Revisiting Sexualities in the 21st Century

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Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

CONSTANTINOS N. PHELLAS

After widespread neglect for many years, the study of human sexuality has recently come to the forefront of many of the most important debates in contemporary society and culture. The continued development of feminist theory, the emergence of gay and lesbian studies, and the impact of the AIDS pandemic have combined to focus new attention on the ways in which gender and sexuality are shaped in different social and cultural settings, and on the complex interactions amongst sexuality, race, culture and health in the early twenty-first century.

This edited volume aims to seriously explore the key question of what different methodological and theoretical uses of intersectionality contribute to our understanding(s) of sexualities. The various stimulating and exciting contributions to this book critically examine key issues of sexualities around communities, identities, politics, education, relationships, arts, gender and health to offer new insights, allowing us to advance our understanding of the dynamics of sexualities from a multidisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary perspective, ultimately enabling us to begin to see matters of sexuality as they really are.

Sexual interactions are socially constructed within a historical, social and cultural milieu and are continually defined and redefined accordingly depending on the surrounding economic, political, moral, and religious social forces. Although the human capacity for sexual expression spans a wide range of variations and permutations, it is nonetheless seriously confined, limited and restricted to but a few “acceptable” forms. Western style “sexual acceptability” is in turn determined by the prevailing white heterosexual standards of patriarchy perpetrated through childhood masculine socialization and adolescent/adult machismo practices.

A book with the title *Revisiting Sexualities in the Twenty-first Century* begs a whole set of explanatory and definitional issues from the very outset, especially regarding what may be rightly included and excluded from its provenance and coverage. The contributing researchers of this book have been selected from three different methodological spheres: qualitative, quantitative and historical/comparative. Each author lays out

the traditional parameters of the methodology used in their perspectives of social science research and openly discusses how they have been applied to the study of hetero sexuality/non-heterosexuality and the ways in which their theory and methodology may in any way be improved. Their contributions outline some of the major theoretical and methodological problems that still confront the study of modern sexualities while presenting a selection of theoretical and methodological issues of interest to both new and experienced researchers.

This edited collection arises from the "Revisiting Sexualities in the 21st Century" conference, organised by the Cyprus Sociological Association held on June 12, 2013 at the University of Nicosia in Cyprus. The chapters in this book are based on presentations at the conference or on the works of those who were invited but could not attend. We are grateful to the CSA and the University of Nicosia for supporting the conference and providing the opportunity to lay the groundwork for this edited collection.

The various contributions to this book assist and empower: (i) social scientists (especially sociologists, psychologists and sexologists), (ii) biomedical scientists (epidemiologists, medical scientists), (iii) health professionals and other academic and professional audiences, and (iv) students, researchers and instructors of sexuality studies to:

- chart more successfully and profoundly the growth of lesbian and gay studies
- critically examine key issues around communities, identities, relationships and sexualities, and
- carry out empirical research which properly addresses issues of sexuality.

CHAPTER ONE

GENDERED ASYMMETRIES IN THE NARRATIVES OF ADOLESCENTS IN GREEK CYPRIOT SCHOOLS REGARDING EQUALITY

GEORGINA CHRISTOU
AND MARGARITA KAPSOU

Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) within intimate relationships is a widely researched phenomenon, which in recent years has gained ground within research focused on young people and their intimate relationships. Evidence in the international literature suggests strong links between patriarchal attitudes and values, and higher tolerance or even acceptance of GBV (Burton & Kitzinger 1998; Kimberly et al. 2010; McCarry 2010; Murner, Wright & Kaluzny 2002; Santana, Raj, Decker, La Marche & Silverman 2006; WHO 2005). Despite this, studies examining violent attitudes/behaviours among adolescents relating to GBV remain limited, while extant studies often ignore the gender dimension while examining such attitudes (Klein 2006; Reed, Raj, Miller & Silverman 2010). For example, studies on dating violence which focus on young age groups often ignore the gender dimension of this type of violence, or the different ways in which violence is experienced by women and men. However, studies that do examine the gender aspects of violence in relationships clearly indicate that violence experienced by girls and boys, and women and men, within dating and inter-personal relationships is substantially different, as girls/women tend to face more severe forms of violence within relationships, as well as consistent forms of abuse rather than one-off incidents (Council of Europe 2008; Walby & Allen 2004).

Within the Cyprus context, studies that have considered the effect of patriarchal attitudes and structures on the treatment of Cypriot and foreign women are scarce (Γρηγορίου & Χρίστου 2012; Charalambidou-Solomou et al., 2010; Spyrou, 2009; Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies [MIGS] 2008a; Vassiliadou 2004), and indicate that women continue to be given subordinated statuses and become marginalized and abused in multiple ways. The repercussions of this subordination are evident in many facets of life, including in the severe under-representation of women in political and public life and the wide gender pay gap, as well as in the persistence of high rates of violence against women, including domestic violence, rape and sexual assault. In relation to the school context, studies have shown that widespread societal narratives about gender propriety widely inform the attitudes of adolescents within intimate and peer relationships, while forms of gender-based bullying appear to be commonplace in Cypriot secondary schools (Christou 2013; Γρηγορίου & Χρίστου 2012; Skapoulli 2009; MIGS 2008b).

