

10

Learning from the Learners: How Research with Young People Can Provide Models of Good Pedagogic Practice in Sexuality Education in South Africa

Rob Pattman and Deevia Bhana

In our experiences of doing interviews and ethnographic research with young people in South Africa and elsewhere about their interests, concerns, aspirations, and relations, sexuality often emerges as a key theme. The frequency with which it is introduced by the young people in this kind of research highlights, we argue, the material and symbolic importance which versions of sexuality hold for them in their everyday lives. Much of this research has been school based, and what we aim to do in this chapter is to reflect on our research with learners, as school students are called in South Africa, and how sexuality is introduced, spoken about, and given meaning and significance by them.

It is often assumed that learning in schools is a process which takes place in classrooms and involves children as learners. But a great deal of sexual and gendered learning goes on in schools, both in and outside of the classroom, which is usually neither recognised nor named in formal curricula and educational discourses, and that access to this depends on us (as adult researchers)

R. Pattman (✉)

Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology,
University of Stellenbosch, Private Bag X1, 7602
Matieland, Stellenbosch, South Africa
e-mail: rpattman@sun.ac.za

D. Bhana

School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Private Bag X03, 3605 Ashwood, Durban, South Africa

researching young people in ways which position them as authorities and experts (Pattman and Kehily 2005).

When exploring young people's sexuality education in schools, our chapter focuses on sexuality, as it is introduced by the young people in our research, and how it is connected with broad activities and relationships in which they engage and participate which are not necessarily defined as sexual. We reflect on *what* we learn from the learners about sexuality as it emerges in their accounts about their lives and identifications as young people in and out of school. What do we learn about *intersectionality* through the sorts of connections they make between sexuality and gender, race, age, and so on (as sources of identification and dimensions of power)? We reflect, too, on *how* we learn this and the kinds of relations we establish with the young people in the research which enable them to engage with sexuality in ways which are pertinent to them.

This kind of qualitative research with young people carries implications, we argue, for developing forms of sexuality education, as advocated in the *Life Orientation* curriculum, 2003, which encompasses sexuality education in South Africa.

Engaging with Young People and Sexuality in Research in the Context of the HIV/AIDS Pandemic

Until the late 1990s and early 2000s, little research had been conducted on the topic of young people and sexuality in either South Africa or other African countries 'because it was deemed too private to make investigation either appropriate or feasible' (HEAIDS Report 2010: 27). This was, and still is, reinforced by cultural taboos concerning adults and young people talking about sexuality and by adult constructions of children, in many predominantly Christian countries, as non-sexual beings, through idealisations of youthful 'innocence' (and ignorance) in relation to sexuality. Indeed, one of the main contributions that more recent research with young people on the topic of sexuality has made in Southern Africa is that young people are themselves sexual beings, a view which informs and is reinforced by further research (e.g. Wood et al. 2007; Shefer and Foster 2009; Bhana and Pattman 2009, 2011; Jewkes and Morrell 2012; Msibi 2012).

Sexuality, as these studies have attested, is not something that becomes meaningful and significant only as we approach adulthood, even if it has been constructed in South Africa (Bhana 2007), as in many other societies

(Epstein and Johnson 1998; Kehily 2002), as a marker of adulthood by adults wishing ‘innocence’ on children and imagining them as asexual.

This research in Southern Africa has been motivated mainly by the HIV/AIDS pandemic as well as other social issues and concerns, such as sexual harassment and gender-based violence, and has attempted to explore the meanings and significance which young people, in particular communities and social contexts, attach to gender and sexuality and how these affect and influence their lives.

Such research has engaged with young people as sexual beings and provided insights on how they deploy gender and sexuality as categories, and the inequalities which frame these, though the research findings, as they are written up and presented, often do not address processes of knowledge production and identity construction as they occur in the research (Pattman 2015). In this chapter, we advocate an analytic approach which focuses on the dynamics of interview research with young people, and engages with how themes emerge, and are debated and contested by the different participants, how these connect with the identifications and relations they make in the interviews, and how these are tied by the participants with versions of gender and sexuality. We try to demonstrate this approach by presenting and analysing data from our research with young people, and situating what they say and how they say it, in the context of research encounters.

Our interest in the relational dynamics of research encounters is influenced by the work of feminist writers who have raised concerns about power and self-reflexivity in research (Coleman and Ringrose 2012). Such research demonstrates that relations of power are constructed in the very process of doing research, and that these are particularly acute when they are hidden. This is when the researchers seek to minimise their influence by constructing apparent conditions of objectivity and relate to those they are researching as ‘mere objects there for the researcher to do research “on”’ (Stanley and Wise 1983: 164).

Given that adults are often defined as figures of authority in relation to children, it is relatively easy for both adults and children to slip into these kinds of relations when the researchers are adults and the researched children and to take these for granted, particularly in school-based research.

How do adult researchers invert these kinds of generational power relations? How do they engage with the learners as authorities about their social worlds, as they (the learners) construct them? This presents a particular challenge when the adult researchers are interested in exploring the significance and meanings which sexuality holds for the learners, given that sexuality, as discussed above, is so often taken as a marker of adulthood (Kehily 2012; Renold et al. 2015; Egan 2013).

