

ELEVEN

Identity formation and challenging stereotypes: Gender, sexuality and political identities

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores some of the key representations of youth sexuality within public and health discourse, with specific reference to the ways that these representations may be problematic. Focusing on the intersections of race, class and sexuality, the chapter addresses some of the underlying issues of representation of sexuality in tandem with race and class politics in South Africa. In so doing, we highlight these intersections as important to any dialogue on youth sexual wellbeing and development. Against a backdrop of increasing concern over young teenage parenting, school dropout, teenage abortion, HIV/AIDS transmission, gender-based violence, youth unemployment and delinquency and sexual and gender diversity, there has been renewed interest and dialogue on youth representation and participation in civil society. Part of this interest has focused on intervention strategies for and on behalf of youth that highlight

even more complex issues: how do we conceptualise, think about and theorise youth and youth sexuality? Which psychosocial dimensions of identity development and practice are important to consider for intervening and working with youth for better sexual wellbeing and development? What discursive and social marginalisation continues to exist in conversations about youth sexuality? How has sexual and gender diversity been addressed and what gaps exist?

In considering these problematics, it may be necessary to revisit and reimagine what the category of youth implies and how we understand this meaning for psycho-sexual development and wellbeing. In this regard, scholars such as Macleod (2003) argue that we need a dialogue on youth sexuality that does not only address the negative dimensions of sexuality, such as abortion, sexually transmitted diseases and violence, although these are certainly important. For Macleod, we must also attend to intersecting issues of sexuality that include, for example, sexual desire. This is important because such a dialogue facilitates an understanding of youth sexuality that is implicated in networks of power. In such a reading, sexual desire must be understood via interconnected and complex social processes that legitimate sexual citizenship for some social groups and not for others. For example, queer youth have for a long time been excluded or marginalised in large-scale dialogue on sexuality and identity due to dominant discursive and social framings that do not legitimate their sexuality and identifications. Similarly, when such inclusions do occur, they are invariably framed within negative discourses that position and only speak about queer youth in terms that deny their sexual agency and voice. For example, Quinlivan (2002) shows how the market-driven discourse of LGBT students as consistently 'at risk' invariably re-pathologises LGBT youth and frames their sexuality as a problem.

In this chapter, we explore some of these complexities of representation, lived experiences and case research to demonstrate that young people negotiate and navigate their environments via constructs that position their sexuality as lacking agency, inviable, pathological and/or immature. Such constructs result in interventions (or non-interventions) on behalf of young people without a full acknowledgement of how they may be active social actors who are

continually making sense of their world. Important reminders from Bradbury (2020), and Bradbury and Miller (2010), that young people narrate themselves amidst fluid historical-political and material changes are thus useful to remember in work with youth. We focus on three categories of youth: young girls, young boys and queer youth, and attend to the ways that dominant frames of understanding young people may inadvertently (re)produce axes of marginalisation which deny young people's agency in how they may have input into their lives. The chapter draws from qualitative research into young men's sexual identities and the sexual and reproductive lives of young women, as well as from the socio-political memoir of the first author, Jamil Khan, on queer youth visibility in South Africa.

In doing so, it highlights the importance of thinking about identities-in-context, which attend to the narrative influences of young people and how they make sense of their lives and the people in it. Similarly, we would argue that, in tandem with mapping the political, social, cultural, discursive and material influences on young people's sexual lives and experiences, there remains an urgent need to also consider and listen to the subjective accounts of young people about their sexual lives and relationships. In a country with such a tumultuous and unequal history and present as South Africa, we cannot ignore gender and sexuality's intersections with other social categories which include race, class and geography. These categories, and their resultant impact and meanings of inequality and continued oppression in a post-apartheid democracy, mean that how young people experience themselves as sexual and gendered beings is significantly different. Access to health services that promote sexual health and wellbeing, concerns about one's bodily integrity and security, and sexual maturation are all influenced by these interwoven categorisations and markers of difference.