More specifically, a study on adolescents' understandings and experiences of GBV demonstrated that many teenagers do not seem to recognize psychological forms of violence within their intimate relationships (such as controlling behaviours or pressure to consummate a relationship) and consider these behaviours as "normal" (Christou 2013). Another study undertaken with one thousand Cypriot young adults (18–25 years old) exploring interpersonal relationships and violence found that 70% of the participants expressed opinions and attitudes that are conducive to violence, such as "victim blaming," the belief that violence in relationships is a "private" matter, and the belief that the use of violence is acceptable under certain circumstances, such as to "correct" behaviours (Andronikou, Erotokritou & Hadjiharalambous 2012).

The current chapter aims to examine adolescents' perceptions on gender-based violence (GBV) and equality within the Cypriot context. Findings analysed here are part of a larger research project that aims to explore the relationship between adolescents' perceptions of gender stereotypes and GBV, and their tolerance of different forms of GBV.[1] The relationship between attitudes toward gender and GBV and tolerance of GBV has not previously been studied within the Cypriot context. In the first part of this research project, 453 adolescents, students in public and private secondary schools in Cyprus, completed self-report questionnaires, examining their attitudes toward women (Galambos, Petersen, Richerds & Gitelson 1985), attitudes toward violence, violence attributions and myths about GBV. Results from this quantitative study showed that more conservative attitudes towards women predicted more acceptance of

violence directed towards girls by boys. Furthermore, a significant percentage of the variance for boys' attitudes towards violence (49%) could be explained by their attitudes towards women (for a detailed description of the quantitative study and its findings, see Kapsou & Christou [2011]).

Following these results, we sought to explore in more depth adolescents' perceptions of gender categorization and how these may be linked to tolerance of GBV. This was achieved by conducting two focus group discussions with adolescents from two secondary schools. The discussions explored, among other issues, adolescents' narratives and rationales pertaining to tolerance of different forms of GBV within intimate heterosexual relationships, as well as the links between these and stereotypical perceptions of gender categorization. The main argument explicated in this chapter is that adolescents' narratives about GBV contain gendered asymmetries, especially when discussing responsibilities for the different forms of violence enacted and the absorbing of gender stereotypes, thus leading to an unbalanced attribution of blame which is implicitly inflicted on the victim of violence.

Method

Participants

Two focus group (FG) discussions were conducted. Participants in FG 1 were six adolescent students (three girls, three boys) from a private, English-speaking urban school in the capital of Cyprus, Nicosia. Participants in FG 2 were six adolescent students (four girls, two boys), from a suburban school in the district of Nicosia. Convenience sampling was used, as the students were recruited with the help of their teachers and selection was based on availability for interviewing and interest in the study. All participants were 17 years old at the time.

Procedure

Written parental or guardian consent was obtained for all participants, and prior to each focus group discussion participants were informed about the purposes of the study and given the option to withdraw at any moment. FG 1 was conducted in a local university, moderated by the researchers (MK and GC), in the presence of a research assistant. FG 2 was conducted in a schoolroom reserved for this purpose, and moderated by one researcher (MK) in the presence of their teacher as an observer. Both focus

groups were conducted in Greek, following a semi-structured focus group guide prepared by the researchers. Quotes from the students' narratives used in this chapter have been translated by the authors.

Focus Group Guide

A semi-structured focus group guide was prepared by the researchers and contained four sections of the themes that the researchers aimed to tackle during the focus group discussions: (1) an Introduction to the Study; (2) Definitions of "violence in relationships" (behaviours that constituted violence, and examples) Perceptions on Frequency, and Perceptions of Change in frequency of violence currently compared to the past (15 years ago); (3) Evaluation of Awareness and Knowledge (perceptions of perpetrator/victim characteristics, Reasons/Causes of GBV, perceived consequences, perceived "profiles" of persons/populations/relationships where GBV is likely to occur, perceived links with changes in gender roles); (4) of Findings from the Quantitative Study and Recommendations (current and desired sources of knowledge about violence, and suggestions for preventing GBV).

Transcription, Coding & Analysis

Focus group discussions were recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed by research assistants. Coding and analysis were based on verbatim statements in transcripts. Data lost due to noise contamination was supplemented, where possible, with notes taken by the researcher. Coding and analysis were conducted by one researcher (MK), while a second rating and analysis of findings were conducted by both researchers (MK & GC). For the purpose of writing this chapter, one researcher (GC) revisited the transcriptions and provided further analysis of the adolescents' narratives undertaken during the focus group discussions. Coding followed a combination of open and focused coding strategies, aiming both to "uncover" emerging patterns in the views expressed by the students, as well as identifying recurrent patterns in the responses, in relation to predetermined questions of interest. Additional themes that emerged were analyzed in a subsequent step.

