Original Contributions

Young lesbian and bisexual women resisting discrimination and negotiating safety: A photovoice study

Floretta Boonzaier[1]
Department of Psychology, University of Cape Town, Cape Town

Maia Zway
Department of Psychology, University of Cape Town, Cape Town

ABSTRACT

With the increasing focus on the problem of 'corrective rape' in South Africa, representations of black lesbian women have largely become about victimhood. The increasing media focus on 'corrective rape' has also resulted in the 'hyper-visibility' of black lesbian bodies. These representations of victimhood can be problematic, as they erase the agency, political activism, pleasure and multi-dimensionality of black lesbian lives. Furthermore, although there has been increased attention on the lives of black lesbian women, the experiences of black lesbian youth remain marginal. In this paper we present findings from a participatory, photovoice project with young, black lesbian women in the Western Cape. The project involved the development of photo stories and the collection of interview and focus group data from 14 young women between the ages of 13 and 17 years who identify as lesbian or bisexual. We discuss the young women's experiences of violence and discrimination at school, and how they resist that discrimination. We also discuss how the young women construct and negotiate safety in their community, zoning in on the young women's agency in their resistance and negotiation of safety, and their defiance of dominant narratives of victimhood. We further discuss how the photovoice methodology can be used as an empowering method to research issues around violence and safety with young people and those who may be stigmatised or marginalised.

Keywords: *photovoice, black lesbian youth, discrimination, resistance, safety.*

---

1 Please direct all correspondence to: Prof Floretta Boonzaier, Department of Psychology, University of Cape Town, Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701; E-mail: Floretta.Boonzaier@uct.ac.za

INTRODUCTION

The rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people in South Africa are enshrined in the constitution, which protects against discrimination based on a variety of identities, including sexual orientation, and is considered to be one of the most progressive constitutions in the world. However, this often does not translate into protection in the lives of all citizens (Nel & Judge, 2008).

Despite progressive legislation regarding the protection of sexual-minority rights, attitudes towards homosexuality in South Africa remain overwhelmingly negative (Roberts & Reddy, 2008). In a review of the trends around attitudes towards homosexuality in the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) from 2003-2007, Roberts and Reddy (2008) showed that the percentage of respondents who believe that sex between people of the same sex is 'always wrong' remained relatively steady, ranging between 82%-85%. In addition to pervasive negative attitudes towards homosexuality in South Africa, there are also high levels of homophobic victimisation (Baird, 2010; Rich, 2006; Wells, 2006; Wells & Polders, 2004). Homophobic victimisation furthermore intersects with other forms of oppression, such as racism and sexism to create multiple forms of, and levels of discrimination (Nel & Judge, 2008).

Those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning (LGBTIQ) have to negotiate their identities and identifications in a heterosexist, heteronormative and homophobic context. For young people, this may pose special challenges. The 'coming out' process is often seen as central in the formation of gay and lesbian identities (Cass, 1979; Savin-Williams, 1990; Smuts, 2011), and adolescence is the time when many gay and lesbian young people will 'discover' their sexuality, or 'come out' for the first time (Savin-Williams, 1990). Adolescents who identify as LGBTIQ may face additional challenges in resolving this developmental conflict due to the stigma they may face in a heteronormative society which is often hostile towards same-sex desire and gender non-conformity (Rivers, 2002).

In this paper we argue that, while the reality of the risks faced by LGBTIQ young people should be an important site of research, theorising and activism, we also need to find ways of doing research that foregrounds new narratives about the lives of young people. We argue that a one-dimensional focus on risk is problematic as it denies people's agency and their everyday experiences of survival and pleasure and tells a single story, particularly about black women as perpetual victims.

BLACK LESBIAN WOMEN AND THE PROBLEM OF 'CORRECTIVE RAPE'

Perhaps the most visible of risks faced by lesbian women is the issue of 'corrective rape[2]'. Despite the fact that black lesbian women bear a range of additional burdens of racist discrimination and economic disempowerment (Holland-Muter, 2012), it is the issue of 'homophobic rape' that has captured media attention in South Africa and internationally. This refers to the practice of targeting and raping lesbian women, specifically black lesbian women, with the apparent suggestion that their sexual preferences may be 'corrected'. Given that the rape of black women who identify as lesbian cannot be analysed outside of the continuing high levels of gender-based violence in South Africa, it is not unreasonable to assume that the practice is widespread, and anecdotal evidence suggests the same (Holland-Muter, 2012; Muholi, 2004; Nel & Judge, 2008). However, there is currently no official 'hate crimes' category in which crimes against LGBTI people can be classified, so no official statistics on the prevalence of this crime exist.

The rape of lesbian women is often analysed through the lens of gender; it is most often butch[3] lesbians who take on a masculine role who are most at risk of victimisation, though this is not to say that femme/feminine women are not victimised (Muholi, 2004; Swarr, 2012). A common perception is that butch lesbians want to be men, and are taking over the role of men (Swarr, 2012). Thus, butch lesbians are argued to pose a threat to the traditional gender order and to heterosexual men in particular (Matebeni, 2013). In addition, butch lesbian women are also known to have sex with straight women, and thus they are furthermore perceived to be 'stealing' those women from heterosexual men (Swarr, 2012). This victimisation is then seen as a way to enforce the traditional gender order.

With the widespread acknowledgement of the problem of homophobic violence, the portrayal of black lesbian women has largely become about victimhood and their risk of being victims of 'corrective rape' (Matebeni, 2013; Morrissey, 2013; Swarr, 2012). However, these kinds of portrayals also have the effect of making invisible the agency women have and the political organising occurring amongst black lesbian women in township spaces (Morrissey, 2013; Swarr, 2012). Furthermore, it also serves to erase the multiple and intersectional identities that shape women's everyday experiences (Matebeni, 2013). These portrayals

---

2 'Corrective rape' is a term originally coined by activists to refer to hate crimes targeting black lesbian women in particular. It is, however, a problematic and contested term, as it implies that sexuality is something that can be 'corrected' and also shifts blame from the perpetrators to the victims, for 'transgressing' traditional gender norms (Matebeni, 2013).

