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The African Safety Promotion: A Journal of Injury and Violence Prevention (ASP) is a forum for discussion and critical debate among academics, policy-makers and practitioners active in the field on injury prevention and safety promotion within the African context. ASP seeks to promote research and dialogue around a central public health issue that affects Africa, namely injury and violence.

SUBJECT COVERAGE
Issues of ASP’s predecessor, the Institute for Social and Health Science’s Monograph Series, addressed a variety of injury and violence related topics, such as:
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- Injury surveillance methodologies
- Costing techniques
- Epidemiological research findings
- Health systems research
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EDITORIAL PERSPECTIVE

Symbolic violence: Enactments, articulations and resistances in research and beyond

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INTRODUCTION

In his pioneering work on the subject, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (2001, p.1-2) defines symbolic violence as “a type of submission… a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition, recognition or even feeling….“. This Special Issue of African Safety Promotion: A Journal of Injury and Violence Prevention seeks to reflect on the multiple ways that symbolic violence is implicated in research; how research reproduces symbolic violence; and how hierarchies within research institutions determine the ‘legitimacy’ of specific knowledges and knowledge producers. We believe that a focus on symbolic violence is necessary to advance nuanced, complex and meaningful understandings of how different kinds of violence operate and are sustained in contemporary society.

CONTEXTUALISING SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE

Direct violence, which always involves an actor, an object and an action (Galtung, 1969), is any physical or psychological violence that disrupts social functioning (Galtung, 1990). Under neoliberal capitalism, direct violence is an increasingly unacceptable and ineffective mechanism of social control (Hall, 2002). This is certainly not to say that the neoliberal state never resorts to horrific enactments of direct violence (von Holdt, 2018). Indeed, one need only to look to the 2012 Marikana Massacre for a recent example of this. Rather, what is meant here is that violence as control is both effective and sustainable in the long term when it is enacted through legitimised channels. Such violence, known as ‘symbolic violence’ (see Bourdieu, 1990; 2001), thus becomes ubiquitous by integrating itself within the social order.

Symbolic violence is not expressed on the body. Instead, it violates how we think (Chambers, 2005). By following socio-cultural codes of conduct, such as participating in institutional rituals or ‘behaving’ in accordance with

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racialised, classed or gendered expectations, people technically consent to their domination. In this respect, multiple institutional structures - such as ideological state apparatuses and cultural organisations - are integral in coercing subjects to consent to inequitable operational social practices (see Althusser, 2014; Colaguori, 2010). Arguing that “the harder it is to exercise direct domination, and the more it is disapproved of, the more likely it is that gentle, disguised forms of domination will be seen as the only possible way of exercising domination and exploitation” (Bourdieu, 1990, p.128), Bourdieu’s work situates symbolic violence within social systems whose functionality relies increasingly on coercive political control (Colaguori, 2010).

Symbolic violence, we would add, is important in considering how research and activism approaches coloniality, that is, systems of power, which today sustain colonial relations of exploitation and domination (see Maldonado-Torres, 2017). Undoubtedly, symbols are integral to how coloniality disfigures colonised subjects, robbing them of selfhood and relegateing them to zones of nonbeing (see Fanon, 1967), while transforming the worlds of things, people and meanings in the image of the colonising subject (Bulhan, 2015). Dialectically entangled, symbolic violence and coloniality draw on various racist, patriarchal, classist and ableist discourses as a way of structuring and naturalising particular ways of being, power differentials and systems of knowing.