To ensure anonymity and confidentiality within this article, the participating schools' names are not revealed; to distinguish between the two FGs conducted, Group 1 refers to the FG conducted in the private urban school and Group 2 refers to the FG conducted in the suburban school. Moreover, to protect the anonymity of participants, when reference

to specific names was made during the discussions these names have been replaced with pseudonyms. As both focus groups were conducted (and thus transcribed) in Greek, quotes presented throughout this chapter have been translated by the authors.

Findings

One of the main aims of our research project was to identify the links between adolescents' perceptions of gender categorization and the limits of tolerance that adolescents maintained in relation to different forms of GBV within intimate heterosexual relationships.

During the analysis of adolescents' narratives, certain topics seemed to emerge in a recurrent and intense fashion throughout the transcripts from the focus group discussions. Such topics revolved mainly around the issue of "responsibility," and specifically who is responsible for the GBV experienced. This attention on responsibility, as conceptualized by the students, seemed, however, to produce and reproduce a number of gendered asymmetries. It is on these gendered asymmetries of responsibility that the following analysis will focus, as they reveal important insights in terms of the conceptualization of gender identities, victimization and violence. Given the space limitations, we will place emphasis on structural factors and discourses that inform the adolescent's narratives, rather than on adolescents' agency, and the potential challenge of stereotypical gender perceptions. This choice further corresponds to recent feminist worries within academia that identify a shift from a focus on structures that produce and reproduce inequality, towards an intense focus on individual agency (Coy & Garner 2012), especially when it comes to studies which are focused on young people and children. The same anxiety was stressed by researchers within childhood studies, acknowledging the need to strike a balance between the recent focus on child agency in the field with the effects that larger societal narratives can have on children's voices. As Spyrou (2011, 159–160) emphasizes, "children's experience … is mediated by the discourses which they are able to access and this is what we, as researchers, are offered through their words …. [Therefore], researchers need to become familiar with the discourses that inform children's voices."

During discussions in the focus groups, the students made strong associations between gender stereotypes and gender-based violence, while they perceived gender stereotypes to be deeply embedded and persistent in society. However, when referring to the effect of stereotypes on men's and women's behaviours, an implicit asymmetry of responsibility appeared to

emerge as to the ways stereotypes are absorbed and acted upon. The talk on stereotypes, related to men, seemed to absolve them of responsibility for the violence they perpetrated because it was understood as not "purposeful" or "conscious," but rather attributed to their socialization into models of masculinity that required them to be tough and show no emotions:

> he [the man] always has it inside him that the woman is inferior because *it's not really the person's fault*, it's just how he learned, how he saw things (girl, Group 2, referring to violence in Arab cultures; emphasis added).

> Yes, I agree with what Maria said because sometimes men don't feel so … women are more expressive with their feelings, men might accept pressure and as a stereotype not be able to express themselves as they want and for this reason feel the pressure even more … As I said before they (men) do not express themselves in a right way, and there might be anger, repression in a relationship and they can't express these, and this will built up into violence (girl, Group 1).

On the other hand, women were perceived as responsible for making a "choice" of whether or not to absorb stereotypes:

> from history, from the past women were subordinated, a woman may unconsciously have in mind, to believe it, and thus her behaviour becomes influenced in front of a person and she feels uncomfortable that she cannot say her opinion, express herself and sometimes women become *victims by choice* because they *allow* the stereotype to pass that women are inferior and that they should obey their husbands (girl, Group 1; emphases added).

At the same time, women were perceived as more "resilient" to the effects of stereotypes, but also to physical pain and provocation to adultery:

> There is this stereotype that men are not sensitive, they don't get hurt while in fact men are more sensitive, deep down women are more *resilient*, stronger … Women give birth which means they are resilient. Men are human, we are human, we cannot keep making gender distinctions all the time (girl, Group 1; emphasis added).

> yes he (the boy) will get carried away more easily, if a girl provokes him … while the girl, especially if she is in love and emotionally attached to her boyfriend, will stop the other's advances in the first instance (girl, Group 2).

The use of the word "resilience," with its biological overtones, as well as the connection made to the endurance of the physical pain of birth, works as a metaphor to indicate women's strength. At the same time however, this metaphor allows for the normalization of biological functions into characteristics of the female gender. This type of normalization could work to provide fewer "justifications" to women, in comparison to men, for conducting adultery, for example, or becoming victims of violence because of the perceived resilience and endurance that women should portray in the face of such temptation, or the effects of violence. This asymmetry in the treatment of men and women is indicated by the wording of the quote above in which boys are perceived to "get carried away" in the act of adultery, rather than making a conscious choice, while women/girls "do not" get carried away because of their perceived "resilient" nature.