3 Some lesbian women identify within a butch-femme sub-culture. Although this is a simplistic explanation due to space constraints, women who identify as butch tend to take on a more masculine role, in actions, dress and mannerisms, whereas femme lesbians tend to take on a more feminine role (Kheswa & Wieringa, 2005).

of black lesbians as perpetual victims also deny their everyday experiences of survival and pleasure, as opposed to victimhood. Although research with adult lesbian women has started to look at the ways in which viewing women through a lens of 'risk' can be detrimental (Morrissey, 2013; Swarr, 2012), most of the research with adolescents still deals with risk and victimisation, with a focus on homophobic victimisation in schools and increased vulnerability to mental health problems.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND HOMOPHOBIC VICTIMISATIONS

South African, school-based victimisation studies with lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) adolescents indicate that they experience victimisation and harassment by peers, with verbal slurs being the most common form of victimisation and some incidents of physical assault also being reported (Msibi, 2012; Wells & Polders, 2004). Gendered identities appear to play an important role in victimisations as well, as gender non-conforming individuals are most likely to experience victimisation and harassment.

In addition, researchers have raised concern about gay and lesbian learners' reports of victimisation from teachers and administrators in the form of verbal abuse, physical assault and public humiliation (Butler, Alpaslan, Strümpher, & Astbury, 2003; Msibi, 2012; Wells & Polders, 2004). A recent example of discrimination by school administrators, as evidenced by the recent case of a school in Tembisa, Johannesburg that threatened to expel seven lesbian learners for refusing to wear skirts, indicates the problematic heteronormative assumptions that underlie discrimination and how they are linked to gender expression (DeBarros, 2014).

In another study, Nell and Shapiro (2011) conducted informal interviews and focus groups with LGBTI youth from a variety of different racial, gender and class identities (though most were black, gay and male) in Gauteng for an unpublished report commissioned by The Atlantic Philanthropies. They found that LGBTI youth faces similar challenges to other South African youth, but that these challenges are compounded by experiences of discrimination and alienation in the family, at school and in religious settings, as well as threats of violence in their communities. However, despite these challenges, many of the young people they interviewed also found spaces where their identity was affirmed, specifically in LGBTI spaces and organisations and by getting involved in LGBTI activism.

These findings from research with young people are echoed in other qualitative studies that have been conducted with school teachers around their views of homophobia and how they approach the issue in school (Bhana, 2012; Francis, 2012). These studies found that teachers often repress conversations about sexuality in general and actively silence

conversations around homosexuality specifically. This silencing of diverse sexualities is further highlighted at a curriculum level, where same-sex sexualities are barely dealt with at all in most Life Orientation textbooks that are used in South Africa (Potgieter & Reygan, 2012). All of these factors contribute not only to individual learners feeling isolated and excluded, but also to a heteronormative culture within schools that invisibilises alternative sexualities (Butler et al., 2003; Msibi, 2012). Furthermore, the silencing of talk about sexuality at school is problematic as it means that opportunities to engage with young people in a more youth-centred, participatory and open way are missed, particularly engagement with young people who may hold homophobic attitudes and who tend to act on them.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND VULNERABILITY TO MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

International research has shown that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) adolescents have higher rates of mental health problems than heterosexual youth (Marshal et al., 2008, 2011). Homophobic victimisation in all its forms, as well as the promotion of a heteronormative culture in schools, families and other spaces, can have adverse effects on LGBT young people, and may lead them to feel rejected and isolated. Adverse effects can include academic difficulties, as well as increased vulnerability to various mental health problems such as depression, suicidality and substance abuse (Burton, Marshal, Chisolm, Sucato, & Friedman, 2013; Marshal et al., 2008, 2011; Polders, Nel, Kruger, & Wells, 2008). In addition, victimisation in school years is also linked to increased vulnerability to mental health problems in adulthood (Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2011). Although there is not much published literature on the mental health of LGB adolescents in South Africa, anecdotal evidence suggests that they may face similar challenges (Nell & Shapiro, 2011).

Despite a large body of international evidence linking homophobic victimisation to mental health problems, there have been some inconsistent findings that suggest that mental health problems are related to victimisation in general, rather than homophobic victimisation in particular (Collier, Bos, & Sandfort, 2013). These findings may suggest the importance of moving away from viewing LGB adolescents as inherently ‘at risk’ for mental health problems due to their sexual orientation, and to rather focus on preventing victimisation in general. Savin-Williams (2001) further argues that the link between sexual orientation and poor mental health has resulted mainly from problematic research designs that compare LGBT youth to heterosexual youth, when this ignores that LGBT adolescents are not a homogenous group and it also sets non-LGBT youth up as the norm against which comparisons are made.

Other research has focused on the role of family support in the mental health outcomes of adolescents. LGB adolescents who come out to their parents may face rejection due to

religious or cultural values that denigrate same-sex sexualities, or due to heteronormative assumptions that parents hold (Kowen & Davis, 2006; Padilla, Crisp, & Rew, 2010). Parental rejection is linked to the internalisation of negative beliefs about homosexuality, more difficulty in the coming out process, as well as more stress in trying to conceal their identity, which may lead to poorer mental health outcomes (Bregman, Malik, Page, Makynen, & Lindahl, 2013). However, family and peer support and acceptance can also act as a protective factor against mental health problems (Bregman et al., 2013; Padilla et al., 2010). Kowen and Davis (2006), for example, in their interview study with young lesbian women in South Africa, found that the women experienced much isolation and feelings of alienation from family and peers at school, but at the same time they also gained support from friends, which resulted in resilience in coping with the challenges they faced. Families and peers therefore play an important role in how adolescents experience and understand their gender identities and sexualities, in both positive and negative ways.