These questions are raised in *participatory* forms of research which seek to engage with young people as potential authorities by encouraging them to *produce knowledge* concerning their lives as young men and women and, at the same time, critically reflect on themselves and their relationships through their participation in various kinds of research activities such as drawing, role play, and photo voice (see Stuart and Smith 2011; Mitchell 2015; Boonzaier and Zway 2015, for examples of this kind of research with young people in South Africa in the context of HIV/AIDS, sexual violence and abuse).

This kind of research blurs the boundaries between research and pedagogy. Further, it resonates, we argue, with concerns which inform learner-centred forms of sexuality education, as articulated in the *Life Orientation* curriculum, 2003, which frames sexuality education as it is taught in South Africa. *Life Orientation* educational initiatives were introduced by United Nation's Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and other non-governmental organisations, in sub-Saharan Africa in the late 1990s in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and in response to the perceived failure of didactic teaching approaches in sexuality education in schools to stem the tide of infection. Such approaches took the form of information giving about the 'terrifying facts' of HIV/AIDS in ways which tended to problematise young people and sexuality and/or involved preaching against young people (and especially young women) having sex and idealisations of pre-marital abstinence. In contrast, arguments for developing *Life Orientation* initiatives drew on pedagogic concerns to engage with the agency of young men and women as sexual beings, and to encourage dialogue and critical reflection on the significance and meanings which they attach to gender and sexuality in their lives generally and the kinds of relations they develop.

In this chapter, we take examples from our own research in South Africa with young people aged between 16 and 17 years in which sexuality is raised as a matter of interest or concern by the young people themselves, and, reflecting on the dynamics of the research encounters, we discuss how this research may contribute to developing learner-centred forms of sexuality education.

Learning from the Learners About Gender and Sexuality in Interview and Ethnographic Studies

Our interests in learning from the learners about gender and sexuality developed through our engagement in qualitative research projects in the early 2000s: a UNICEF-funded interview study, which Rob coordinated with

Fatuma Chege, with learners, mainly in their teens, in schools in sub-Saharan African (Pattman and Chege 2003; Pattman 2005) and an ethnographic study which Deevia conducted with 6- to 8-year-old children in primary schools near Durban (Bhana 2013).

Research Focus and Approaches

The rationale of the UNICEF study was to generate findings which could be used to produce appropriate and relevant resources for *Life Orientation* programmes which were being introduced in schools in sub-Saharan Africa. To this end, learners were interviewed in groups on the theme *growing up as boys and girls*.

They were asked about their relations with and attitudes towards people of the same and opposite sex, parents and teachers, interests and leisure pursuits, pleasures and fears, future projections and role models, and views about HIV/AIDS. But within these broad themes, they were encouraged to raise and pursue issues that they deemed significant to them. They were also asked to reflect on how they experienced the interview. (In developing this kind of interview approach, we draw on Frosh et al.'s school-based interview study on 'young masculinities' with boys and girls in London; Frosh et al. 2002; Pattman 2015). The interviewers—women and men from their early 20s to 50s—were trained to be self-reflexive, approachable, and to pick up and explore issues the young people raised. Some of the interviewers engaged the young people in dance and clapping and short ritualistic games prior to conducting the interviews, and this seemed to be very effective in helping them feel at ease with each other.

Deevia was interested in children's views and experiences of schooling in the playground and in class, and pursued her research through conversations she had with them in conjunction with participant observation mainly in the playgrounds, but also in class where she sat with them in groups (Bhana 2013). The kinds of questions she posed were aimed at generating conversations with the children about themselves and their everyday lives in school, and, while relating to her interests in gender and play, were largely spontaneous and dependent on the context. Her conversations in the playground were shaped by the constant movement of children from one person or activity to another, like 'bumblebees' (Thorne 1993: 15) and resonated with these rhythms, breaking when they went away and continuing when they came back to her. Relating to them in these ways provoked interest in her among the children and seemed to create a dynamic where they wanted to engage in these kinds of reflective conversations (Mayeza 2015).

In both studies, gender and sexuality emerged as key themes which pointed, as we argue and elaborate below, not only to the significance these held for the young people participating in the studies, but also to the kinds of relations they and the researchers established which made it possible for them to raise and talk about sexuality with the adult researchers.

What We Took as Research Findings

What sorts of findings did the UNICEF study generate which might be of relevance in *Life Orientation*? At first, it was assumed the findings would comprise *what* young people said in the interviews, and specifically *what* they said about gender and sexuality, which would be coded thematically. But it became clear that by focusing only on this, the data was being constructed in an abstract way which conveyed nothing about how it emerged and the kinds of emotions which the young people expressed, nor about the relational dynamics which were established in the process of conducting the interviews.