Unlike direct violence, which is usually more readily perceived as ‘violence’, symbolic violence is normalised in ways that obscure its recognition as violence. It is in response to the ways by which violence has been symbolically coded that various social movements, such as #RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall, Occupy, #HowIResist, direct violence and various other resistance acts across time and space, have contested and attempted to (re)make the symbolic order. Instances of such activism include the removal of symbolically violent statues (such as those at the University of Ghana and the University of Cape Town, as well as numerous Confederate Monuments in the United States); contesting naming legacies (such as Rhodes University as well as the ‘Native Yard’ naming convention for roads in Gugulethu); challenging the dearth of gender-neutral bathrooms (legally reified by discriminatory ‘bathroom bills’); as well as resisting the arbitrary and ideologically-infused bourgeois politics of respectability to which poor and working class people are held. These movements, and their attempts to make visible and dismantle symbolically violent modalities, are repeatedly met with strong - sometimes directly violent - opposition from state authorities, the political Right, liberal establishment figures, and even some on the Left whose chief concern is an economistic ‘pragmatic politics’ that renders symbolic violence a superfluous ‘secondary front’ (see Keucheyan, 2013).

VIOLENCE AS A GLOBAL RESEARCH IMPERATIVE

Each year, millions of lives are affected by direct, physical violence, resulting in mortality as well as long-term negative health consequences (World Health Organization, 2014). For example, in South Africa physical violence is “the second leading cause of death and lost disability-adjusted life years” (Seedat, Van Niekerk, Jewkes, Suffla, Ratele, 2009, p. 1011). The effects of violence are therefore both qualitative and quantitative in character.

Direct interpersonal violence has received much-needed attention within academic research, as well as in other sectors of society, including but not limited to non-governmental and state sectors. However, as Colaguori (2010) argues, although there is widespread global recognition that direct violence has become especially pronounced as an individual and collective phenomenon, this recognition has not necessarily resulted in the development of comprehensive conceptualisations of violence. In particular, there is a need to explore further the ways in which direct violence is inextricably intertwined with and supported by more covert forms of symbolic violence (Morgan & Björkert, 2006). Following this, Pieterse, Stratford and Nel in their contribution to this Special Issue, Relationship Between Symbolic Violence and Overt Violence in Hate Incidences in South Africa, argue that “symbolic violence breeds the circumstances in which direct violence becomes socially acceptable behaviour, thus creating a society in which hate victimisation of certain vulnerable groups becomes normalised”. They go on to assert that “overt violence”, what we refer to here as direct violence (see Galtung, 1969, 1990), “reinforces symbolic violence by
communicating to the victims, as well as to their larger communities, that they are unwanted, third-class citizens and because they do not conform to established societal norms, are undeserving of any respect, human dignity and/or regard for their safety”. Indeed, it is often through the conditions set by symbolic violence that direct violence is enacted.

It is also necessary to highlight the ways in which research on direct violence is embedded within dynamics of symbolic inequality. Here, critical feminist scholars, such as Tamale (2011) and Shefer (2018), have argued that research on sexual violence in Africa, shaped by Northern and Western research agendas, has rendered Africans in problematic ways. For example, in South Africa research has produced constructions of black women as inevitable victims, and black men as inherent violators (Shefer, 2018). In light of this, the Special Issue attempts to call attention to how symbolic violence is sometimes overlooked in research on violence, as well as the ways in which research itself can be symbolically violent. As Swartz, Hunt, Watermeyer, Carew, Braathen and Rohléder state in their article, *Symbolic Violence and the Invisibility of Disability*, persons with disabilities have been positioned “through medical discourse and the symbolic power which underlies it as ‘naturally’ inferior”. It should certainly be admitted that in the call for this Special Issue, while we refer to race, gender and class, we did not explicitly mention disability as a social category through which symbolic violence is so often enacted. Thus, even our considerations of symbolic violence are not exempt from symbolically violent tendencies. The silencing and invisibility of disability continued.

**THE (SYMBOLIC) VIOLENCE OF RESEARCH AND WRITING**

One form of symbolic violence within academic research is the positioning of some knowledges as neutral, scientific and objective by rendering others invisible, subjective and/or cultural. In this way, the former’s legitimacy, authority and dominance becomes presumed on the latter’s illegitimacy. The production of Otherness is partly a function of how researchers and academics write (Abu-Lughod, 1991). No research product, as Richardson (2000) reminds us, can be disconnected from “the producer, the mode or production of the method of knowing” (p. 962). Given the history of colonial research which constructed African knowledges and subjects as ‘barbaric’ and ‘bizarre’ in order to legitimise colonial violence, the symbolic violence of academic research is of particular salience in African contexts.