DEBUNKING YOUNG MEN'S SEXUAL IDENTITIES¹

Adolescents are often targeted in interventions to deal with their

¹ This section of the chapter draws on excerpts from Langa (2020).

perceived risky sexual behaviours (Bhana, 2013, 2016; Campbell and MacPhail, 2001; Shefer et al., 2015). In these interventions, however, much is not critically theorised about young male adolescents' sexuality. Young men's sexuality is simply represented in terms of its risks, such as the spread of HIV infection due to having multiple sexual partners (Shefer et al., 2015). Studies have been conducted in South Africa to establish the link between dominant masculinities and risky sexual behaviours amongst young men (Lindegger and Maxwell, 2007; Ratele, 2016; Sathiparsad, 2008). Some of the behaviours involved celebration about one's ability to have sex with multiple girlfriends. It is in these relationships that young men affirm their power and authority over their partners, including how and when to have sex. Young women who refuse to toe the line or comply with these often violent practices, or question their partner's infidelity, risk being beaten up (Bhana, 2013, 2016; Wood and Jewkes, 2001). Violence against young women is therefore rooted within practices of hegemonic masculinity, which Connell (1995, 2000) defines as the configuration of gender practice which culturally and socially guarantees men the position of power and domination while women are subordinated.

However, over the years, a literature has emerged which shows how other young men are rejecting the violent and risky sexual behaviour associated with hegemonic masculinities (Langa, 2020; Lindegger and Maxwell, 2007; Ratele, 2016; Sathiparsad, 2008). For example, the ethnographic study conducted by Langa (2020) with 32 young men in Alexandra Township found that they rejected the heterosexual practice that young men must have multiple sexual partners as part of asserting their manhood. Langa met these young men when they were between the ages of 12 and 16, and traced them over a period of 11 to 12 years. In this work, he concludes that young men's sexuality is fraught with all kinds of fears and fragilities when one looks beyond the public spectacle of boasting about having multiple girlfriends. It is important to note that hypersexuality is rendered compulsory through homosocial conversations based on the male sexual drive discourse (Hollway, 1989) that young men must be sexually active and publicly flaunt their sexual conquests. This is what Pascoe (2007)

calls compulsory heterosexuality in which even those young men who have never had sex concoct stories of being sexually active not to look foolish in the eyes of their male peers. It is an emotional price that the young men in Langa's study (2020)² had to pay in order to belong:

Nathan: I did not want other boys to laugh at me. You know when we had a group meeting, I told you I was active sexually, but I am virgin, but it was not easy to say so when we met with other boys.

Herman: I never had sex, but no one knows about this because other boys will laugh at me.

Michael: I am virgin and happy about that.

It is slowly, as argued by Segal (1990) and Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (2002), that young masculinities are positively changing rather than being static. This change has also been observed in other studies on young masculinities (Bhana, 2016; Shefer et al., 2015) in which young men do not engage in risky sexual behaviours. These young men are committed to being faithful to one partner (Langa, 2020):

Brett: I do not buy the whole story that we guys must have many girls. I have one girlfriend and ok with that.

Moses: It is unfair for us as guys to say I want to have many girls while girls cannot do that. I want one girl and going to be faithful to her.

The above views of sexual relationships as a site of equality rather than control and domination are interpreted as alternative and non-hegemonic. In this context, sex is an act intended to not only satisfy young men's sexual desires but also that of their partners. The concern

² The names of the young men cited in the interview excerpts are pseudonyms.

was raised by young men in Langa's (2020) study that sex should not be a one-sided activity. It was argued that young women's sexual desires must be recognised and acknowledged.

William: When we have sex, we must all be satisfied.

Themba: Some guys just have sex to satisfy themselves. I feel that is not fair.