Yet many of the young people commented at some length on these aspects when asked how they experienced the interviews. Some said that they imagined that the interviewers would ask questions about their knowledge of HIV/AIDS, as if this was being tested, and expressed surprise and pleasure at being able to take the interview in directions they wished and being listened to and questioned by interested adults. Reflecting these kinds of relational dynamics, participants raised issues which they claimed were usually too 'sensitive' to discuss with adults, such as boyfriends and girlfriends, HIV/AIDS, and use of condoms.

In the UNICEF project, the ways young people introduced and engaged with gender and sexuality were taken as key findings, and the interviews came to be understood as particular social contexts which created opportunities for reflexive and emotionally engaged conversations to take place about gender and sexuality, as experienced by the interviewees. The researchers learnt about the connections they made between sexuality and 'sensitivity' and their relations with adults (which were disrupted, unexpectedly for many of them, by the learner-centred, informal approaches the interviewers adopted). They also learnt about how particular connections were made by the interviewees between sex and gender through the often implicit ways, such as laughter, in which they invoked sex. Sexuality was introduced by the young people, themselves, most notably when they were discussing their relations with contemporaries of the opposite sex. In fact, questioning young people about their relations with contemporaries of the opposite sex often provoked laughter and

some embarrassment, especially among girls, as if cross-gender relationships were synonymous with heterosexual relations (an association reinforced by the rarity of narratives told by young people about cross-gender friendships) and these were considered naughty.

In Deevia's study, sexuality also emerged in hetero-sexualised forms in the kinds of relationships the young people she observed established in play and class (e.g. in writing love letters and playing games such as kiss chase where groups of boys or girls chased and kissed the other; Thorne 1993) and in reflective conversations she had with them about their relations with contemporaries of the opposite sex. As in the UNICEF study, Deevia's analytic focus in these conversations was not just on *what* the young participants said about gender and sexuality but how they constructed, connected, and communicated their passions, excitements, and desires, which varied considerably according to context. When asked if they had friends of the opposite sex, boys tended to be adamant that they did not, as if the very question violated their sense of being boys. Yet some of these same boys wrote 'love' letters to girls they imagined as possible girlfriends. Girls spoke more with Deevia about particular boys they liked and what they liked about them, though also, sought assurances from Deevia, when reflecting on these and love letters they sent boys, not to divulge this information to others for fear of damaging their 'reputations'.

Significantly, Deevia was often asked by the children in her study if she had a boyfriend and if she 'did the French kiss'. In posing such questions, they showed their familiarity with hetero-normative discourses and their ability to draw on these in sexualising Deevia in relation to gender, as a possible girlfriend in a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship. Interestingly, they did not ask if she had a husband, even though she was asked about her children. We suggest that this was because 'husband–wife' did not carry the sexual connotations which 'girlfriend–boyfriend' had for them.¹

Not only does this provide insights into the kind of relationship she was establishing with them, one which allowed and enabled them to pose such a question to an adult in the school, but also indicates that the children were sexual beings and that they attached considerable significance to this, in the ways they positioned adults, and, as it emerged especially in their conversations about play, in their self-reflections.

¹ In an observational study which focused on teacher–learner interactions in a pre-primary school in England in the 1980s, Valerie Walkerdine, 1981, also observed examples of learners, as young as three to four, sexualising teachers. This, however, was only something which boys did to women teachers, took the form of sexual objectification, and was intended to undermine the authority of the teacher, even if this was dismissed by the teacher as simply boys being 'silly'. The notion that the boys were just being silly not only served to legitimate the teacher's sense of authority, but also reflected and contributed to the assumption that children (of this age) were not sexual beings.

We learnt from the learners in these interviews and ethnographic studies about the meanings and significance gender and sexuality held for them through the ways they positioned themselves and related to each other and to the adult researchers in play, interviews, and ‘bumble bee’ conversations. In the next section, we focus on more recent interview research with Grade 11 (16- to 17-year-old) learners in public schools in Durban in which we have collaborated. Again, sexuality has emerged as a key theme in the interviews, and we develop an analytic approach which engages how sexuality is presented and discussed by various participants and the dynamics of the research encounter.

Taking Interviews as Ethnographic Encounters and Learning, *First Hand*, About Gender, Sexuality, and the Operation of Power in Group Interviews with 16- to 17-Year-Old Learners

In this research project, sexuality featured prominently in the interviews in participants’ narratives and discussions about their lives, in and out of school, thus providing strong support for the contention that schools are not simply academic places involved in the emotionally detached pursuit of knowledge (Paechter 2006). As Epstein and Johnson (1998) and many others (Allen 2005; Renold et al. 2015; Bhana 2016) have illustrated, schools are sexual and gendered domains (Epstein and Johnson 1998) where sexuality is everywhere and nowhere (Allen 2014).