This emphasis on the resilience of women, as well as the expressed assumption that women, as opposed to men, are considered to "choose" whether or not to absorb stereotypes and thus become victims, is very much related to another central issue that emerged from the discussions and revolved around the responsibility for violence experienced within intimate relationships. First, an indicative point is that, at several points during discussions on this issue the students focused disproportionately on the victim's responsibility versus the perpetrator's responsibility, or versus gendered socialization processes that might be conducive to violence. This emphasis is demonstrated in the analysis that follows below.

Moreover, throughout students' narratives, the victim was mostly kept a-gendered (gender-neutral), while the extent of the impact of violence in relationships as well as "exit" options were largely perceived as contingent upon the victim's personal "strength" or "weakness":

> If a person is low profile, does not easily express themselves … they will hold something inside … the other person, when they exercise violence, seeing that the other does not react or does not do anything to stop it, will continue (girl, Group 2).

> If is the person strong, not the one exercising the violence, the other one … how they will deal with it as a person let's say, maybe they will appear strong and say "ok, it's over" (boy, Group 2).

The impact on the recipient of violence was related to notions of "strength" and "weakness," and explained as being contingent upon how "strong" or "sensitive" a person is, and thus how they will be affected by someone else's behaviour. This was a recurring idea throughout the

discussions when the topics of a person's options to exit a relationship and the consequences on the individual of experiences of violence were discussed. The limit for defining whether or not an action is considered as violent was how much the victim could take/handle, and therefore on the perceived "weakness" or "strength" of their personality:

> It depends on how sensitive the person is because sometimes you will say I won't take it seriously, they might be a strong person psychologically and can handle it, but there are people who … cannot handle it (girl, Group 1).

> that is why I think that you cannot set limits, that from this point forward it's violence, it's the victim that will realise this, at the point when "I can't take it anymore, this makes me psychologically ill, I cannot be near him, I don't feel comfortable," at that point it's violence (girl, Group 1).

The reference to and emphasis on individual versus social factors are common features in teenagers' discourse on power, at least within the Cypriot context (Gregoriou & Christou 2012). These associations with the impact of violence however work in a way that shifts responsibility for the (continuing) act of violence from the perpetrator to the victim. This was also indicated by the following quote where the price for not reacting to violence is to endure further violence. The victim is therefore understood to be responsible to react in order to not be exposed to further violence:

> You need to set limits. When a relationship is formed with trust as we said before, the more you extend the limits that you set in the relationship, if the other person uses even minimum violence and sees that you don't react, they will do it again and it will be even worse (girl, Group 2).

Placing such emphasis on the victim and her responsibility for preventing, averting or reacting to GBV runs the risk of enhancing victim-blaming perceptions. In the current patriarchal gender order, where women constitute the majority of victims of GBV in heterosexual intimate relationships (Task Force to Combat VAW 2008; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2014), such asymmetrical emphasis and victim-blaming seem to enhance rather than challenge the already unequal status quo. Furthermore, as mentioned above, when discussion revolved around victims, the discourse very often became a-gendered as well as stripped from its social environment and socialization aspects. Using a gender-neutral and individualizing language effaces and does not help adolescents see the different effects that GBV can have for men and women, as well as their gendered positions within structures and relationships of power.

Close examination of the adolescent participants' narratives also showed gender-biased assumptions, most evident through a subtle imbalance in how men's and women's responsibilities for (in)equality in relationships were construed. Whereas the participants demonstrated profound understanding of the gender dimension, through the observation that gender and social norms can become internalized and automatic, their understanding of the gendered context in which men's and women's responsibilities for passively "internalizing" as opposed to consciously "choosing" to adopt stereotypes appears problematic. Whereas men were said to perform violence "unwittingly" (boy, Group 2), as a result of internalized gender norms, women were described as becoming victims "by choice." Implicitly, the adolescents appeared to assume that women, but not men, are (or are expected to be) aware of the gender stereotypes relating to them, and therefore are responsible for adopting them and not reacting to their victimization. These observations raise further questions about how gender stereotypes are conceived and understood among adolescents as an issue that could be tackled in the context of gender education.

Furthermore, this individualising language, as well as the language of "choice" mentioned above, where choice on absorbing stereotypes is asymmetrically placed on girls/women (as opposed to men absorbing the stereotypes passively), do not serve adolescents well in understanding the gender dynamics within relationships and society in general, as emphasised in studies on the problematic discourses around sexualized consumption (Bragg et al. 2011). From the discussions in the focus groups it was clear that girls felt much more vulnerable in relation to their safety as well as the weight of protecting themselves from harm:

> If people see that you don't have anyone to protect you or anything, they will not think too much before they exercise violence, they don't feel that you have someone to support you (girl, Group 2).

> Basically you shouldn't provoke … Since I know that drug users frequent that street, and things like that, not for my age, why should I pass from there and not somewhere else? (girl, Group 2).