This represents another shift in which young women are not seen as sex objects but as equal partners who deserve to enjoy sex as much as men do. Feelings of fear and anxiety were also shared by other young men about the ability to satisfy their partners sexually, which contradicts the dominant stereotype of young men as knowledgeable when it comes to matters of sex. Connell (1995) argues that it is during sex that one's manhood is tested. It is an anxiety-provoking moment where some men worry about the possibility of failing to satisfy their partners and the indictment associated with such failure. All these findings show the feelings of vulnerability associated with young masculinities and sexuality. Understanding these alternative voices is important to gain new insights about the subjective world of young men which does not necessarily generalise them as a problem. Some young men are working hard to be 'different' and embrace alternative, non-toxic masculinities. This is not an easy process as it is characterised by feelings of self-doubt and contradictions (Langa, 2020; Ratele, 2016), which manifest themselves when these young men are teased and ridiculed for not complying with practices of hegemonic masculinities. Some opt to be in-between where they vacillate between two positions of hegemonic and alternative masculinities, which then create some tensions and contradictions in their masculine identities.

For real change to happen, it is important that safe spaces are created for young men to talk about their sexual relationships with women to help them develop and embrace heterosexist practices that are non-risky sexually and that promote equity. In the next section, we explore representations of young (black) women's sexuality which are framed within a pathologising and problematising discourse. We highlight

some discursive points of similarity in how youth sexuality, more generally, is often framed in terms of a problem to be contained and, more specifically, how intersections of race and class are important in these discursive representations.

YOUNG WOMEN'S SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

In this section we provide a critical literature review of the dominant ways in which young women's sexual and reproductive lives have generally been understood within models of intervention. We also explore some of the core findings regarding young women's sexual and reproductive health vulnerabilities. Young black women's sexuality in South Africa, and across the continent more generally, has been a contentious one within many public and state discursive sites of (re)production. These multiple and at times contradictory (re) productions of young black women's sexual and gendered lives have translated and influenced state policies affecting young women's bodies and relationships. Young black women's sexuality is often spoken about against a backdrop of social ills such as HIV/AIDS, teenage pregnancy, abortion, absent fathers, fragmented families and communities, amongst other factors. This dominant, and at times exclusive, framing of young women's sexual lives as a problem requiring some form of institutional intervention is the inevitable result of such a unidimensional understanding of young women's intimate and sexual lives.

The approach we adopt in this chapter is that a historical, social and political contextualisation and critical lens is required to understand how many young women's sexual and gendered lives are lived. This is informed by the view that how we perceive young women and sexuality is inextricably tied to how historical, economic, social, cultural and political influences have shaped their development and wellbeing. For example, gender and feminist scholars such as Nduna (2020), Gqola (2007, 2015), Bennett (2010) and Coetzee and Du Toit (2018) have argued and demonstrated that the colonial and apartheid legacies of slavery, racial segregation and discrimination continue to

influence how matters of sex and sexuality are configured in the current moment, including gendered violence in society. Gendered inequalities in South Africa and across the continent, these scholars argue, must be understood in relation to capitalist, racial and patriarchal systems that continue to inform how young women's lives are lived and experienced in the everyday. For example, cultural and religious discourses that assume hegemonic influence over how young women develop into their sexuality influence attitudes and responses to premarital sex, abortion and marriage (Nduna, 2020). These discourses are, in turn, constructed within these systemic ideologies of economy and race and gender which often dictate the gendered roles of women and men, the role of the family, sexual reproduction and rights. Two significant issues are discussed in this section: *vulnerability* and *agency* of young women in matters of sexual and reproductive behaviour.

Vulnerability and agency are two important factors to discuss in relation to young women and their gendered and sexual reproductive wellbeing. Understanding the ways that many young women remain vulnerable to abuse and exploitation requires an urgent intervention which demands multi-layered responses that engage the family, communities, broader society and institutional and state entities. For example, Jewkes et al. (2010) demonstrate that young women in South Africa are at higher risk for HIV infection, compounded by intimate partner violence. They also identify power inequities as key factors in increasing young women's vulnerability to violence and HIV infection. Karim and Baxter (2016) have highlighted the role of gender inequalities in gender-based violence and HIV infection rates in the country. This vulnerability to violence and HIV infection largely affects a population group aged between 15 and 24 years old. This is a similar finding to the national survey by Pettifor et al. (2005) which also identified young women aged between 15 and 24 years as most vulnerable for HIV infection in the country. Without a doubt, an understanding is needed of the multiple causal pathways that affect and influence young women's risks and vulnerabilities to violence, and to sexual and reproductive disadvantages.