As in the UNICEF study, we wanted to explore their social worlds by asking broad questions about their interests and leisure time activities, reflections on being learners, and relations with boys and girls and adults in and out of school, and our approach was to encourage our interviewees to set the agenda and respond to issues *they* raised and encourage them to reflect and elaborate upon these. Sexuality did not emerge in the interviews in response to specific questions we asked about sexuality but in reflective discussions precipitated by these broad questions usually in relation to gender. How sexuality emerged, and how it was invoked and connected with gender by our interviewees differed considerably between the (15) groups, participating in our study. Below, we compare two group interviews conducted with learners attending a formerly Indian school.² One of the groups, comprised two black women, three

²Under apartheid in South Africa, people were divided into different racial categories, namely white, black, Indian, and coloured, and these were institutionalised in the separate provision, according to these

Indian women, and two Indian men learners, and was facilitated by Deevia, and the other, comprised six black women learners, and was facilitated by Rob.

In these group interviews, gender, sexuality, age, and race were raised by the participants and we see not only how they construct these, making particular kinds of symbolic connections between them, but also how they draw on these as key resources as they position and present themselves as girls and boys in the interviews. In this sense, we reflect on the interviews as ethnographic encounters in which we witness how our participants interact and perform gender.

Race- and Gender-Mixed Interview

How Gender and Sexuality Emerged

In this interview, sexuality emerged early on in a way that focused on girls, when Deevia asked them what they liked or disliked about school, and some of the girls complained about girls in the more junior years in high school (Grades 7, 8, and 9, ages 13–15) applying make-up in the school toilets.

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| Neila (female) | It's the grade 8 and 9's—I don't know what's wrong with the grade 8's, I really don't know! They are so small, and they, I really don't know! I think that when they are in Grade 7, they think that 'Oh, I own the world'. Come to high school, they think, 'Oh, I'm so big'. Grade 8. (laughter), Big? Please! |
| Meru (female) | When you go in the toilets ... break time ... you see them applying the eye shadow, the foundations and what not ... why make yourself beautiful in school? |
| Col (male) | You tell me, at one stage you were there in the toilets putting mascara and make-up and all. |
| Meru | No, no, no I, I was putting make-up and mascara and all? Me! No, never, no, no, no! |
| Lungi | And there's these 3 girls, I think they're from grade, grade 9, they're using a lot of make-up |
| John (male) | But that's the fashion now. |
| Lungi | What, but there is no fashion in school. You come here to learn. You have discipline. |
| John | What about your braids? That is fashion isn't it? |
| Lungi | Hey, hey, hey. |

racial categories, of living spaces, schools, and jobs. The formal de-racialisation of schools in the post-apartheid era has resulted in the formation of racially diverse learner populations mainly in the formerly white and formerly Indian schools. At Gandhi, the formerly Indian school in our study, 85% of the learners were Indian and 15% were black. Some black learners in formerly Indian schools, like Gandhi, protested that, because they were black, it was often assumed by Indian learners and teachers that they were poor and lived in the shack accommodation in the schools' catchment area.

Constructing Some Girls as Other in Relation to Sexuality

The young women spoke about these girls in the third person as ‘they’ or ‘them’, as a different category, and also in emotionally engaged ways which ridiculed them and evoked laughter in the group, especially among the girls. This played on the discrepancy between the shared motivations the girls in the interview attributed to them—their desire to enhance their status, to ‘look big’ through putting on make-up—and how ‘small’ they looked. They also spoke in quite moralistic ways (as teacher figures) about what they saw as the inappropriateness with these girls’ fixation with putting on make-up in the school context. This was constructed as a place of ‘learning’ and ‘discipline’, as if the two were connected and undermined by putting on ‘make-up’.

Significantly, it was girls in this group who criticised the girls in the junior grades. The two boys, Col and John, who contributed to this discussion, indeed, challenged Meru and Lungi by suggesting that they also used make-up and styled their hair. The emotional denials Meru and Lungi made: ‘Me, no, never, no, no, no’; ‘Hey, hey, hey’ indicated just how *invested* they seemed to be in constructing the girls they described in the lower grades who put on make-up in the toilets as Other, and identify implicitly, in contrast, as good, mature, and independent girls.

Negotiating Their Gender Identities in Relation to Sexuality in the Interview

Why were they so invested in positioning themselves in this way? Insights into this began to emerge in Meru and Neila’s responses to the question which Deevia put: ‘what’s the problem with girls coming to school with make-up?’

Meru It makes them look cheap. They’re giving the school a bad name. The time you come into the bus you’re wearing this tie and this make-up on your face ... they gonna say the whole school is like that.

Neila I think the girls that are putting make-up and all, they want is to be noticed by boys now that they’re in high school and tend to have feelings for boys.

Putting on make-up for school was read as something which girls might do to make themselves sexually attractive to boys and, in this context, was constructed as making them ‘look cheap’ and giving the school ‘a bad name’, as if the ‘reputation’ of the school was being compromised by the sexual ‘reputation’ of these girls.

We suggest that these girls’ investments in Othering junior grade girls who put on make-up in the school toilet were motivated, in part, by fears about

their own susceptibility, as girls, to being sexualised in derogatory ways, with the Other providing a fantasy structure—‘a peg’ on to which they project and hang both fears and desires (on the psychodynamics of Othering, see Frosh et al. 2002). This threat, embedded in popular discourses in which gender is implicitly connected with hetero-sexuality in ways which position men as subjects and women as objects of desire (Jackson and Scott 2010; Hollway 1989), was exemplified in criticisms two of the boys made about girls and dress in the passage below. These criticisms were precipitated by Meru who, while blaming particular girls for being overly and inappropriately sexual, paused and changed tack and began to question the selective naming and shaming of girls, not boys, in relation to sexuality.