The responsibility by the person (woman) herself to exercise "caution," avoid "provocation" and secure her "protection" was a recurring focus. Participants considered that potential victims are responsible for taking caution regarding the places they frequent or visit in order not to "provoke." In line with previous studies (Christou 2013; Fourth report: Secondary education schools and education in values project, MIGS

2008b), "provocations" were occasionally used to explain or even justify "control" behaviours from boys within intimate relationships as appropriate (e.g. when the girl is dressed inappropriately, or exhibits too much power), and transferred responsibility to the victims themselves.

Beyond these gendered asymmetries in terms of consciously absorbing stereotypes and focusing on the victim's versus the perpetrator's responsibility for the violence enacted, participants recognised the benefits to the position of women within society brought about by enhanced equality in the different spheres of life. However, when discussing this perceived progress in women's societal position, some students were keen to indicate that *too much equality* may be harmful for women as well as for their intimate relationships. For this reason, women were seen as responsible to not "provoke" as well as not "abuse" the rights granted to them through enhanced equality provisions, as expressed in the excerpt below:

> Boy: I believe what Natasha said, that society's position has changed in relation to women. Violence from men that used to be so much in the old times is reduced, but now psychological violence from women to men has increased, but also the opposite, but simply now women think it's their right. But violence by women has increased because of this, because it is correct to say that violence by men has been reduced but maybe violence from women has increased
> Girl: Psychological war
> Boy: Yes, psychological war (laughter), it might be a matter of reaction
> Researcher A: What do you mean by that? Can you explain it to us?
> Boy: In the old days, a woman's position was subordinate, the man could beat her and she couldn't talk to anybody, but now seeing that the times have changed, seeing that women gained rights, and this is a very proper thing, they (women) might abuse this power, this right
> Girl: Yes
> Researcher B: the women?
> Boy: Yes, and for this reason men might again use psychological violence (Excerpt from focus group discussion in Group 1).

In a similar vein, when the discussion in Group 2 focused on whether it was acceptable to set limits on your partner's dress, the issue of the limits to women's appropriation of this change in their subordinate status was again brought up, and seemed to require a constant negotiation that must be undertaken by women in order to avoid becoming "provocative":

> This is a society that started to progress, girls are now freer, they don't control them so much, they go out frequently, they may provoke in the end (girl, Group 2).

> that is, if she herself provokes and may tell him that "I make more money," or she will put him in difficult position, well, there, yes, the boy may feel bad, but from the moment she doesn't give him anything to bother him, there's no reason (girl, Group 2).

Power emerged as an important force considered to be at work behind transactions involving violence and gender on many levels through perceived relations between power, dominance and violence, and more specifically money as power. Participants linked shifts in gender roles to shifts in power balance that could bring about many positive outcomes, such as obtaining "rights" that were "just," but that could also lead women to (perhaps consciously) "abuse" the power from those rights, or flaunt their achievements if they are successful (e.g. if they make more money), and lead men to try to (re)establish dominance through control. This seems to indicate that the idea of "progress," in terms of upgraded provision and implementation of gender equality norms, is conditioned upon women's' potential demonstration of "abuse" of such rights/power.

Thus, despite participants' recognition of the righteousness of greater equality, as well as the direct link made during discussions between greater equality and less violence against women, at the same time the level to which women are "allowed" to exercise the rights provided to them through this enhanced equality appears to be subject to negotiation. More specifically, there appears to be some sort of underlying rationality in relation to the extent that women can "exercise" certain freedoms, after which this exercise can be considered "provocation" or even "abuse of power." This rationality, as illustrated from the above quotes, is directly connected to a perception that progress towards equality results in the loosening of control over the actions of women. This echoes other perceptions expressed during discussions, especially within Group 2, where the breaking of older (traditional) socially-enforced restrictions by a "progressive" society was lamented and was causally linked to increased violence in contemporary societies:

> I think now there are more incidents (of violence) because in the past there was more respect, people were more conservative, there wasn't all this development that urges you to exercise violence … it was … now we are more liberal so … (girl, Group 2).

> now there are no limits … let's say, parents don't set so many limits on their children and they learn either to mock or to pressure … it's more … people believe that now they are more independent and there are more fights, more violence (girl, Group 2).

Despite this lamenting of traditional norms and imposed boundaries, students' narratives contained some contradictions in relation to the negative effects of progress, as at other points of the discussions the current Cypriot society seemed to be blamed as being "too conservative."

Conclusion

This chapter summarizes some key insights drawn from a qualitative study with twelve Cypriot adolescents on their perceptions in relation to gendered categories of identification, like women and men, and the possible association of these with tolerance towards different forms of GBV. Through an analysis of the narratives of adolescents participating in the research, we identified a number of gendered asymmetries in the ways adolescents conceptualized responsibility towards the GBV enacted as well as victimization. First, there was a strong focus on the "attribution of responsibility" for becoming a victim (rather than questioning the reasons for conducting violence). This asymmetrical emphasis on the victim, as juxtaposed with the perpetrator of violence or with gender socialization processes, seemed to be supported by perceptions that based judgments of whether or not an action was to be labelled on the "strength" or "weakness" of the personality of the victim and how much the victim could "handle," rather than on legally recognized forms of violence. The impact of socialization and structural factors as conducive to the violence enacted received less emphasis in discussions on victims, during which the latter remained a-gendered and stripped of their social characteristics and categorizations.