At the same time, the drive towards understanding and intervening must consider the unintended consequences of reinforcing ineffectual

responses that are informed by problematic assumptions about the very population group the interventions are aimed at. Put differently, the ontological assumptions that inform the different models of intervention must be interrogated. These ontological assumptions underlie how young women are perceived and constructed and which interventions are therefore deemed best for them. This is an issue of agency and how it is constructed. Intervention models that do not acknowledge the possibilities of young women's agency in making decisions about their bodies and their sexual wellbeing invariably reproduce hegemonic and patriarchal assumptions about women. This failure to address women's concerns and contributions to their own sexual wellbeing denies the complexity and nuances of the psychosocial developmental challenges experienced by many young women.

In considering the vulnerability models that have informed sexual and reproductive health and rights interventions in Africa, Nduna (2020) identifies the core ontological assumptions that underpin these models. Her critique alerts us to the missed opportunities for working with and better understanding young girls' and women's sexual agency. Citing Mojola (2014), Nduna argues that two models – sequential and combination models – have been the most influential in discourses about and approaches to young women and sexuality in Africa and influence current approaches to intervention in the South African context. The sequential model has been, and perhaps continues to be, the most commonly accepted model for engaging young women's sexuality. It is rooted in traditional value belief systems which favour sexual abstinence until marriage or at least until significant developmental milestones have been achieved. These milestones include obtaining an education, becoming employed, getting married and starting a family. The underlying assumption of the sequential model is that sexual desires and behaviour must be delayed until a later developmental period when other more urgent developmental milestones have been attained. Current discourses about young women and sex, for example, implicitly employ this sequential understanding of delayed sexual gratification, in which young women are urged to focus on their education and abstain from premarital sexual activity. The sequential model assumes that delayed

sexual gratification will result in the successful attainment of material and other success that, in the end, will contribute towards idealised sexual and romantic partnerships for young women.

Yet, as Spaul (2015) has observed, in a society that is overwhelmed with high youth unemployment, such expectations and assumptions remain unrealistic for many young women. This is because poverty influences the educational choices and decisions that they are able to make, including whether or not to remain in school. Furthermore, given other contextual factors such as gendered roles within the family, many young women will make decisions about their education and chances of success relative to these roles and gendered constructs. In this sense, the sequential model of young women's sexual and reproductive trajectory requires a more considered approach that recognises that sexuality and sexual behaviour do not exist in a social and cultural vacuum, but are informed by other determining factors which impact on young women's vulnerability and lived choices.

The combination model that has also been influential in how young women's sexual and reproductive health and rights are understood is another useful model to consider. According to Nduna (2020), this model attempts to bridge some elements of the sequential model – such as remaining in school and obtaining an education – with a consumption model that seeks to gain material and other social capital gains via transactional modes of sexual relationships. In such instances, young women may choose to exploit these relationships for their own personal gain, such as to acquire monetary rewards to finance education. Alternatively, they may also be focused on the acquisition of material and monetary gains for personal enjoyment and/or to accrue socially accepted consumerist trappings, while still pursuing key developmental sequential objectives. For Nduna (2020), these relationships typically are characterised by age-disparate gaps such as those in what has come to be termed the 'Blesser-Blessee' relationship (Mampane, 2018), but they may also involve mutually beneficial relationships with peers.

Variations of the assumptions that inform the sequential and combination models also underlie how dominant constructs of teenage pregnancy are represented. The work of critical gender scholar

Catriona Macleod has been insightful in its exploration of the trends of teenage pregnancy discourses; these reinforce heteronormative assumptions of youth sexuality which drive intervention strategies (Macleod, 2003). Macleod's work demonstrates that the depiction of teenage pregnancy has exclusively been in terms of its negative impact and as a social problem. In an interview excerpt below with Nolwazi Mkhwanazi (2011: 36), a researcher and activist in sexual and reproductive health and rights, Macleod argues that:

Teenage pregnancy is almost always depicted in the media and in medical or social science texts, both internationally and in South Africa, as a social problem... These, as listed in the research literature, are the disruption of schooling, the perpetuation of a cycle of disadvantage or poor socio-economic circumstances, poor child outcomes, health risks associated with early pregnancy, welfare dependency and contribution to unacceptable demographic patterns. A more recent concern is the association of HIV and teenage pregnancy.