In attempting to disrupt the symbolic violence inherent to academic ‘scientific’ authority, we have included some alternative forms of writing in the Special Issue. The two conference reviews provided by Matutu and Makama seek to excavate the kinds of symbolic violence that are apparent in academic spaces. It is within these spaces that knowledges of a particular - often colonising - kind seek to delegitimise particular ways of knowing and being (see Maldonado-Torres, 2017). Makama’s contribution is particularly interesting, as she considers symbolic violence within progressively-oriented decolonising spaces; speaking as she does about the kinds of symbolic violence that can be experienced through acts of silencing that render her deviant for “not being angry enough”.

Thomas’s poem, *Selotape for Bullet Holes*, represents another kind of symbolic violence. The poem presents an unsanitised, personal and emotional reflection on dominant representations of certain communities in Cape Town (specifically, Bishop Lavis, ELSIES River, Manenberg, Ravensmead and Uitsig) as broken and violent spaces. In the poem, Thomas says “[t]hey think we’re uncultured, no real ‘tongue’ mocking our mother-tongue as if it wasn’t born in the kitchen of slaves. Uneducated the stats say. Fatherless the stats say. Selotape their mouths

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2 We use the term ‘race’ (and racial categories, such as ‘black’ and ‘white’) to highlight processes of racialisation, rather than to reify categories of race, which we recognise as both socially constructed and discriminatory.
I say”’. In our reading, the poem does not reject violence as a descriptor. Instead, it highlights how violence becomes fixed to community identities in order to deny their full humanity. In other words, in constructing certain communities as inherently violent, they become foreclosed as such in the collective imagination.

Mignolo (1993) notes that when speaking about issues related to hegemonic oppressive structures such as colonialism, the locus of enunciation is paramount in how resistance against these oppressive structures is constructed. In the quest to make oppressive social structures more visible (crucial in the task of articulating and resisting symbolic violence), we reflect below on our own subjective, institutional and ontological positionalities in the context of our respective research areas. Each of us are PhD candidates, whose work speaks to, resists and (re)inscribes symbolic violence in different ways. The dynamics of such work is therefore complex and sometimes contradictory.

Sipho: Being one of the few black counselling psychologists in South Africa, my particular positioning is fundamental to how I have constructed my PhD. Focusing on the training of clinical and counselling psychologists, my PhD seeks to critically interrogate the pedagogical and selection practices of training sites. I position the study in such a way that race and gender are particularly privileged due in part to how I have read issues of transformation in higher education, and psychology in particular. The framing of my work means that there are many people, who are marginalised and excluded through the course of my study. The conceptualisation of my work has had to take into consideration how the intersecting identities of class, race, gender, and sexuality are significant in the shaping of disciplinary boundaries. In much the same way that the call for this Special Issue neglected to mention people living with disabilities, my PhD may continue forms of symbolic violence experienced by other marginalised groups, such as queer and gender non-conforming people. My own positioning as a self-identifying Black, cisgendered, man fits neatly with the focus on binary conceptions of race and gender. However, what this binary conception of race and gender obscures are the nuances often inherent in the lives of the people who are excluded from physical and epistemic participation in higher education. Related to this is the caution advanced by Brown in his article *The Geographies of Heteronormativity: The Source of Symbolic Homophobic Violence at a South African University*, that unless we expand how we conceive of transformation in higher education, we run the risk of continuously acting in (symbolically) violent ways towards people who do not fit neatly within dominant - often binary - identity categories. Symbolic violence’s hidden and obscure nature means that we must engage explicitly with who is researching what, from where, and to what end. This is to say that in resisting oppressive structures in academic institutions, the onus is on the researcher to clearly position their locus of enunciation (see Mignolo, 1993).