Adolescence is an important time for identity formation, with 'coming out' seen as an important step in identity formation for adolescents who identify as lesbian. Lesbian adolescents face additional challenges, such as isolation and alienation from most structures that would normally be supportive, including the family, school and peers. While victimisation rates are high for LGBTI people and black lesbian women in particular, the differing contexts (e.g. family and school) in which young people act out their identities may pose further risks – a focus on risk alone tells only one kind of story about the lives of young people who identify as LGBTIQ and feeds into heteronormative discourses and the pathologisation of those deemed 'other'.

In this paper we draw from a larger project that explored the representations of gender and sexuality amongst diverse groups of young people in South Africa, using participatory methodologies. We address the following question: How do lesbian and bisexual young women choose to represent their experiences of gender and sexuality through photovoice and how do these stories challenge or maintain dominant narratives about young people of diverse sexualities?

METHODS

Photovoice, a participatory action research (PAR) method, has been identified as an innovative way through which to engage with young people (Kessi, 2011; Wang, 2006). We used the method, which involves training participants in photography and facilitating a process in which they represent their experiences on their own terms (Wang & Burris, 1997) to address the question of how adolescent women who identify as lesbian represent their experiences of gender and sexuality.

We approached the research from a feminist intersectional stance, interested in the ways in which intersecting identities and structures of power result in differing experiences and locations. At the level of representations, we are also interested in how particular representations, which are either foregrounded or obscured, serve ideological and political interests.

We recruited 14 isiXhosa-speaking young women between the ages of 13 and 17 years, 12 of whom identified as butch lesbians and two as bisexual. Participants were recruited with the assistance of the Triangle Project, an NGO based in Cape Town that focuses on LGBTI rights. The research took place in a community approximately 70 kilometres from Cape Town.

The process we followed in this photovoice study entailed meeting participants 10 times over a five-month period. These included four focus group discussions about their lives as young lesbian and bisexual women and their experiences in their community, and framing their photo stories and their experiences on the project. Participants also received photography training from a professional photographer and were given a camera to use for one week. They each produced a written narrative to accompany the photographs they took. Each participant was interviewed once and was asked to tell her own story. A public exhibition of photo stories was planned and managed by the participants and the community group they belong to.

Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the appropriate university body and informed consent and assent negotiated with parents and the participants themselves. All names and identifying details have been changed to ensure anonymity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

STORIES OF DISCRIMINATION AND RESISTANCE

In this paper we focus on narratives of resistance in participants' stories of their experiences as lesbian and bisexual young women, specifically how they 'speak back' to dominant narratives of black lesbian lives. Despite the many challenges that the participants faced in relation to discrimination at school and alienation in various settings, there were also many stories of resistance that emerged in the young women's narratives. These stories involved resistance to actual discrimination, particularly at school, as well as resistance to dominant, one-dimensional narratives of black lesbian victimhood.

Most of the young women who identified as lesbian wore 'greys' (grey pants considered to be the 'boys' uniform') to school. For these young women, wearing 'greys' was felt to be

an essential part of their identities as butch lesbians. The 'greys' also served as a physical marker of their lesbian identities to themselves and to others in a school context in which they were expected, as young women, to wear dresses or skirts[4]. However, wearing 'greys' to school also resulted in a great deal of discrimination and victimisation from teachers. The school uniform seemed to be the cause of conflict between teachers and some of the participants. Participants described incidents of being 'chased' out of school by teachers (and therefore missing school), verbal abuse (e.g. being called 'dogs'), public humiliation, and some incidents of physical abuse (e.g. being slapped by a teacher). In addition to incidents of abuse towards individual learners, many participants also talked about a strong discourse of 'separate development' from some teachers, who suggested that lesbian learners should be taught separately, by lesbian teachers.

Dunne, Humphreys, and Leach (2006) suggest that schools create their own 'gender regimes' through formal and informal school traditions, rules and codes of conduct that are governed by gender. In township schools such as those attended by the participants, the 'gender regime' may be further reinforced by conservative religious and cultural understandings of gender roles (Msibi, 2012). Although not specifically mentioned by Dunne et al. (2006), the uniform forms a central part of the regime through it being a physical marker of 'gender difference'. Thus, although the abuse and discrimination that the participants faced seemed to be centred around the wearing of the 'boys' uniform', it is important to bear in mind that this conflict was not about the uniform itself, or school rules about the uniform. Rather, it was about what the uniform represented: a supposed transgression of the schools' 'gender regime'.

Some of the participants wrote about their experiences at school in their photo stories and also took photographs to represent their experiences. Through publically exhibiting this aspect of their stories, the young women drew attention to the victimisation and discrimination that they experienced. For example, Sesethu (aged 17)[5] presented a photo story of herself in 'girls' uniform', juxtaposed with one of her in a 'boys' uniform':

> At school there was this day a teacher came to me and ask are you a boy or what, I did not answer her because she knows me. Then she take me to another

4 The national guidelines on school uniforms allow each school to decide school uniform policies for that particular school. Schools may treat refusal to wear the approved school uniform as a disciplinary matter. In the participants' school, the principal allowed lesbian learners to wear 'greys', but individual teachers continued to discriminate against lesbian learners.

5 The ethical requirements of our institution require that we blur participants' faces in order to maintain their anonymity. Although we have adhered to this requirement in this paper, we are deeply uncomfortable about rendering the participants invisible and potentially reproducing the power dynamics that marginalise young people who do not identify as heterosexual and we surface the tensions between 'giving voice' and institutionalised ethical requirements.

> teacher, they were asking me a lot of questions which are not good. I was very angry because I did not like the way they were talking with me. When I listen to them seriously they are talking about me wearing a grey pants which they say is for boys. I was very shocked because I have been wearing this grey since 2010, but they were not talking. In my mind I had this unanswered question which is why they don't want me to wear this now, what about those passed years. There was this day the same teacher called me to her class. Then she said where do I belong in the register, she was asking that do they put me under boys' side or girls' side. I said to her how can you ask me that because you are the teacher, girls are in the same side. She said to me I must take my pants off she wants to see what I am hiding behind those pants. I did not take my pants off so she chased me out of school. (Sesethu)

The above extract from Sesethu's photo story highlights how the school uniform has become the site of discrimination against lesbian learners because it is a physical marker of their identities. However, it is also evident in the extract that the 'greys' have become a symbol for something much larger: the subversion of the traditional gender binary which the teachers feel the need to police. Thus, the teacher asks her whether she belongs in the girls' column or the boys' column, and what she is "hiding behind those pants." It therefore seems that the 'greys' have become a physical marker or symbol of a stigmatised identity ('lesbian') that is seen as threatening to the traditional gender order and the school's 'gender regime'. Msibi (2012) points out that such behaviour on the part of teachers reflects the intersection of sexism and homophobia, with teachers wishing to enforce sexist traditional gender roles ('girls wear skirts'), but also with a focus on how this is linked to homosexuality.

