

- The study employed qualitative methodologies (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011; Mouton 2001) to provide data on the forms and boys' and girls' experiences of gender-based violence in one co-educational school in KwaZulu-Natal.

- A total of eight learners (4 girls and 4 boys) aged between 9 – 12 years, who were purposely selected participated in the study. Conducted over a period of three weeks, the study used semi-structured interviews as its methods of data collection.

- The semi-structured interviews took the form of gender-based focus group and individual discussions with girls and boys during the break, lunch and leisure time.

- They involved the use of a tape recorder to document the participants' responses, which enhanced ease of reference during data analysis.

- The use of a tape recorder allowed for verbatim citation of girls and boys views during the reporting and thus privileged children's voice in the discussion of the findings.

DATA ANALYSIS

- **Data Analysis**

- Firstly, the data were analysed through an inductive process whereby research findings were allowed to emerge from frequent, dominant and significant events in the raw data (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011).

- Thereafter analysis involved identifying broad categories of constructs across the data which illuminated forms of gender-based violence as per girls' and boys' own point of view.

- This necessitated a line by line reading of the different data sets and identification of salient (representative) quotes that would be used as illustrations during the discussion of the study findings.

- The second phase of data analysis involved identifying theoretically and conceptually informed themes across these categories (Cresswell 2009).

- This allowed for explicit themes to emerge, which included gender-based demeaning comments, unfounded sexual rumours, sexual gestures, comments and jokes, corporal punishment – all of which the girls and boys expressed as having deep undertones of bullying and sexual harassment.

FINDINGS

- **Sexual Gestures, Comments and Jokes**

- Boys are constantly engaging in sexual gestures, making comments or jokes about other learners. These gestures take the form of hand and lip movement and boys expose their tongue to girls.

> Hetty: Boys curl their lips to show girls that they want to kiss them.

> Amu: The boys show their tongue to the girls and they round their lips like they want to kiss the girls.

> Amu: One time I told this girl that I liked her and that I would like to hang out with her. She slapped me and then began to swear me. I feel that she should not have done that because I was doing it in a nice way. I did not hit her but I pushed her away from me.

FINDINGS

- **Sexual Violence**

- . The boys and girls in the sample did not understand sexual harassment substantially differently. Boys also endorsed that it is an act performed by males, and looked at it as a way of deriving sexual pleasure. The boy's responses speak as though sexual harassment is acceptable.

> Amy: *It's like boys abusing girls, to me it's like its wrong, so people say like why boys can't fight with boys, because they always fighting with girls, because it's wrong, another thing is that they know that girls are much, are like quiet, can't fight, majority. When a boy wants something from a girl, and keep going after her.*

> Elaine: *Wants to take the girl out on a date.*

> Nent: *Boys interfering with girls in a bad way. Asking a girl if she wants to do it [a reference to sex].*

> Amu: *Grabbing a girl in a lonely spot and try to kiss her and touch her private parts.*

> Linet: *When a boy says something to a girl about her body that makes her feel bad.*

FINDINGS

- The use of language to demean feminine behaviour— "stop acting like a girl" and "you behave like my granny" is comparable to the use of language negative to sexual minority learners —"you are so gay", and so on.

- Other comments included 'sexy', 'nice legs', 'nice body', 'moffie', 'bat', 'young one', 'ticky line', 'gay', and 'lesbian'. Learners of both gender use terms like 'skank', 'bitch', 'jezebel', 'ravin', 'slut', 'ho', 'gong', 'faf', and 'rig rat' – all of which refer to girls as prostitutes.

- Boys not only use sexual terms of abuse, but also show aggression towards girls' perceived degree of (hetero) sexual attractiveness e.g. "by saying they needed to diet", " should shave their legs", thereby evaluating girls' femininity.

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    Amu: *The boys show their tongue to the girls and they round their lips like they want to kiss the girls.*

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