Rebecca: In 2015, following being raped, I went to a Thuthuzela Care Centre (one-stop government facility for rape victims/survivors) to receive treatment. At this facility, located in an area which was classified as black under apartheid, the nurse misrecognised me as a health professional rather than as a victim/survivor of rape. “In a context in which the bodies of poor black womxn are repeatedly constructed as the sites of sexual violence the nurse is unable to recognise my white, middle-class body as the site of such violence” (Helman, 2017, p. 1). This experience has been the starting point for my PhD project which explores how understandings and responses to rape are enmeshed with the discursive and material politics of sexual violence in South Africa. This PhD study draws on both my own experience and those of other victims/survivors to explore the ways in which post-rape subjectivities are constituted by intersecting categories of social identity. The use of my personal experience of rape is intended as “an act of reverse discourse that struggles with the preconception borne in the air of dominant politics” (Park-Fuller, 2000, p. 26), in relation to both form and content. For example, by drawing on my own experience, I attempt to problematise dominant representations (in both public and research discourse) which render young poor black women as the inevitable victims of sexual violence. By inserting myself into the text (both through my experience and my analytic voice) I seek to destabilise ‘objective’ authority, whilst acknowledging the ways in which my knowledge claims are politically and socially constituted (Butz & Besio, 2009). However, I am simultaneously aware of my symbolic power (both as a researcher and as a particular raced, gendered, abled and classed subject) in being able to write about my rape, as well as ‘analyse’ the rapes of
others. Throughout my PhD process I attempt to reflect on the multiple dynamics of symbolic violence which shape sexual violence and research on sexual violence.

Nick: My PhD work, as well as other academic work with which I have been involved, is primarily concerned with using visual methods to (re)present and signify various social phenomena within (and also beyond) community contexts. At present, I am working with different groups to produce participatory films - documentary and scripted - that use multimodal language to explore experiences of structural and direct violence, as well as highlight community-driven modes of resistance and ‘the ordinary’ (see Ndebele, 1986). It is intended that the films are used for the purposes of epistemic correction (i.e. countering the ahistorical, neoliberal discourses predominantly drawn on by political actors and media personnel when constructing low-income areas) as well as material justice (i.e. lobbying for community resources and services at public film screenings, as well as informing activist and community organising efforts). Impulses towards and enactments of symbolic violence have been noted at numerous stages of the project. Indeed, participants’ cinematic narratives are not inherently progressive, with many, in my eyes, drawing on overtly patriarchal and masculinised tropes, as well as a bourgeois politics of respectability, in their characterisations of resistance efforts in the community. Herein lies another symbolically violent potentiality of the project, that is, imposing my own hermeneutic - which, due to my racialised, classed, institutionalised and gendered positionality, is likely to carry a greater degree of “narrative potency” (see Senehi, 2002) than community-driven narratives - onto participants’ cinematic portrayals. Although the project is conceived as participatory, it is still me, an outsider to the community, who directs it and plays a significant role in shaping its participatory character. Furthermore, by isolating particular moments in the film products - effectively divorcing them from their broader cinematic contexts - audiences may use the films for their own political purposes. Finally, while the project does not engage ‘community’ as a homogeneous entity, there is a risk that the films become read in this way, which raises further issues around foreclosing what a community is and what it cannot be. Despite the films, in my reading, addressing in important ways a number of neglected iterations of symbolic violence (and how these interact with other kinds of cultural, structural, epistemic and direct violence), they are also, necessarily, myopic representations that signify - as both processes and products - forms of symbolic violence.