In her photo story, Sesethu wonders about what has changed this year that has caused the teachers to focus on the uniform. Another participant, Mandisa (aged 17), elaborates on this point and provides potential reasons for what some of the participants perceived as a sudden change from teachers regarding the uniform:

> I don't know what is it, or since [name removed] is the deputy principal now she wants to shine or maybe to be noticed in her position now, or I say because there are lots of us now that is why we are easily noticed, 'cause last year there were few of us. We were not this much, or that is why we are noticed there is too much of us, and we also go together, in fact we know each other, there is no way that we wouldn't go together.

Mandisa's extract above points to some of the possible power dynamics that may fuel discrimination against lesbian learners. Although she partially attributes the discrimination to the deputy principal's desire for power, her primary attribution seems to focus on how lesbian learners have become more visible in school through larger numbers and through being seen together in groups. It is possible that greater visibility, which is marked by large numbers of girls wearing the 'boys' uniform', has resulted in the perception that lesbian learners are more of a threat, and therefore need to be policed. In this way, the uniform has become a symbol of the greater visibility of a 'threatening' identity. Msibi (2012) suggests that fear of contagion or the 'spread' of homosexuality contributes to the discrimination against queer learners by teachers, who feel that if they 'police' gender non-conforming behaviour, they will prevent queer learners from influencing others. It is therefore possible that the greater numbers and visibility of lesbian learners may have fuelled a fear of contagion, which resulted in the 'sudden' use of violence and discrimination by teachers. This fear of contagion may also be at play in some teachers' desire to separate lesbian learners from the rest of the school.

International literature has highlighted schools as highly gendered spaces, where gender is strictly policed and compulsory heterosexuality is actively promoted (Dunne et al., 2006). In South Africa, previous research has similarly shown that gay and lesbian learners experience a great deal of victimisation from teachers and peers, including verbal abuse, physical abuse and public humiliation (Butler et al., 2003; Msibi, 2012; Rich, 2006; Wells, 2006; Wells & Polders, 2004). Msibi (2012) demonstrated the particular challenges that queer learners in township schools face, and how gender policing and the promotion of compulsory heterosexuality through physical and verbal violence create a climate of fear at school. The literature also points to the potential detrimental consequences of the kind of victimisation that the young women in this study experienced, including increased vulnerability to depression and other mental health problems (Burton et al., 2013; Polders

et al., 2008), suggesting that the victimisation learners experience may have an impact on how they experience themselves, and how they construct their identities.

STORIES OF RESISTANCE TO DISCRIMINATION AT SCHOOL

Although the participants experienced a great deal of discrimination at school, they also actively resisted. Through these acts, participants simultaneously resisted dominant representations of black lesbians as passive victims (Matebeni, 2013; Morrissey, 2013). Participants' resistance to the discrimination they experienced took several forms. Many initially attempted to talk to teachers themselves. This strategy being unsuccessful, the participants found alternative ways for their concerns to be heard. Some enlisted the help of supportive caregivers and the LGBTI organisation that they were part of, who came to the school to advocate for them. Akhona (aged 16) enlisted the help of her mother:

> Like I must also wear a skirt, then I told the teacher no I can't wear a skirt like he said; I must go and come back when I realise I want to be a real girl. Like it was quite hurting to me like, I wanted to be at school. Every time I entered the class, but I didn't give up. I just told my mother and then my mother called the teacher and told him all the story. That I can't. It's like I don't feel comfortable. But now the teacher is fine with me.

Another participant, Fezeka (aged 15), described how the strategy to enlist the assistance of members of the LGBTI group was successful in allowing them to wear their 'greys' after group leaders came to the school to talk to the teachers. Despite being unable to engage with the teachers themselves, these young women narrated their stories in a way that demonstrated their resourcefulness in accessing support. In all of the narratives, the discrimination against the young women was resolved after the intervention by another adult. These stories highlight the need to focus on age/youth when thinking about these stories of discrimination. Dunne et al. (2006) have highlighted how gender in schools is regulated through institutional power relations linked to age and authority. The institutional power relations between teachers as authority figures and learners as 'youth' meant that the participants' needs regarding the school uniform were not taken seriously until an adult intervened. In addition, these narratives further highlight how the young women's experiences of discrimination and resistance were directly affected by their status as 'minors' and their dependence on their parents. In the extracts above, the participants had supportive adults or organisations that they could turn to for assistance. It is likely, however, that their experiences would have been radically different if they did not have these resources available to them.

It is interesting to note that in all of the narratives of resistance presented above, the stories ended with a favourable outcome for the young women, with them being allowed to wear the 'greys'. The structure of the narratives is similar, with the young women experiencing discrimination, then taking an action (telling a parent/organisation), which ultimately leads to a favourable resolution of the situation. By narrating their stories in this way, the young women construct identities in which they have agency to change discriminatory practices in their lives.

CONSTRUCTIONS OF VIOLENCE, SAFETY AND COMMUNITY

In this project we chose not to ask specifically about rape or hate crimes against lesbian women, unless participants' raised the issues themselves. However, issues of rape, safety and violence were brought up in the first group discussion, prompted by the question: "What is it like to be a lesbian teenager in (your community)?"