Such "neutral" conceptualizations of victims of GBV in association with overt responsibility placed on them in terms of the violence enacted do not service adolescents in acknowledging the structural dynamics and limitations that different positions of power might inflict on women and men. Furthermore, given that, currently in Europe, the majority of GBV victims in intimate heterosexual relationships are women/girls, the focus on an a-gendered victim strengthens victim-blaming perceptions and thus enhances, rather than changes, an already unequal status quo.

Finally, the perception that women are more "resilient" than men, as well as the associations made among resilience and physical endurance, contribute to posing asymmetrically stricter evaluation standards on women in terms of different actions and relational contexts, such as adultery, relationships of violence, the adoption of what is considered as stereotypical societal roles and norms, and the extent to which women can exercise rights provided to them through equality.

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Notes

[1] The project under which this research study was conducted was entitled "Youth4Youth: Empowering Young People in Preventing Gender-based Violence through Peer Education" [JUST/2010/DAP3/AG1351], funded by the Daphne III program of the European Commission and coordinated by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies [MIGS]. More details about the project as well as all the deliverables can be accessed at http://www.medinstgenderstudies.org/youth4youth-empowering-young-people-in-preventing-gender-based-violence-through-peer-education/.

CHAPTER TWO

"SHIELD AGAINST HOMOPHOBIA IN EDUCATION" IN CYPRUS: A BREAKTHROUGH CAMPAIGN

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Introduction

Homophobia in Education is a serious issue, of increasing concern to research and policy in recent decades, as Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) students are disproportionately more likely than other students to experience bullying (Berlan et al. 2010; Butler et al. 2003). Adverse effects on well-being include, among other things, suicide and suicide ideation, isolation, depression and mental health concerns, academic disengagement and social alienation (Kendall & Walker 1998; Malinsky 1998; Poteat & Espelage 2007). At the same time, tackling this issue presents obstacles for several reasons. The issue is perceived by many as challenging or controversial, and in the absence of overt policies, best avoided; some teachers may perceive the issue as irrelevant to their pedagogical area, may be limited by their own heterosexist resistance, or fear "exposing" children to issues considered "sensitive" (Ferfolja & Robinson 2004). Standard heteronormative narratives in formal education, including heterosexist sex education (Buston & Hart 2001), and in the mainstream social discourse reinforce invisibility and further silence any attempts to acknowledge and address homophobic occurrences.

Schools often lack overt policies for handling homophobic bullying. Yet, our obligation to ensure that issues of sexual orientation and homophobia are addressed can, beyond the fundamentally ethical, at a minimum be placed in the context of children's rights for diversity, safety and the quality of their education (United Nations General Assembly

1989). In its Recommendation on measures to combat discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity (2010), the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers stresses the obligation of member states "to ensure that the right to education can be effectively enjoyed without discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity," including ensuring a "safe environment, free from violence, bullying, social exclusion or other forms of discriminatory and degrading treatment related to sexual orientation or gender identity" (paragraph 31). In addition, they are committed to:

> providing objective information with respect to sexual orientation and gender identity, for instance in school curricula and educational materials, and providing pupils and students with the necessary information, protection and support to enable them to live in accordance with their sexual orientation and gender identity. Furthermore, member states may design and implement school equality and safety policies and action plans and may ensure access to adequate anti-discrimination training or support and teaching aids (paragraph 32).

In the educational system in Cyprus, not much has been done to meet the above educational obligations. Cyprus is considered a socially conservative country on issues pertaining to sexuality and diversity (Georgiou, Modinos, Papageorgiou, Papantoniou & Peristianis 2006), including LGBT issues, as reflected through public opinions and inadequate legal or institutional provisions through its institutions to ensure equal rights (Polycarpou 2010). Lack of visibility in general discourse has been noted in the media (Kapsou 2011) and education (Lesta, Lazarus & Essen 2008). In schools, Trimikliniotis & Karayianni (2008, 17) identify "heteronormativity as the master narrative that everyone is expected to obey" in the context of the public educational system in Cyprus. Deviations are considered taboo and treated with embarrassment, whether these appear in the context of school work, or among the students or staff themselves, who rather tend to "wrap matters in an awkward silence."

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) is important in providing information and knowledge regarding LGBT issues, addressing prejudice and stereotypes, shaping attitudes and perceptions and promoting acceptance irrespective of sexual orientation (IPPF 1996; APA 2005; YouAct 2009; CYC 2009). In Cyprus, CSE has not yet become a mainstream feature in formal education, although following a curriculum reform in 2010, educational targets for sexuality education, including a wider view of family, sexual health and sexuality, were set for both

primary and secondary education in the context of the "Health Education" curriculum (Ioannou, Kouta & Charalambous 2010). The Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) states that "specialised teacher training with regard to sexuality health education takes place," but training on these targets does not appear to have been fully realised, and was not specified to include LGBT-specific content. Specific references to sexual orientation in trainings are important, as sexuality education itself is often prone to heterosexist biases and is bound by dominant heteronormative narratives (Burton & Hart 2001). There are no MoEC safety policies, Codes of Conduct or handbooks for educational staff in place specifically dealing with, or containing references to, sexual orientation or gender identity, nor formal guidelines or training regarding handling incidents of homophobic bullying within schools (Kapsou & Mantis 2012).