- Meru She [girls who put on make-up] can be the best looking girl, but, you find out she’s been with half my friends [having sexual relationships] and got like a really bad reputation, she’s named as a slut (3) But have you thought of that? It only happens to girls. If a boy has many girl-friends, nothing happens to him.
- Col You can’t say boys are pigs, if a girl is dressing up with short skirts and all, they are attracting the boy.
- Lungi I wear my short skirt for my own satisfaction, if you tell me, if you go to the beach, you’re going to wear a long skirt? Sorry! No ways! Are you gonna tell me that if you [looking at Col] go to the beach you’re gonna wear long pants? If I go to the beach and wear a hot panty and bikini bra and nobody gonna rape me, coz I’m attracting boys. No, no ways. Boys must control themselves! (group laughter)
- Col Girls with short skirts, get raped more easily
- Lungi Excuse me, excuse me! [tone of exasperation] Listen to me. I’m wearing my short skirt right, you come to me, I ignore you. That means I’m showing you that I’m not interested in you.
- John Wearing short skirts, tells a lot about the girl, wearing short skirts, bikini If you see a girl with a short skirt, I think, maybe, she’s looking for a guy.
- Neila Don’t judge girls right, coz of how they dress.
- Col You’ll be paying a big price for so little material on your body. And you said girls, some girls are like bicycles, everybody tends to ride them. If a girl is dressing like that, what do you expect?

The focus in this passage is again on girls and sexuality though this shifts to boys and their constructions of girls and sexuality, as the girls challenge connections boys make between girls’ appearances and, notably, their dress and a desire to sexually attract boys. Lungi was particularly passionate in her criticisms presenting herself as a young woman who liked wearing short skirts and bikinis,

and critiqued the way in which the presumption that girls did so in order to attract men was being invoked to legitimate sexual harassment and rape and regulate and control women like her. Unlike Lungi, Meru and Neila did not refer to themselves, but spoke in more detached ways about the double sexual standard and ‘judging girls’ by virtue of their dress. That the boys in this passage were making moral judgements about the girls who wore short skirts was very clear in Col’s objectification of ‘girls’, modified as ‘some girls’ as bicycles which ‘everybody tends to ride’. Significantly, he refers here to what ‘you said’, in this case Meru, when she seemed to blame girls with ‘bad reputations’, just before raising concerns about the operation of double sexual standards.

In this strange juxtaposition, Meru, we suggest, reflects ambivalences that some of the girls experienced in relation to sexuality and how they position themselves—at one moment Othering certain girls, and at another critiquing the very fact that girls are subject to such forms of moral evaluation and scrutiny. Meru’s ambivalence in the extract above contrasts strikingly with Lungi’s certainty and outrage which she displays towards Col by mocking him and boys more generally for blaming girls for arousing male desire. Her response is to assert herself as an independent being whose movements and dress should not be tied to or restricted by male desire, and as a sexual woman who derives pleasure from wearing clothes which signify this. Meru performs gender very differently in relation to sexuality in the interview, raising concerns about double sexual standards but not as they affect herself, and presenting *other* girls as the ones who may be (unfairly) constructed as overly sexual.

Interview with Black Girls

How Gender and Sexuality Emerged

Again sexuality and gender emerged early, in response to Rob’s question about what they liked or disliked about school. In response to this, Lungi (who also participated in the previous interview) mentioned being one of the few black learners in her class and being treated with contempt by the other children: ‘*the others they treat you like, “who the hell?”, in class*’. When Rob enquired who the ‘others’ were, they turned out to be Indian learners, and their marginalisation by them, and notably by Indian girls, framed another animated and emotionally charged interview.

Constructing Some Girls as Other in Relation to Sexuality

In this interview, the learners provided rich examples of forms of marginalisation they experienced as black girls at their school, which included being

told by Indian girls not to touch the cakes they were selling, how black learners were always assumed to be responsible for crimes committed at school, how Indian not black learners were applauded when they gave presentations in English lessons, and how Indian learners undermined black teachers by mispronouncing Zulu words when asked to be quiet. When examples such as these were elaborated, it was never just one person talking; rather, they all joined in. Clearly, the stories they were telling were common cultural ones which seemed to symbolise common experiences of marginalisation.