All of our work is embedded within particular institutions. Academic institutions, such as universities, retain especially ‘potent’ kinds of symbolic power, that is, ‘soft power’ that works to maintain unequal social hierarchies (see von Holdt, 2018). While students are placed at the lower levels of the academic hierarchy within these institutions, not all students are positioned equally on this level. As Matutu argues in relation to black students: “as a method of survival, we are taught to fear. To be fearful of authority and those who lord over us. Faced with these personages, we would recoil and attempt to take up as little space as we can”. We wish to acknowledge that as student editors of this Special Issue, we are, in different ways and to various degrees, empowered and disempowered. While there are certainly institutional benefits and related material advantages that we are able to accrue, we are only able to utilise these through the limited channels made available by the university. The social justice potential of our work is often constrained in this way. Following this, Gordon (2017) urges us to be vigilant about how institutionalised forms of social justice are often just injustices, which is to say that they serve to maintain the status quo to the continual detriment of those who are oppressed.

Finally, the opportunity to publish this Special Issue has rendered us, as editors, gatekeepers of particular knowledges, and silencers of others. In other words, what appears in the pages of this Special Issue was assessed by us as relevant. Although paying attention to our own symbolically violent practices does not mitigate the effect of such practice, we hope that by raising these issues we can begin the difficult, uncomfortable yet fundamental task of challenging the multiple and interlocking iterations of violence within and beyond violence research. The dilemma of simultaneously being located at a lower level within the hierarchy of academic institutions, and being guest editors of an academic publication, was evident in our discussions around the submission by Matutu. In this provocative and insightful paper, Matutu makes reference to feeling necklaced, an act of tremendous violence that was used against people who were deemed ‘impipi’ during the apartheid era. We, the editors,
discussed whether we should ask the author to remove this or change it as we were concerned that the use of such an example could serve to trivialise the trauma and pain experienced by communities during the latter days of apartheid (in a similar way to when rape is used as a metaphor). However, in removing or changing this reference we would also be censoring Matutu. These kinds of symbolic violences often imposed on authors in the name of scientific rigour can operate as a way to silence voices considered dissident. The inclusion of Matutu’s account of the conference as he has written is, firstly, an attempt on our part to open up space for engagement with the issue of academically-sanctioned silencing. Secondly, this account, with its use of the imagery of being necklaced, indicates how difficult it is to articulate symbolic forms of violence - rendered invisible as they are subtle - without making reference to other, direct kinds of violence. We hope that Matutu’s use of necklacing to refer to his pain and discomfort at the conference serves to make visible and palpable the harm caused by symbolic forms of violence.

We should pay serious attention to symbolic violence if we are to understand more comprehensively how suffering is institutionalised, historicised and legislated through systems and symbols that are characteristic of so-called liberal, democratic and/or egalitarian societies. However, with language itself being a symbolic system, studying symbolic violence is an inherently difficult, perhaps even tautological, undertaking, and should thus be approached carefully.

CONCLUSION

The Special Issue aims to bring to the fore how symbolic violence is embedded in both a collective will towards unjust power structures, as well as these power structures themselves. By including a range of different articulations, the Special Issue seeks to disrupt the legitimised forms of knowledge dissemination, not only in research related to violence, but also in the structure of academia and formalised systems of knowledge production. We had hoped that other forms of expression in this limited print format, such as visual art, would be part of this issue, but no submissions were made in this regard. The fact that this Special Issue was curated by students, and includes perspectives from students, also allows for voices otherwise relegated to the periphery of the academy to take centre stage in issues that affect us in different ways. In addition to this, the Special Issue highlighted how we, as people committed to social justice, cannot be complacent in the struggle for equity and cede our control of the definitions of justice to oppressive structures. Further, the Special Issue highlights how, even in progressive spaces, the tendency to revert to problematic binary identity politics needs careful and critical interrogation if we are to truly begin to undo historic and contemporary injustices.