Precise documentation regarding the frequency of bullying, harassment or violence motivated by homophobia in schools is not available, as current MoEC data collection procedures do not record sexual orientation or gender identity issues as motives. Some available retrospective findings raise serious concerns. Experiences shared by LGB participants prior to 2010 (Kapsou & Christophi 2011) narrate instances where teachers were unsupportive or discriminatory in their treatment, and references to LGBT persons, especially in the context of religious studies, were derogatory. Participants also reported having experienced severe instances of homophobic bullying and harassment in school, and gave no account of school staff or teachers intervening to stop these incidents. More recently, in a study by the Observatory for Violence in Schools, 9.6% of students in the sample reported having experienced "mocking remarks about their sexuality" (Kapsou & Mantis 2012).

Some increase in the visibility of LGBT issues has been noted since 2010, following the launch and activity of a visible LGBT rights organization, Accept-LGBT Cyprus (Kapsou 2011), and we took the opportunity to use the momentum generated from this increased discourse toward our campaign. The Campaign was funded under the National "Youth in Action Program" and implemented by the Pool of Trainers of the Cyprus Youth Council (CYC) in partnership with the Cyprus Family Planning Association (CFPA), the only entity in Cyprus that deals systematically with sexuality education, primarily using non-formal education methods (Nicolaou 2010, 11).

Such disconcerting preliminary data indicating that the school setting appears particularly vulnerable to homophobic incidents and bullying instigated us to develop the campaign "Shield against Homophobia in Education."We chose to focus the campaign on teacher training, which

was considered an essential step in raising awareness and effecting change in schools. Many studies find that teachers and staff themselves highlight the need for training in issues surrounding sexuality and homophobic bullying, as well as clarification of policy (Adams, Cox & Dunstan 2004). Moreover, Russell, Seif & Truong (2001) report that sexual minority students' relationships with their teachers play a crucial role in explaining school troubles experienced by these students, and thus emphasise the need for teacher awareness and training for supporting sexual minority students. We sought to empower a group of education professionals in preventing and tackling homophobic expressions in schools which, as a norm, seemed to be avoided or "hidden under the carpet," in part due to the lack of any unified and systematic school policies on the topic.

The campaign aimed to provide further insights into how homophobia is expressed, experienced, identified, viewed and handled (if at all) in the school settings, to raise awareness among education professionals and train teachers in identifying and handling incidents, as well as engaging in positive discourse about gender sexuality and sexual orientation. Overall, the project involved three parts: (1) a brief qualitative study exploring teachers' experiences with gender norms and homophobia in schools (described in Shoshilou, Vasiliou, Kapsou & Papageorgiou, forthcoming), (2) a voluntary training course on gender and sexuality for teachers from various levels of school education, and (3) a nationwide conference for education professionals. Stakeholders including the MoEC, the Pedagogical Institute, the Commissioner of Administration (Ombudswoman) and the Commissioner for the Rights of the Child collaborated in or provided support for the campaign. The present chapter focuses on the training; the methodology is described through an experiential account of the trainer and coordinator (CP), and a quantitative assessment of training outcomes and evaluation is presented.

Method

Participants

The participants were volunteer teachers from various levels of education including preschool (N=2), primary (N= 35), and secondary education (N= 28), as well as educational psychologists (N=6), students and graduates (N=4), and "other" (N=2). They were informed about the program through circulars distributed by the MoEC, the organisers and supporters of the campaign. Seventy-seven participants completed the initial questionnaires at the training onset. Of those, 70 (91%) were

women and 7 (9%) were men. The mean age of participants was 36.1 years, S.D.=10.29, range=19–58. Most (N=72, 94%) identified as "heterosexual," one identified as a "gay man," one as a "bisexual woman," and three did not wish to disclose their sexual orientation.

In order to accommodate all applicants, while ensuring small group size (up to 20 participants) to allow for an interactive session format and experiential learning methods, four groups were formed—two for Primary Education teachers (acting and pre-service), and two for Secondary Education teachers. Active and pre-service school psychologists who expressed interest were also included, and were equally distributed throughout all groups. This format also permitted the tailoring of content according to the varying needs of primary and secondary education, taking into account students' ages and educational levels. Two trainers facilitated the workshops—the campaign coordinator (the author Constantinos Papageorgiou) facilitated the primary education groups, and another experienced trainer facilitated the secondary education groups.