Though Indian boys were implicated in their accounts of racism and were presented as the main perpetrators undermining the authority of black teachers, the black girls' opposition to racism was mainly directed at Indian girls, and this seemed to be fuelled by anxieties about being constructed as less sexually attractive than them, as we see in the following extract:

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Samantha | Girls are more racist than boys. |
| Rob | Are they? |
| Fortunate | Boys are better |
| Fortunate= Ronda= Bongiwe | Boys are better! |
| Lungi | you know one boy from our class he will talk to you, he will touch you and he will even take what you are eating and eat it. But the girls! They are racist. |
| Bongiwe | One boy in class, after English, we were walking. Instead of him asking me, 'Please can I pass' he swears me and I swear him back. He swear and I pushed him away. |
| Rob | A boy or girl? |
| Bongiwe | A boy. |
| Rob | Okay. |
| Bongiwe | I didn't want to swear him back but I had to. |
| Lungi | the boys are not racist at all. |
| Rob | Why do you think that is? |
| Lungi | I don't know. |
| Bongiwe | The girls, they think they have everything, they wear make-up, their long hair, and we got short hair. |
| Lungi | The African hair, Oh no! they don't like it, and the only thing wonderful about them is they got nice hair, you know. And I said oh God! There's nothing wonderful about you! [loud, angry tone] |

Though Bongiwe provides what appears to be (in the context of the discussion) an example of an Indian boys' racist behaviour, Lungi immediately

affirms 'the boys are not racist at all', and Bongiwe does not contradict this but implicates Indian girls for being racist for constructing themselves as more attractive than black girls. While they provided examples of Indian boys' racism, their constructions of them as 'better' served to accentuate the racism they attributed to the Indian girls. This suggests they attached much importance to being *heterosexually* attractive and felt particularly troubled by the Indian girls being positioned as more attractive than them. Lungi denies this, claiming '*there is nothing wonderful about you*', but her loud, angry tone suggested that she cared a great deal about this.

Negotiating Their Gender Identities in Relation to Sexuality and Race in the Interview

The black girls' sense of marginalisation and exclusion around their identities as black heterosexual young women was made very explicit when they spoke about how much they longed to go to the school dance (emphasising this through repetition), but could not go because no Indian boy would ask them out, and there were not enough black boys of their age to act as potential partners.

- Bongiwe Like now we will be having a dance. So now we don't have partners and we scared to ask them, a boy, because they won't go. They won't go. I'm sure.
- Rob the Indian boys?
- All Yes.
- Lungi Like you black and he's Indian, he won't go. Like we want to go. We really want to go, but we don't have partners. The problem is that we don't have partners.
- Mapopo It's not like we don't want to go to the dance. We do want to go but we don't have the right partner. There is African boys here but not enough for us.
- Bongiwe But it's like nothing's impossible, it's possible an Indian asks me out.
- Rob And it's not possible for you to ask an Indian boy out?
- Lungi How! Please! Who do you think you are? [incredulous tone at being asked such a question]. (Interview extracts from Pattman and Bhana 2009)

The dance was constructed by these girls as a celebration from which they were excluded, a celebration of heterosexual attraction, and especially female

heterosexual attraction, with attendance depending on having a partner of the opposite sex, and in the case of girls, being propositioned by a boy. In contrast to the previous passage where the black girls criticised Indian girls for taking pride in their hair and subordinating them sexually, no criticisms were levelled at the Indian boys even though the implication was that it was the Indian boys' antipathy to having them as partners which prevented them from going to the dance.

Constructions of Gender and Sexuality in the Two Interviews

In both the interviews, gender and sexuality were given much prominence and connected by the participants in ways which presumed heteronormativity (Butler 1990). The participants in both interviews (even the gender-mixed one) tended to focus on girls and (hetero) sexuality, as if the connections they drew between gender and sexuality were less seamless for girls than boys. This was particularly evident in constructions of *inappropriately* sexual girls in the gender-mixed interview, and how this framed 'doing gender' as a problem and concern for girls to which some of the girls contributed by distancing themselves from junior girls who put on make-up in the school, yet also challenged by questioning double sexual standards for boys and girls.

In the interview with the black girls, sexuality and gender also emerged as key themes but, in contrast to the previous interview, these were interlinked and intertwined, in their accounts, with race. This points, we suggest, to the dynamics which are produced in the research encounters and how these make possible or impossible certain kinds of narratives. Of course, it is disingenuous to claim that race was only introduced by the girls themselves in the interview with the black girls; the profile of race was, at least, raised by the mono-racial interview format. But this seemed to make it possible for these girls to talk critically, and with emotion, about experiences of marginalisation which they articulated in relation to their identifications as (hetero) sexual young people. The interview with the black girls showed how sexuality was a source of anxiety and consternation for them but a source, also, of pleasure. Heterosexuality was significant for these girls in complex ways, associated with desire and pleasure as well as marginalisation and racism, a medium through which they asserted themselves and derived a sense of self-esteem and also a medium through which they were subordinated.

Concluding Comments: What Implications Can We Draw from Our Research for Developing Forms of *Life Orientation*?

We have reported on research with young people which engages with their agency and reflects on the dynamics of the research encounters and the processes of identity construction and knowledge production within these. Such research, we argue, can be seen as a participatory pedagogic activity which may carry implications for developing learner-centred forms of sexuality education (as advocated in the official *Life Orientation* curriculum in South Africa), and we conclude by elaborating on this. The need to think creatively about how participatory forms of qualitative research can contribute in this way to *Life Orientation* is reinforced by research with learners in public high schools in South Africa, which indicates that *Life Orientation* is taught (ironically) in moralistic ways which undermine young people's agency and problematise sexuality, especially young women's sexuality (e.g. Shefer et al. 2015) and same sex desire and orientations. (Francis, 2017).