Participants' constructions of violence and safety in their community were often conflicting and contested. Although they often reiterated that there had never been any hate crimes against lesbians in their community, talk about hate crimes and violence against lesbians was prevalent. For some participants, the fact that there had been no reported hate crimes in their community meant that it was 'safe'. For others, the fact that they experienced harassment on the streets meant that it was not 'safe'. Some participants also alternated between the two positions in their own narratives. The following interaction demonstrates some of the contestations around safety:

> Khetiwe (aged 17): …So it's like, let me just say it, there's no problem there, they don't have here and, all that kind of stuff. [Ja so people are calm about it.]
> Floretta: [So you feel safe]
> Khetiwe: Ja I feel safe
> Nokuthula (aged 16): In that case I don't feel safe here, there's no place where I can say it's safe here in my place, because, probably having faced some challenges and problems around, but it's not easy for us to kiss our girlfriends in street because people complain about it we have complaint saying it's devil thing ((noises of agreement)). ((To Khetiwe)) if you haven't got that I have got that, and even if you walk with a person, you can't like, touch them in a setting where you should, where you should like, walk as a group of friends or something. It's not easy here and the rape part it's out there, people might not say it but they have been raped, although they might not say it to you, or come out about it. There's a hate everywhere, no-one likes to accept the fact that we are there, we can't hide ourselves but, although we trying to tell them that we there, we facing problems. So we not safe everywhere.

In the extract above, Khetiwe and Nokuthula provide conflicting opinions on what it means to be safe as young, black lesbian and bisexual women. Khetiwe suggests that she feels safe because there have been no incidents of lesbians being raped that she knows of. On the other hand, Nokuthula does not feel safe due to the harassment that she experiences, and the underlying assumption that lesbians have probably been raped. In the extract, the prominence of rape and murder of lesbians as a 'standard' for safety or lack of safety is notable. It is interesting to note how Nokuthula shifts in her use of pronouns from talking about herself as an individual to an understanding of herself as part of a collective 'community'. Her statements that "there's a hate everywhere" and "so we not safe everywhere" may point to how the prominence of hate crimes against lesbians in South Africa has resulted in a generalised fear, and acknowledgement that as members of this collective, they too are not safe.

These contestations around what it means to be safe were echoed in individual narratives. There seemed to be some polarisation of opinion, with some participants such as Fezeka (aged 15) saying that they felt completely safe and had never been threatened: "I'm not scared. I even walk at 11 or 10 o'clock. Never even had a boy or the old man saying he will rape me or something. It's safe." On the other hand, many of the participants described experiencing incidents and threats of violence. Khanyiswa (aged 13), for example, described the harassment that she experienced on the streets in her community.

> Or when I'm walking with my girlfriend and boys would say "oh no these things" and they just wanted us to turn back and they would throw stones on us and we were scared of boys and we are not boys but we are girls and they will just hurt us very bad but I would just ignore them 'cause I'm use to them now. (Khanyiswa)

Apart from stories of harassment such as Khanyiswa's, many of the participants also described frustration that they could not hold hands or show affection towards their girlfriends in public for fear of such harassment. Nandipha's (aged 17) photo story further exemplifies the ambiguous constructions around safety:

> Same applies in the community when you passing by with boys they calling you a name because you walk with your girlfriend. At the same time I feel great being a lesbian in (my community) because we walk free there because no person has died with a murder because she's homosexual. But at the same time I feel bad because you just can't carry your girlfriend in the street. You must walk and act as friends as it is not. But all I will say is that (my community) is the best community ever. (Nandipha)

Nandipha's photo story, including her photograph above, is a particularly powerful example of contested constructions of safety. It could be argued that Nandipha's story reflects an internalisation of contested narratives of safety in her community as part of her own narrative and identity (Taylor, 2006). This story was presented at the public exhibition, and it is possible that her last sentence may be for the benefit of maintaining the dignity of her community to a public audience that included members of the community. Her story additionally brings attention to how constructions of community, violence and safety are inextricably linked.

CONSTRUCTING SAFETY IN A CONTEXT OF THE OMNIPRESENT THREAT OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Despite the contestations about what it means to be safe, stories about rape and threats of rape were prominent. Even in narratives where participants believed it was safe in their community, rape and murder often seemed to be the 'criterion' according to which safety was evaluated. Thus, even when participants were talking about lack of rape or murder of lesbians, rape and murder were ever present in the narratives.

Some participants wrote about threats of rape that they frequently experienced when walking in their community. The following are extracts from Sindiswa's (aged 16) and Lindiwe's (aged 13) photo stories:

But still we're killed for who we are. It should stop.
We are still the same as others.

> For me life as a young lesbian I would not say it is easy because every day I have to face challenges. Most of the times the streets you will find that guys are ganging up on me, they teasing me about the way I am that I am a lesbian. Sometimes when I am walking alone I would bump into a guy he would be like "I wish I could sleep with you so that you will realise that you are not a boy and stop what you doing, and start act like a girl". Many people especially guys when they see a lesbian like a butch one it's like they see someone they could rape. (Sindiswa)

> Here in (my community) there are young gangsters who always attack young girls from school. Those gangsters also liked to do silly comments and I couldn't ignore them because they always said things I am afraid of, including rape. Gangsters believed that if you are a virgin lesbian, once they sleep with you will stop being a lesbian, which is a lie. Butch lesbians are the ones who always get comments from young boys because butch lesbians date beautiful chicks and attracting chicks. (Lindiwe)

Through displaying their photo stories at the exhibition, the young women drew attention to the common threats of violence that they experienced. Although only Lindiwe mentions it directly as something that she is "afraid of", both of the extracts suggest that fear of rape is a frequent experience for the participants. These findings are in line with previous South African research, which has shown that threats of sexual violence against lesbians in townships are common (Swarr, 2012).