This dominant negative discursive framing means that the ideological meanings of youth and sexuality that underlie these constructs to begin with are not fully identified. For example, there are social, cultural and religious influences that frame sexual maturity in specific ways. Teenage sex in this instance is often read against moralising discourses that construct young people (and young women in particular) who have sex as engaging in illicit and problematic behaviour. Interventions adopting the sequential model, in turn, incorporate this moralising frame to construct youth sexual behaviour as undesirable and to be frowned upon. The social stigma that many young women face and experience in relation to sexual behaviour has been shown to influence the health-seeking behaviours of many young women (see Campbell et al., 2006; Gyan, 2018; Müller et al., 2018).

For Macleod, part of the problematics of dominant discursive constructs of adolescence and sexuality concern how the category of the adolescent is produced. Focusing specifically on the discursive

representations of teenage pregnancy as a social problem, Mcleod (2003: 420) argues that:

In order to speak of teenage pregnancy, in order for adolescents' sexual and reproductive behaviour to be the target of interventions, adolescence needs to be accepted as a separable stage of development, as an identifiable phase in the life span of a human during which she or he is no longer a child, but not yet an adult.

This distinguishing of teenagers and adolescents as a distinct and immutable category poses some problems when engaging notions of sexual agency. For Macleod, the power differentials between youth and caregivers is one of these arising problematics, whereby the capacity for young people to make decisions about their sexual lives is eroded. The idea of an 'in-between' stage of development that is captured in this notion of the not-yet adult but no-longer child almost creates a zone of development and identity formation that does not consider what young people and women think about their sexual lives and relationships. Consequently, decisions are made on their behalf and for their own good. These policy and institutional decisions often fail to fully consider young women as active social actors who address a range of socio-cognitive, behavioural, affective and social challenges. Sequential models of sexual behaviour are pushed without any consideration of the nuances and complexities of the environment and of the structural, institutional factors that influence this linear stage of development. For example, Packery (2020) demonstrates that the blesser-blessee relationship is not always perceived by young women via the same moral economy as by broader society. As one participant in Packery's study (2020) states:

It's not always for the wrong reasons ... people just decide sometimes to do it because they really want to do it. It's got nothing to do with the fact that they were abused or they're broken or they just want to be rebellious.

Packery's study also highlights the importance of engaging young women's narratives about themselves and their lives to inform broader policy and institutional practice. Similarly, Adeagbo and Naidoo (2020) advocate for the role of such narratives as a way of better understanding how young women make sense of their sexual and reproductive lives. This approach will help to further understand what it means to live in this current moment as a specific embodied individual that is also part of intricate social and cultural systems. Willan et al. (2020) further note the role of understanding young women's reproductive decision-making in informing models of intervention to prevent early pregnancy, for example.

These tensions between intervention models that frame young women as completely lacking in agency, and/or fail to make sense of young women's sexual lives via intersectional and contextual lenses which consider racial, class and other axes of vulnerability and agency, must be brought to the forefront of our work and activism with young women. Pathologising and stigmatising discourses of youth sexuality also extend to queer sexuality. These discourses include the marginalisation and even silencing of young queer youth, and their exclusion from decision-making about sexual and reproductive health concerns. This silencing practice affects how many queer youth access health services and other institutional services concerning their safety and wellbeing. Research has shown that many queer youth in schools and at higher education institutions in South Africa continue to experience stigma, marginalisation and discrimination from their peers and teachers, and often have to participate in an environment that, amongst other things, diminishes or ignores their concerns about their identities and relationships (see Francis and Reygan, 2016; Kiguwa and Langa, 2017; Kiguwa and Nduna, 2017; Nduna and Kiguwa, 2017; Reygan and Steyn, 2017). In the last section of this chapter, we turn to this silencing and invisibilising of queer youth and sexuality.