Rather than 'wishing innocence' on children, and constructing them as pre sexual, as many opponents of sex education in schools (and especially participatory and learner-centred forms of sex education) have imagined them as being, our research highlights the importance boys and girls, even as young as six and seven, attach to sexuality in their lives, as witnessed in the frequency it is raised in conversations. But characterising them as sexual beings does not mean explaining their emotions and behaviour, as they relate to sexuality, as the outcome of fixed biological urges. On the contrary, our research raises questions about how boys and girls construct sexuality, and how they 'sexualise' each other as they negotiate their (gendered) identities in everyday social interactions and practices. This resonates with *Life Orientation*, 2003, as it is formulated, in South Africa as 'the study of self in relation to others and to society'.

Our research points to the importance of taking schools as important sites and contexts in which processes of identity construction go on with gender and sexuality much to the fore (with children of all ages), though these are rarely addressed in *Life Orientation*. This, no doubt, relates to the embarrassment many teachers feel talking about sexuality (and especially in conversational ways) with children (Iyer and Aggleton 2014; Bhana 2016). But this also reflects a tendency, we suggest, to construct work in opposition to play or leisure, as institutionalised in common constructions of classrooms and playgrounds. In these, classrooms are seen as working spaces and playgrounds, in contrast, as areas where no teaching or learning goes on, where children can

simply 'be' themselves (Mayeza 2015). In this way, processes of knowledge production and identity work in relation to gender and sexuality in everyday social interactions and practices in schools may, ironically, be rendered invisible in certain teacher appropriations of *Life Orientation*.

A major concern in *Life Orientation*, as it is framed in the national curriculum description, is to engage with forms of 'discrimination and unequal power relations'. In our research, we draw attention to the operation of power in relation to the ways boys and girls construct their (gendered) identities in their everyday lives in school as well as in research encounters (Allen 2005). Such conversations in our research have tended to focus on sexuality as introduced by the young people themselves, without taking for granted gendered and sexual norms as they articulate them, but posing questions and creating contexts where different girls and boys have spoken about their pleasures and costs of these for them.

But how does power operate in *Life Orientation* classes? Can women and men from different and diverse backgrounds engage in reflexive discussions about gender and sexuality? These are important questions to pose in view of the symbolic construction of the class as a formal space tied with teacher authority, and also in recognition of power dynamics which mediate gender and race.

Can and should *Life Orientation* programmes open up spaces for black learners to speak about *their* experiences of 'diversity' in a racially mixed formerly Indian school, by dividing them, as we did in our research, into mono-racial (as well as multi-racial groups). One of the problems with this is that it might sit uneasily with rhetorical commitments of racially mixed schools to 'embracing diversity' and may contribute to forms of polarisation based around race.

A similar question about splitting people into same-sex groups, in *Life Orientation*, to encourage them to talk about issues such as sexual harassment is likely to be considered much less contentious. Indeed, some researchers partaking in the UNICEF study conducted same-sex group interviews because they found that girls and boys were more fluent in these, especially when discussing issues relating to sexuality, though they combined these with mixed interviews in which the same boys and girls who had been interviewed separately participated. In one version of this, the participants were asked to reflect in single-sex groups on the advantages and disadvantages of being members of the opposite sex, and it was noticeable in the mixed plenary session which followed that girls and boys related to each other in empathetic ways which often challenged gender polarities, not least the construction of boys as subjects and girls as objects of desire (See Pattman 2006: 102–105).

Another way in which *Life Orientation* can engage with 'diverse' students, which blurs the boundaries between research and teaching, is to train learners

to be researchers and to work together in small 'diverse' groups interviewing and learning about each other and their constructions and experiences of home and school, their identifications and relations. Engaging in such research may transform the classroom context so that it seems less detached from other school spaces in which identity work goes on informally through talk and play and hanging about. It may also offer opportunities for participants to learn from each other and open possibilities for forging new identifications and ways of connecting gender and sexuality which challenge polarisations based on gender and race.

References

- Allen, L. (2005). Managing masculinity: Young men's Identity work in focus groups. *Qualitative Research*, 5(1), 35–58.
- Allen, L. (2014). Don't forget, Thursday is test[icle] time! The use of humour in sexuality education. *Sex Education*, 14(4), 387–399.
- Bhana, D. (2007). The price of innocence: Teachers, gender, childhood sexuality, HIV and AIDS in early schooling. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 11(4), 431–444.
- Bhana, D. (2013). Kiss and tell: Boys, girls and sexualities in the early years. *Agenda*, 27(3), 57–66.
- Bhana, D. (2016). *Childhood Sexuality and AIDS Education: The Price of Innocence*. New York: Routledge.
- Bhana, D & Pattman, R. (2009). Researching South African youth, gender and sexuality within the context of HIV/AIDS, *Development*, 52(1), 68–74.
- Bhana, D., & Pattman, R. (2011). Girls want money, boys want virgins: The materiality of love amongst SA township youth in the context of HIV/AIDS. *Culture, Health and Society*, 13(8), 961–972.
- Boonzaier, F., & Zway, M. (2015). Young lesbian women's representations of gender and sexuality: A participatory project. *African Safety Promotion Journal*, 13(1), 7–29.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Coleman, B., & Ringrose, J. (Eds.). (2012). *Deleuze and research methodologies*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Egan, R. D. (2013). *Becoming sexual: A critical appraisal of the sexualization of girls*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Epstein, D., & Johnson, R. (1998). *Schooling sexualities*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Francis, D. (2017). *Troubling the teaching and learning of gender and sexuality diversity in South African education*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, US.