REFERENCES


The geographies of heteronormativity: The source of symbolic homophobic violence at a South African university

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how symbolic homophobic violence is produced from hegemonic and heteronormative institutional geographies. This study forms part of a larger project with Life Orientation student-teachers that investigated the strengthening of HIV and AIDS integration in the curriculum. Five student teachers from the class cohort used photovoice to illustrate how students with same-sex sexual identities were subjected to othering, discrimination, bigotry and overt forms of violent aggression emanating from their non-conforming gender expressions. Through photovoice-narrative interviews, I found that their transgression in spatial heteronormative norms resulted in intimidation, vilification and, in extreme cases, overt forms of violence by peers. This article focused on two themes, namely the physical geographies of symbolic homophobic violence and punishment, and discipline of geographies of the non-normative gendered body. Although symbolically homophobic violence can be linked to individual resistance to same-sex sexuality, this article shows that symbolic violence is largely reproduced by the contours of heteronormativity maintained by institutional geographies. If universities are committed to inclusive and safe learning spaces for diverse identities then they will have to interrogate how hegemonic cultures mobilise discourses that enforce systemic oppression.

Keywords: geographies, institutionalised heteronormativity, symbolic homophobic violence, same-sex sexualities

INTRODUCTION

Despite the South African Constitution’s explicit protection and affirmation of the rights of people with same-sex sexual orientations (Department of Justice, 1996), 21 years later, society’s responses to non-heteronormative sexual identities are still strongly disconnected from its constitutional ideals (Brown & de Wet, 2018; Sutherland, Roberts, Gabriel, Struwig, & Gordon, 2016). The South African Constitution was the first in the world to afford equal legal rights to people with same-sex sexual orientations in 1996. Focusing on institutions of higher learning, people with same-sex sexual identities and those who are perceived as such are subjected to overt and more subtle forms of aggression. They are typically ostracised and prevented from engaging in learning opportunities and are often coerced to follow obligatory hegemonic heterosexual scripts by their peers and educators (Brown & Diale, 2017; Jagessar & Msibi, 2015; Lesch, Brits, & Naidoo, 2017; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2017). These oppressive experiences for students with same-sex sexual desires emanate from the skewed transformation focus of race and gender in institutions of higher learning (Msibi, 2013). Msibi (2013) argues that the selective focus on converting South African universities from the legacy of oppression to a democratic and inclusive
environment has done little to address some forms of discrimination, such as homophobia. Although there are remarkable advances in racial cohesion in South African institutions of higher learning, most of these spaces remain commonly heteronormative and oppressive to the same-sex desiring individuals (Msibi & Jagessar, 2015; Nzimande, 2017).

I wish to state, at the outset, that the aim of this article is not to delineate the lived experiences of young people with same-sex sexual identities as tragic tropes of victims, but to draw attention to the unexplored spatial and material dimensions of symbolic violence imbued in normalised heteronormative environments. Heteronormative spaces can be explained as geographies where presumptions are that all bodies are meant to be heterosexual and that this orientation is ‘normal’ and ‘good’ (Brown & Diale, 2017). Non-heterosexual expressions are branded as evil and deviant (Francis, 2018). As a result, they are effectively subjected, invisibilised and silenced (Francis, 2017). Heterosexuality means the sexual involvement with one who is from the other sex, man with a woman, woman with a man (Yep, 2003). It is the perfect fit between the penis and the vagina (Yep, 2003).

The construction of heteronormativity is not only sexual, but is also riddled with inscribed social values. The socially constructed rules regulate that those who transgress the patrolled borders of the heteronormative codes and norms are punished unequivocally through forms of symbolic violence that could lead to forms of overt violence (Valentine, Vanderbeck, Sadgrove, & Anderson, 2013). It is ironic how heterosexuality is valorised and deemed to be natural, but constantly needs to be affirmed and protected. Heteronormativity regulates individuals by imposing set social scripts onto them (Foucault, 1977). This “unfair or unequal treatment that intend to marginalise or subordinate individuals …. based on their real or perceived affiliation with socially constructed stigmatised [sexuality]” can be characterised as a form of homophobic violence (Ayala, Beck, Lauer, Reynolds, & Sundararaj, 2010, p. 2). Homophobia entails not only the hatred felt for individuals with same-sex sexual desires but it is also the discomfort and fear experienced in the face of such expressions (Vaccaro, August, & Kennedy, 2012).