Additionally, both Sindiswa and Lindiwe begin to unpack how they make meaning of the rape threats against them, with both of them mentioning that threats of rape are directed predominantly towards butch lesbians. Identifying as butch lesbians themselves, the young women simultaneously construct themselves as potential victims of rape, in addition to simply describing their daily experiences of harassment. Sindiswa's and Lindiwe's narratives suggest an understanding of some of the power dynamics that make them and other butch lesbians threatening to men. Butch lesbians are often perceived as threatening because they symbolically claim the privileges associated with masculinity (Gunkel, 2010; Matebeni, 2013; Swarr, 2012; Swarr & Nagar, 2003). Thus, they are seen to be taking over the role of men, as the man in Sindiswa's narrative suggests when he says she must "realise that (she is) not a boy." Furthermore, butch lesbians are often perceived to be in competition with men because they commonly date 'straight' women, who may also be dating men (Swarr, 2012).

NEGOTIATING SAFETY IN PUBLIC SPACES

Although many of the participants experienced harassment and threats of violence in their community, they also developed strategies to manage their safety in public spaces. This involved a careful negotiation of their 'public' selves (Matebeni, 2011). In the following extract, Mandisa (aged 17) describes how she negotiates her identity in relation to the harassment that she experiences:

Like with no reason you see boys like mocking like even if we are just walking, especially if we are a group, they will pass remarks but we don't entertain them. Even if I walk alone they sometimes mock at me, if I'm not scared of that person I respond to that person but if I'm scared of him I just keep quiet. Even if you are walking with your girlfriend they will never keep quiet, they talk. We shouldn't hold hands together while walking, you must just walk, and look like you are just chatting.

Mandisa appears to be highly attuned to her environment, and responds to the harassment she experiences according to what she judges to be safest in the moment. Thus, she narrates a story in which she needs to 'hide' her identity to maintain her safety, but also demonstrates her resistance by responding to her harassers when it is safe to do so. Like Mandisa, many of the participants mentioned that they did not hold hands with, or kiss, their partners when they were in public, and rather pretended to be friends. This was frustrating for them, and many expressed anger that they had to 'hide' in order to avoid harassment and threats of violence, though they too confronted their harassers when they thought it was safe to do so. Thembeka (aged 17), in contrast, mentioned that being more visible and 'known' in the community aided her negotiation of safety:

> "Like if you're known in (the community), then the people don't have a problem with you, like they don't really have a problem, in my experience."

Although the participants who identified as butch lesbians constricted their behaviour when necessary, they could never fully 'hide' their identities, as these were made visible through their embodiment of masculinity. This therefore creates a paradox, as Matebeni (2011) and Swarr (2012) suggest: the visibility that they desire as butch lesbians through their embodied masculinity may simultaneously make them more vulnerable to violence. Thus, the young women needed to constantly monitor their environments and negotiate their identities, attempting to strike a balance between being 'known' and staying 'hidden'. The participants' narratives reflected this dialectic, echoing a body of literature suggesting that lesbian women are constantly negotiating their identities in relation to the spaces in which they find themselves (Bagnol, Matebeni, Simon, Blaser, Manuel, & Moutinho, 2010; Gibson & Macleod, 2012; Matebeni, 2011; Smuts, 2011; Swarr, 2012; Swarr & Nagar, 2003).

Furthermore, the participants' narratives and photographs demonstrated how their experiences of violence, safety and community were intimately linked to poverty and marginalisation. In the community in which the research was conducted, about 48% of people live below the South African poverty line (Bland, 2011 as cited in Grundlingh, 2011). Continued structural racism and economic inequality as a legacy of apartheid and colonialism mean that many black people continue to be impoverished (Swarr, 2012; Swarr & Nagar, 2003). Thus, it is important to consider the intersections of gender, race, class, sexuality and other identities and how these shape everyday lived realities (Bowleg, 2008; Crenshaw, 1991; Swarr & Nagar, 2003). The participants' experiences of living in

poverty were particularly prominent in some of their photographs. Sindiswa (aged 16) took photographs of where she lives, which is a poor area close to the research community:

Mandisa (aged 17) also took a photograph of the informal settlement where she used to live (she now lives in an RDP house with her grandmother). She described deep feelings of shame about living in an informal settlement, and how she did not want her friends to visit her.

Swarr and Nagar (2003) highlight how the lived experiences of violence and safety in townships are intimately linked to poverty and everyday struggles for survival. The poor living conditions which are evident in the photographs (lack of safe transport, inadequate housing, lack of adequate sanitation, lack of lighting, etc.) shape how the young women negotiate their environments in order to maintain safety, and are also likely make them more vulnerable to future violence as young lesbian women (Swarr & Nagar, 2003).

Thembeka (aged 17) took a photograph to represent the poverty and the resultant fragmentation of her community. Her description of the photograph is below:

> Oh yeah, and then there's that other one of …the biscuit …and that one I can say it really, it represent hmm, the poverty, and me also just saying that poverty, black people are related to poverty and something like that. And because it's broken in pieces, so I would also say that it represents the breaking up of a community, the non-unity that the people have yeah.

Above, Thembeka constructs her community as "broken" and fragmented. She also demonstrates an understanding of the politics of race and class in South Africa. Akhona (aged 16) narrated a similar story of a 'broken' society, specifically mentioning problems such as substance abuse and rape. Thus, the participants narrated how the fragmentation of communities linked to poverty and racism also has a direct impact on violence and safety.

Like Akhona, some of the participants mentioned the problem of sexual violence and its impact on safety and the community by. Although lesbian and bisexual women are often targeted and threatened with sexual violence specifically because of their sexual and gender identities, this violence also takes place within, and cannot be separated from, a broader context of high levels of sexual violence and violence against women (Matebeni, 2013; Swarr, 2012). Some of the participants talked about their experiences with sexual violence outside of discussions about the threats they endure because of their sexual and gender identities.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we report on a participatory photovoice project with young women who identify as lesbian and bisexual, with an interest in answering questions about their experiences of gender and sexuality and their resistances to dominant narratives about their lives as young black women of diverse sexualities. Although the young women reported experiences that fit in with dominant narratives about LGBTI youth victimisation, the participants challenged these dominant narratives of victimhood by demonstrating how they asserted their agency and resisted discrimination. They employed a variety of resources at their disposal to challenge the discriminatory practices of teachers at their schools. Participants' stories of discrimination do, however, point to the need to work with teachers on creating safer, more inclusive environments for learners with diverse sexual and gender identities, especially given the finding from other research showing how talk about sexuality is silenced at schools.