- Frosh, S., Phoenix, A., & Pattman, R. (2002). *Young masculinities*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- HEAIDS report. (2010). The role of educators in mitigating the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on the education system in South Africa.
- Hollway, W. (1989). *Subjectivity and method in psychology*. London: Sage.
- Iyer, P., & Aggleton, P. (2014). Virginity is a virtue: Prevent early sex – Teacher perceptions of sex education in a Ugandan secondary school. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 35(3), 432–448.
- Jackson, S., & Scott, S. (2010). *Theorizing sexuality*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill-Open University Press.
- Jewkes, R., & Morrell, R. (2012). Sexuality and the limits of agency among South African teenage women: Theorising femininities and their connections to HIV risk practises. *Social Science & Medicine*, 74(11), 1729–1737.
- Kehily, M. J. (2002). *Sexuality, gender and schooling. Shifting agendas in social learning*. London: Routledge.
- Kehily, M. J. (2012). Contextualising the sexualisation of girls debate: Innocence, experience and young female sexuality. *Gender and Education*, 24(3), 255–268.
- Life Orientation Curriculum, South Africa. (2003). www.education.gov.za
- Mayeza, E. (2015). Exclusionary violence and bullying in the playground: Football and gender policing at school. *African Safety Promotion Journal*, 13(1), 49–70.
- Mitchell, C. (2015). Who's learning or whose learning? Critical perspectives on the idea of youth-led policy-making related to gender-based violence in a South African classroom. In J. Wyn & H. Cahill (Eds.), *Handbook of children and youth studies* (pp. 169–181). Singapore: Springer.
- Msibi, T. (2012). I'm used to it now: Experiences of homophobia among queer youth in South African township schools. *Gender and Education*, 24(5), 515–533.
- Paechter, C. (2006). Reconceptualising the gendered body: Learning and constructing masculinities and femininities in school. *Gender and Education*, 18(2), 121–135.
- Pattman, R. (2005). Boys and girls should not be too close: Sexuality, the identities of African boys and girls and HIV/AIDS education. *Sexualities*, 8(4), 497–516.
- Pattman, R. (2006). Making pupils the resources and promoting gender equality in HIV/AIDS education. *Journal of Education, HIV/AIDS Special Issue*, 38, 89–115.
- Pattman, R. (2015). Ways of thinking about young people in participatory interview research. In J. Wyn & H. Cahill (Eds.), *Handbook of children and youth studies* (pp. 79–92). Singapore: Springer.
- Pattman, R., & Bhana, D. (2009). Colouring sexualities: How some black South African schoolgirls respond to 'racial' and gendered inequalities. In M. Steyn & M. Van Zyl (Eds.), *The prize and the price* (pp. 21–38). Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Pattman, R., & Chege, F. (2003). *Finding our voices: Gendered and sexual identities and HIV/AIDS in education*. Nairobi: UNICEF.
- Pattman, R., & Kehily, M. (2005). Gender. In S. Fraser et al. (Eds.), *Doing research with children and young people* (pp. 131–144). London: Sage in association with Open University.

- Renold, E., Ringrose, J., & Egan, D. (Eds.). (2015). *Children, sexuality and the sexualisation of culture*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Shefer, T., & Foster, D. (2009). Heterosex among young South Africans: Research reflections. In M. Steyn & M. van Zyl (Eds.), *The prize and the price: Shaping sexualities in South Africa* (pp. 267–289). Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Shefer, T., Kruger, L., Macleod, C., & Baxen, J. (2015). A huge monster that should be feared and not done: Lessons learn in sexuality education classes in South Africa. *African Safety Promotion Journal*, 13(1), 71–87.
- Stanley, L., & Wise, S. (1983). *Breaking out: Feminist consciousness and feminist research*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Stuart, J., & Smith, A. (2011). Reading across and back: Thoughts on working with (re-visited) drawing collections. In L. Theron, C. Mitchell, & A. Smith (Eds.), *Picturing research: Drawing as visual methodology* (pp. 147–162). Rotterdam: Sense.
- Thorne, B. (1993). *Gender play*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Wood, K., Lambert, H., & Jewkes, R. (2007). Showing roughness in a beautiful way: Talk about love, coercion and rape in South African youth culture. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 21(3), 277–300.