Measures

Participants were asked to evaluate their perceived knowledge about sexual orientation and skills for identifying and handling homophobic incidents on a 10-point scale. In order to include an objective evaluation of training impact, two scales were compiled to assess knowledge about Sexual Orientation (seven Yes/No statements), and Attitudes to Sexual Orientation (six Agree/Disagree statements). The Personal Homophobia Scale (Wright, Adams & Bernat 1999) was also administered. The scale was adapted in Greek using the method of front and back translation by the first author (MK), and another psychologist bilingual in Greek and English. For this sample the internal reliability of the scale was high, as indicated by a Cronbach alpha=.93.

The battery of questionnaires was completed anonymously by the participants, prior to training onset (N=77), at training completion (N=59), and at a six month follow-up (N=31). Pre-, post- and follow-up data were matched using codes. Upon training completion, participants also completed training evaluation forms, assessing the quality of the training in terms of several parameters including content, trainers and methodology, and were asked to provide feedback in response to open questions.

Data were analysed using multivariate statistical methods. T-tests were computed to compare scale scores between training onset and completion, as

were Repeated Analyses of Variance for the three phases of measurement (Pre, Post and Follow Up). Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

Training Methods

Format. The training course consisted of four sessions of 150 minutes each. Since participation in the program was voluntary, the training was scheduled during extracurricular (afternoon) weekday hours. Training took place over four consecutive weeks in May 2012 on premises provided by the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute.

The educational programme was compiled by the trainers. Teaching materials were sourced, selected and adapted from openly available international resources on sexuality, including Stonewall (Kibirige & Tryl 2012: Tryl 2012), Trevor, the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN 2012, Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen & Palmer 2012), Out for Our Children (Davis 2010), the It Gets Better Project and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO 2012). Coursework design took into account suggestions by GLSEN and "Gay Straight Alliances" to incorporate a combination of statistics, personal stories and role-play, and illustrate teachers' power to tackle homophobic incidents.

The training employed primarily non-formal education methods, as participatory methods can empower teachers to become agents of change (Francis & Msibi 2011). Brief lectures and presentations (ensured not to exceed 20% of session time) were used to introduce key topics, review literature, and present statistics and empirical evidence around the topics discussed in each session. Substantial training time was intentionally allocated to drama and theatre activities. When used in education, dramatic structures or theatrical tools help participants emotionally engage in the process, experiment with multiple perspectives, and hence deepen empathy (Simpson & Heap 2002). Drama can be a useful tool for addressing social, cultural and ethical issues, as in the dramatic process meanings are negotiated and renegotiated in the company of others, leading to affective and cognitive learning (Schneider et al. 2006).

The material was selected to meet objectives set for the training as follows: provide accurate, evidence-based knowledge regarding sexual orientation and gender identity; develop comfort and confidence to break the taboo of discussing sexuality in schools; familiarise participants with the concept of homophobia and its various types and levels; sensitise on the importance of identifying and tackling homophobia in education;

develop skills and practice techniques for identifying, tackling and combating expressions of homophobia in educational settings.

The resulting training curriculum was organized around four thematic areas, each corresponding to one session: (1) Gender & Gender in Education, (2) Sexual Orientation & Sexual Orientation in Education, (3) Homophobia & Homophobia in Education, and (4) Teaching Methods and Approaches. Activities included in each training session were selected to represent the various steps as described in David Kolb's cycle of experiential learning (1984). Based on this cycle, learners pass through the following stages in their experiential learning journey: experiencing; reporting (sharing reactions, feelings and observations on what happened); reflecting on the experience (analysing patterns and dynamics observed in order to gain insights); generalising (connecting the outcomes of the experience with the real world); and ultimately applying the competences developed during the activity to real life (Brander et al. 2007).

Table 1 presents the structure of each of these sections, including a brief description of the exercises used. The following sections describe the rationale and background for some of these exercises and illustrate how targets were met, bearing in mind that objectives are met in multiple ways, and some activities pertain to multiple objectives.

Session 1—Gender & Gender in Education

Francis & Msibi (2011) ran a module on heterosexism and homophobia with educators, and reported misconceptions among participants about gender and sexual orientation, such that gay men were perceived as wanting a female identity and bisexual people were seen as having two sexual organs. Drawing on this experience, we made sure to first clarify basic concepts of gender, gender stereotypes, gender expression, gender identity and biological sex through presentations and exercises. The Genderbread Person figure (Killermann 2013) and Titley's (2007) Gender Boxes (boxes that shape the expected expression, roles and behaviour of individuals according to their sex) also clarified gender concepts, and enhanced participants' insights into the socially-constructed nature of gender roles, the mechanisms and agents of gender socialization and the connections between gender socialization and Gender-Based Violence (GBV). The concept of GBV can also apply to the "punishment" of LGBT people for not conforming to gender role demands (Titley 2007), and was later used to illustrate connections with homophobic bullying. For Primary Education groups, unfinished fairy tales provided a framework for experimenting with multiple ways to present messages about gender and gender stereotypes to children.