This research shows that, with some intervention from parents and community organisations, teachers ended their overt discrimination against lesbian and bisexual learners. A clear

recommendation for educational policy emerging from this and other research (Francis, 2012) is that the teaching of sexual diversity should be deeply embedded in the curriculum, not only through Life Orientation programming, but also across the curriculum. An embedding sexual diversity teaching is especially important so that the informal gender and sexuality curriculum that continues to hold sway and fuel discriminatory practices may be properly disrupted.

Furthermore, the young women's constructions of safety, violence and community included contested representations of what it means to be safe as a young black lesbian woman. Although, at times, participants constructed their community as 'safe', rape and murder were prominent in their talk, and emerged as the criteria against which safety was measured. Throughout participants' narratives, but particularly in their stories about safety, violence and community, the issue of visibility was foreground and highlights the young women's complex negotiations of identity. On the one hand, walking on the streets with girlfriends or other lesbian friends, or being together in groups at school was described as fuelling discrimination from teachers or harassment from men on the streets. On the other hand, some participants also described feeling safe if they were known (or visible) in their community. What these narratives of violence and safety illustrate, is the potential of the young women to challenge stigma discrimination by being visible and present through their embodiment of butch lesbian identities. On the other hand, the young women simultaneously walk a tightrope because the greater visibility comes with risks and requires of them to be hyper-vigilant and aware of their surroundings because of the constant threats of violence and the harassment they experience.

This research has foregrounded young lesbian and bisexual women's representations of their own experiences, finding that the photovoice method was useful to engage with young people. Through the method, the young women in this research chose to foreground representations of themselves as active and able to resist the discrimination they experience. While recognising their experiences of discrimination, these narratives of resistance were cast to specifically speak back to dominant representations of them and their lives as young, black lesbian women living in a South African township.

REFERENCES

Bagnol, B., Matebeni, Z., Simon, A., Blaser, T. M., Manuel, S., & Moutinho, L. (2010). Transforming youth identities: Interactions across 'races/colours/ethnicities', gender, class and sexualities in Johannesburg, South Africa. Sexuality Research & Social Policy, 7, 283-297. doi: 10.1007/s13178-010-0027-9

Baird, H. (2010). Same-sex sexuality in the North-West Province: Community report on outcomes of a research project. Retrieved from OUT LGBT-Wellbeing website: http://out.org.za/index.php/library/reports

Bhana, D. (2012). Understanding and addressing homophobia in schools: A view from teachers. South African Journal of Education, 32, 307-318. Retrieved from http://www.ajol.info/index.php/saje/article/view/79397

Bowleg, L. (2008). When black + lesbian + woman $\neq$ black lesbian woman: The methodological challenges of qualitative and quantitative intersectionality research. Sex Roles, 59, 312-325. doi: 10.1007/s11199-008-9400-z

Bregman, H. R., Malik, N. M., Page, M. J. L., Makynen, E., & Lindahl, K. M. (2013). Identity profiles in gay, lesbian and bisexual youth: The role of family influences. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 42, 417–430. doi: 10.1007/s10964-012-9798-z

Burton, C. M., Marshal, M. P., Chisolm, D. J., Sucato, G. S., & Friedman, M. S. (2013). Sexual-minority related victimisation as a mediator of mental health disparities in sexual minority youth: A longitudinal analysis. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 42, 394-402. doi: 10.1007/s10964-012-9901-5

Butler, A. H., Alpaslan, A. H., Strümpher, J., & Astbury, G. (2003). Gay and lesbian youth experiences of homophobia in South African secondary education. Journal of Gay and Lesbian Issues in Education, 1, 3-27. doi: 10.1300/J367v01n02_02

Cass, V. C. (1979). Homosexual identity formation: A theoretical model. Journal of Homosexuality, 4, 219-235. Retrieved from: http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/264126

Collier, K. L., Bos, H. M. W., & Sandfort, T. G. M. (2013). Homophobic name-calling among secondary school adolescents and its implications for mental health. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 42, 363–375. doi: 10.1007/s10964-012-9823-2

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. Stanford Law Review, 43, 1241-1299. doi: 10.2307/1229039

DeBarros, L. (2014, February 28). School pupils demand equality for lesbian girls. Mamba Online. Retrieved from http://www.mambaonline.com/2014/02/28/school-pupils-demand-equality-for-lesbian-girls/.

Dunne, M., Humphreys, S., & Leach, F. (2006). Gender violence in schools in the developing world. Gender and Education, 18, 75-98. doi: 10.1080/09540250500195143

Francis, D. A. (2012). Teacher positioning on the teaching of sexual diversity in South African schools. Culture, Health & Sexuality, 14, 597-611. doi: 10.1080/13691058.2012.674558

Gibson, A., & Macleod, C. (2012). (Dis)allowances of lesbians' sexual identities: Lesbian identity construction in racialised, classed, familial and institutional spaces. Feminism & Psychology, 22, 462-481. doi: 10.1177/0959353512459580

Grundlingh, M. (2011). Playing with a purpose: An ethnographic study of a sport-for-development programme in Mbekweni. (Unpublished Master's thesis). Stellenbosch University, South Africa.

Gunkel, H. (2010). The cultural politics of female sexuality in South Africa. New York, NY and London, UK: Routledge.

Holland-Muter, S. (2012). Outside the safety zone: An agenda for research on gender-based violence targeting lesbian and bisexual women in South Africa. Johannesburg, South Africa: MaThoko's Books.

Kessi, S. (2011). Photovoice as a practice of representation and social solidarity: Experiences from a youth empowerment project in Dar es Salaam and Soweto. Papers on Social Representations, 20, 7.1-7.27. Retrieved from http://psych1.lse.ac.uk/psr/PSR2011/20_07.pdf

Kheswa, W., & Wiernanga, S. (2005). 'My attitude is manly….a girl needs to walk on the aisle': Butch-femme sub-culture in Johannesburg, South Africa. In R. Morgan, & S. Wieranga (Eds.), Tommy boys, lesbian men and ancestral wives: Female same-sex practices in Africa (pp. 199-230). Johannesburg, South Africa: Jacana Media.