THE PARADOX OF QUEER YOUTH VISIBILITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

An identity is questioned only when it is menaced, as when the

mighty begin to fall, or when the wretched begin to rise, or when the stranger enters the gates, never, thereafter, to be a stranger: the stranger's presence making you the stranger, less to the stranger than to yourself. Identity would seem to be the garment with which one covers the nakedness of the self; in which case, it is best that the garment be loose, a little like the robes of the desert, through which robes one's nakedness can always be felt, and, sometimes, discerned. This trust in one's nakedness is all that gives one the power to change clothes (Baldwin, 1976: 77).

According to Yuval-Davis (2006), identities are stories people tell themselves and others about who they are and who they are not, and these stories can be individual or collective. The stories, however, have material consequences for the lived experiences of queer youth. The concept of identity among queer youth is a contested and fluid domain (Matebeni, 2017) and hence can be treacherous terrain to navigate. Growing unrest among black youth in South Africa, and students in particular, shows itself most prominently in student protests such as Fees Must Fall and Rhodes Must Fall – movements which themselves highlight the paradox of visibility for youth. The demands and outcomes of these movements have been more extensively reported on in the media because of their affiliations to prestigious institutions. This has invited criticism of drowning out other movements at less privileged institutions. This visibility is also a function of the highly racialised dynamics of university rankings which place formerly white, colonial institutions at the top of a hierarchy of knowledge production. At the same time, the visibility of these movements was criticised from within for enjoying visibility at the expense of silenced queer people and women in the movement. This is often the reality of queer black youth, who are both hypervisible and invisible. On the one hand, queer youth are subsumed under many interest groups as not having any specific needs and therefore remain underserved as a group among the youth with specific needs. At the same time, they are hypervisibilised as token interest groups, often for the purposes of political point scoring, or when tragedy occurs after another queer person is murdered or raped in a homophobic attack.

I write in my memoir, *Khamr*, that (Khan, 2020a):

The privilege of failing in the daylight can never be underestimated when someone like me still wonders what a first kiss feels like. By university age, most people have already experienced at least one teenage love affair, which probably signalled the end of the world when it died, with parents and siblings to offer comfort in fully lit rooms. We don't love in the light, we don't fail in the light, we don't win in the light, and we don't live in the light unless we force ourselves into it. Even today, it is a job to be visible as a queer person. Nothing is organic.

The visibility being spoken of here points to the right to everyday expressions of queerness which many still have to hide and obfuscate for safety in a country where our Constitution protects us, but attitudes to queerness remain overwhelmingly negative (Khan, 2020c). The experience of being black and queer in general is burdensome in South Africa. However, youth propels many into visibility, which is often met with violence as a disciplinary measure for perceived deviance. In a chapter in the edited collection *They Called Me Queer*, I explain (Khan, 2019: 156):

The people around me who consciously or unconsciously partook in this project of disciplining my sexuality practised their power through discourse. In no particular order, I remember my mother, brother and sister-in-law all promoting normalizing discourses peppered with varying degrees of objection ranging from disapproval to disgust. While watching an episode of Oprah with my mother one afternoon at home, she commented on the subject of parents dealing with their gay children. In response to the show's encouragement of acceptance, she said, 'This is fine, as long as they are not my children.' ... The symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1989) of this discourse locked me into self-regulating retreat for fear of punishment associated with transgression (Foucault, 1978).

This quote demonstrates the paradox of queer youth visibility, in that the response to it is often a warning from normative society to those who are not yet visible to remain invisible, failing which consequences will be administered.

Accordingly, the visibility of black queer youth often places them in a precarious position in which they risk a backlash for existing freely. The few efforts by media and entertainment to represent black queer people are often interpreted as forcing queerness onto a society that is predominantly understood to be heterosexual. Gevisser (2020: 6–7) narrates how the broadcasting of queer content in a South African soap inspired homophobic witch hunting by police in Malawi, proving again how visibility for queer people is inextricably linked to the threat of violence, not only in South Africa, but also in other African countries.

Returning to the issue of invisibility, queerness ruptured a significant moment in youth politics, when queer students refused to be silenced in the fight for free education during various student resistance movements in 2015. According to Mokgopa (2018: 110):

Fallism's ability to gather followers was evidenced in the Fees Must Fall protests across the country. However, Fallism is far from perfect. For the most part it tries to distance itself from the struggle of transgender people, and women, expressly stating that Fallism is not a feminist movement and that there is no space for the transgender agenda on the Fallist mandate, thus failing the demands of intersectionality. Further, hyper-masculine performativity is rampant in Fallist spaces.

The struggles that place queer identity at odds with youth identity are clearly highlighted in the quote above. They are struggles characterised by the tensions between progressive agendas of broadening humanity's expression of itself in various ways, and conservatism that foregrounds normativity and the hegemonic expressions of powerful positionalities. As Gevisser (2020: 24) points out, it is no coincidence that, at the same time that LGBT rights discourse spreads across the

world, the reaction by conservative forces who fear loss of control also intensifies. Youth visibility is not inherently progressive as youth identities are often aligned to normativity which silences queer people, who are easily subsumed into youth-led movements for the benefit of numbers. The experiences of queer black youth are often of having to choose one identity at the expense of many others. In the absence of intersectional analysis of youth challenges, attempts at understanding black youth will always fall short.

Despite this paradox, many black queer youth are choosing to reject the conventions that restrict and invisibilise them, and deliberately so. In this way, the stories they tell themselves and others about who they are take precedence over those about who they are not. The first way in which this is being done by queer youth is through the ownership and weaponisation of old stereotypes used against them. A big part of this has been to reclaim language through an initiative called Find New Words. Given that most words used to describe queer people are derogatory or non-existent, the Find New Words initiative works with the LGBTQQIAP+ community and stakeholders to create new language using African words that describe the community positively. The goal is to address and alter the narrative around queer identities to hopefully create a more exclusive society without the 'cloak of Western influence' (Nkumane, 2018). This initiative, however, takes its lead from the existing ways in which black queer youth are grappling with and shaping African languages to become more inclusive and affirming of queer identities. The belief that language influences behaviour and beliefs is the driving force behind such ongoing attempts to make black queer youth agents of change in shifting perceptions of queerness.

The second way that black queer youth are dismissing invisibilising conventions is through the rejection of gender hegemony. This remains, of course, a choice that places them at great risk of violence, but they are persisting. Many such examples exist in popular culture through the visibility of recording artists like Nakhane and FAKA, among many, who unapologetically divest from hegemonic gendered

expressions of queerness.³ These artists, like others before them, have inspired many black queer youth to do the same and a visible trend of rejecting gender normativity can be seen among queer youth in South Africa. This rejection of gender normativity supplements the language project noted above in dismantling the negative connotations attached to queerness, through normalising gender diversity within queerness.

The third way that invisibility is challenged is through demanding intersectionality in analysis of struggles that affect queer youth in multiple ways. In relation to the process of growing into queerness, I note in *Khamr*, that (Khan, 2020a: 169):

It has been nearly ten years since I commenced my journey into personhood and its many winding turns. I say personhood, because for me the journey centred intersectionality in its way of reconciling multiple positionalities, both privileged and oppressed. I have also embodied my queerness in ever-evolving ways, realising that coming out is not an event when it does happen, and that queerness is no less valid in its absence.

This understanding of intersectionality has helped many black queer people to articulate their realities through discourse around identity and, additionally, to situate their experiences of queerness within its many intersections, one of which is youth identity. Young black queer people are demanding to be seen in their fullness as simultaneously black and queer, transgender, gender-nonconforming or non-binary and myriad different identities they have come to identify with. It is an important occurrence in light of young queer people's agency to command their visibility, resist their invisibility and denounce the violence they face because of it.