Kowen, D., & Davis, J. (2006). Opaque young lives: Experiences of lesbian youth. Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity, 20, 80-92. doi: 10.1080/10130950.2006.9674701

Marshal, M. P., Dietz, L. J., Friedman, M. S., Stall, R., Smith, H. A., McGinley, J. … Brent, D. A. (2011). Suicidality and depression disparities between sexual minority and heterosexual youth: A meta-analytic review. Journal of Adolescent Health, 49, 115–123. doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2011.02.005

Marshal, M. P., Friedman, M. S., Stall, R., King, K. M., Miles, J., Gold, M. A. … Morse, J. Q. (2008). Sexual orientation and adolescent substance use: A meta-analysis and methodological review. Addiction, 103, 546–556. doi: 10.1111/j.1360-0443.2008.02149.x

Matebeni, Z. (2011). Exploring black lesbian sexualities and identities in Johannesburg. (Unpublished doctoral thesis). University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa.

Matebeni, Z. (2013). Deconstructing violence towards black lesbians in South Africa. In S. Ekine, & H. Abbas (Eds.), Queer African reader (pp. 341-353). Nairobi, Kenya: Pambazuka Press.

Morrissey, M. E. (2013). Rape as a weapon of hate: Discursive constructions and material consequences of black lesbianism in South Africa. Women's Studies in Communication, 36, 72-91. doi: 10.1080/07491409.2013.755450

Msibi, T. (2012). 'I'm used to it now': Experiences of homophobia among queer youth in South African township schools. Gender and Education, 24, 515-533. doi: 10.1080/09540253.2011.645021

Muholi, Z. (2004). Thinking through lesbian rape. Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity, 18, 116-125. doi: 10.1080/10130950.2004.9676055

Nel, J. A., & Judge, M. (2008). Exploring homophobic victimisation in Gauteng, South Africa: Issues, impacts and responses. Acta Criminologica, 21, 19-36. Retrieved from: http://reference.sabinet.co.za/sa_epublication_article/crim_v21_n3_a3

Nell, M., & Shapiro, J. (2011). Out of the box: Queer youth in South Africa today. Retrieved from the Hear Us Out website: http://hearusout.org/resources/out_of_the_box_queer_youth_in_south_africa_today.htm

Padilla, Y. C., Crisp, C., & Rew, D. L. (2010). Parental acceptance and illegal drug use among gay, lesbian and bisexual adolescents: Results from a national survey. Social Work, 55, 265-275.

Polders, L., Nel, J., Kruger, P., & Wells, H. S. (2008). Factors affecting vulnerability to depression among gay men and lesbian women in Gauteng, South Africa. South African Journal of Psychology, 38, 673-687.

Potgieter, C., & Reygan, F. C. G. (2012). Lesbian, gay and bisexual citizenship: A case study as represented in a sample of South African Life Orientation textbooks. Perspectives in Education, 30, 39-51. Retrieved from http://www.ajol.info/index.php/pie/article/view/86254.

Rich, E. (2006). Overall research findings on the levels of empowerment among LGBTI people in the Western Cape, South Africa. Retrieved from the Triangle Project website: http://thetriangleproject.org/resources/399-2/

Rivers, I. (2002). Developmental issues of lesbian and gay youth. In A. Coyle, & C. Kitzinger (Eds.), Lesbian & gay psychology: New perspectives (pp. 30-44). London, United Kingdom: BPS Blackwell.

Roberts, B., & Reddy, V. (2008, December). Pride and prejudice: Public attitudes towards homosexuality. HSRC Review, 6, 9-11. Retrieved from http://www.hsrc.ac.za/uploads/pageContent/1607/Pride%20and%20 Prejudice.pdf

Russell, S. T., Ryan, C., Toomey, R. B., Diaz, R. M., & Sanchez, J. (2011). Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender school victimization: Implications for young adult health and adjustment. Journal of School Health, 81, 223-230. doi: 10.1111/j.1746-1561.2011.00583.x.

Savin-Williams, R. C. (1990). Gay and lesbian youth: Expressions of identity. New York, NY: Hemisphere Publishing Corporation.

Savin-Williams, R. C. (2001). A critique of research on sexual-minority youths. Journal of Adolescence, 24, 5-13. doi: 10.1006/jado.2000.0369

Smuts, L. (2011). Coming out as lesbian in Johannesburg, South Africa: Considering intersecting identities and social spaces. South African Review of Sociology, 42, 23-40. doi: 10.1080/21528586.2011.621231

Swarr, A. L. (2012). Paradoxes of butchness: Lesbian masculinities and sexual violence in contemporary South Africa. Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 37, 961-988. doi: 0097-9740/2012/3704-0011

Swarr, A. L., & Nagar, R. (2003). Dismantling assumptions: Interrogating “lesbian” struggles for identity and survival in India and South Africa. Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 29, 491-516. Retrieved from http://abahlali.org/files/nagar.swarr_.pdf.

Taylor, S. (2006). Narrative as construction and discursive resource. National Inquiry, 16, 94-102. Retrieved from http://www.clarku.edu/faculty/mbamberg/narrativeINQ/

Wang, C. (2006). Youth participation in Photovoice as a strategy for community change. Journal of Community Practice, 14, 147-161. Retrieved from http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1300/J125v14n01_09#. VN9IkWiUeSo.

Wang, C., & Burris, M. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology and use for participatory needs assessment Health Education and Behavior, 24, 369-387.

Wells, H. (2006). Levels of empowerment among lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender [LGBT] people in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. Retrieved from OUT LGBT Well-being website: http://www.out.org.za/index.php/ library/reports.

Wells, H., & Polders, L. (2004). Levels of empowerment among lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender [LGBT] people in Gauteng, South Africa. Retrieved from OUT LGBT Well-being website http://www.out.org.za/index. php/library/reports.

.