Finally, there is a clear drive to renegotiate the histories that legitimise the abuse and exclusion of queer people, with nuance and

³ Both Nakhane and FAKA, who would generally be read as men through normative interpretive frameworks of gender, often play with fashion and make up in their audio-visual music projects and their personal lives in ways that trouble the gender binary. It is difficult to interpret their genders through a normative gender lens.

accuracy. One prevailing contestation around queerness is its relation to African culture. It is often said that queerness is a Western import, foreign to Africa (Bennett, 2011; Tamale, 2011). Young black queer people have built up an arsenal of historical facts debunking this myth and are contributing more, inside and outside of the academy. Matebeni (2017) also points out the links between queerness and migrant identities which share an experience of othering rooted in being characterised as foreign. This framing adds an important lens of intersectionality to queerness which is thereby opened up to possibilities beyond just marginalisation and derision.

In an article titled 'Remembering is deliberate: Resisting the erasure of Bev Ditsie' (Khan, 2020b), I write about the remembrance of queer resistance icons in South Africa as one such contribution to the arsenal. In conversation with Dr Bev Ditsie, she relates a personal anecdote of her personal history which upends the lie of foreign queerness.

My great-great grandmother was still alive until I was in my late teens; she passed away when she was 95 years old... She said 'I don't understand when people say there is a problem with you and this is un-African, where do they get that?' This is someone who was born in 1899, whose mom was born in the 1820s, whose grandma was born in the 1750s, whose great grandmom was born in the early 1700s. So, these are people who remember colonisation, just from her own oral history. She says to me, 'We've always had people like you until the colonisers arrived and gave us a bible and told us that you should not exist. So don't let them tell you anything.'

It is unfortunate that young black queer lives often find themselves fighting for legitimacy in a system that simultaneously denies and exploits them. If it is not for political point scoring and posturing, then it is for capitalistic gain that young queer identities are commodified. On the other hand, little is done by those in power to effect change in attitudes that lead to harm perpetrated against queer people, even when those with power are themselves youth. Policy interventions

are often focused on structural issues such as unemployment, and not sexual and gender identities. A failure to focus on these identities ignores pertinent axes of difference that shape the lives policies are meant to protect. However, a history of resistance against injustice rests comfortably within the ambit of queer identity, seen in the ways that young black queer people reject and refuse old notions of hardship as an essential component of identity formation. What was formerly participation in struggle has become insistence on access to healing and nurturing for black queer people.

This process of negotiation that young queer people partake in to actively redefine the boundaries and possibilities for queer identities holds a few keys to understanding the trajectory of youth identities. Leading such demands for healing and nurturing, queer youth influence youth identity as a whole and make many more possibilities available to articulate exactly what must change in order for the youth to inherit a better future and lead a healthier world. In light of the juxtaposition of hypervisibility and invisibility affecting queer youth, it is important to note the ways in which queer youth are taking the lead in demanding that we see them as autonomous, independent actors who are in full command of their identities, fluid as they may be.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed representations of youth sexuality in South Africa with particular focus on three categories of youth: young men, young women and queer youth. We argue that youth sexuality must be understood against a backdrop in which historical-political, racial, classed and gendered hierarchical systems continue in the post-apartheid, democratic present. Gender and sexuality's intersections with other markers of categorisation and inequality are thus important to consider in relation to how we conceptualise and work with youth. While we acknowledge that many explorations of, and encounters with, sex and sexuality for many young people are characterised by violence, coercion and misinformation about sexual desire and practice, we also acknowledge that this is not always the dominant frame of experience for many young people. Young people

also resist and reframe the marginalisation they experience. Indeed, it is worth noting a continued missing dialogue on sexual pleasure in relation to youth sexuality. This chapter focused specifically on some of the challenges and gaps that continue to be present in how youth and sexuality is spoken about and how interventions are conceptualised. In so doing, we emphasise that, alongside these dominant discursive representations of how sexuality is configured and practised within systems and relations of violence and discrimination, we need to also address the sexual agency that young people embody and that can contribute to a national dialogic practice.

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