The understanding of symbolic violence in this article is a ‘gentle violence,’ which involves acts that ignore, trivialise and/or condemn queer identities (Bourdieu, 2001; Venzo & Hess, 2013). In this article, the terminologies are merged and coined as symbolic homophobic violence to illustrate the anxiety-ridden, guilt-producing, fear-inducing, shame-invoking and hate-deserving layers to be uncovered in symbolic homophobic violations (Yep, 2003). An extended discussion around symbolic violence is presented later in this article. De Craene (2017) argues that the creation of space is a social process and therefore the lived experiences of symbolic homophobic violence should be viewed as socio-spatial. There is a need to question normativities, their power relations and discursive processes in the production of space and sexuality (Browne, 2006). Geographies of sexualities are not necessarily the depiction of queer identities existing in opposition to heterosexual spaces, but how the reterritorialisation of heterosexual spaces produces the visibility of sexual subcultures (Oswin, 2008).

In this article, I ask the question, how do heteronormative geographies matter in the production of knowledge on sexual subcultures and homophobia? Following the introduction, I explore the intersection of symbolic violence and docility. I then present a brief description of the study’s methodology. An examination of the everyday embodiment of the subculture of sexual identities in specific spaces and places is presented before concluding this discussion by exploring how discourses of transformation in institutions of higher learning should move beyond the obsession with race and consider the often invisible and silent ‘isms’ in order to ensure an inclusively safe environment for all students (Msibi, 2013).

**SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE OF DOCILITY**

Symbolic violence is a mode of discrimination constituted by common social conventions with unrecognised and imbalanced power relations that produce and sustain prejudice (Bourdieu, 1991). Symbolic violence is that
“invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 164). It captures an active construction of systems classification where expressions are regulated (Fowler, 1997). Those with hegemonic powers within the porous contours in a specific social system develop and centralise forms of domination that legitimise and privilege the deserving existence of certain identities while disorientating and suppressing the unwanted ‘deviant’ (Bourdieu, 1984). Through the establishing of social scripts, these controlled spaces teach, produce and affirm a way of being and condemn the characterisation of the ‘othered’ (Wachs & Chase, 2013). The lives of the ‘othered’ are thus not considered as lives at all and cannot be humanised for they fit no dominant frame for the human within that particular border (Butler, 2004). Tautological instruments of communication within these classified geographies use surveillance to suitably privilege and subordinate the different identities within this social location (Bourdieu, 1991). These discursive forms of power are disguised in naturalised institutional practices, which present themselves through soft forms of violence (Bourdieu, 2001). The perpetrators of these gentle forms of violence habitually hide in ways of looking, sitting, standing, keeping silent, or even speaking (‘reproachful looks’ or ‘tones’, ‘disapproving glances’ and so on) (Bourdieu, 1991). Although invisible, subtle and disguised in shape and form, it is still a powerful form of violence for it is unfair, damaging, and manipulative in nature (Scott, 2012). Its ultimate function is to preserve a particular status quo and social order that coerce subordinate identities into accepting a redundant status. When left unattended, symbolic violence can change to overt violence (Malpass, Sales, & Feder, 2016) as will be presented later in this article.

Foucault (1995) cautions us not to get stuck on notions of how hegemonic powers repress, contain and control but rather on how it directs, shapes, and constitutes relationships and behaviours. Through the norms that govern reality, these constituted relations and behaviours are symbolic and create the understanding that one exists as a subject of some kind (Butler, 2004). Through applying Bourdieu’s constructs of symbolic violence, this article, at its centre, is concerned with heteronormative boundaries that tell the ‘other’ sexual identities what to do and reduce them gently to what they are from who they truly are. Notions of symbolic violence enable this article to illustrate how normative conditions within spaces discursively vet what must be fulfilled for one to become a validated and valued being. When these spaces where all bodies are to be affirmed remain silent and unresponsive to the discrimination of minority identities, they (re)produce and perpetuate legacies of oppression.

METHODOLOGY

This article draws on a broader project with 86 first-year Life Orientation Education students to integrate HIV and AIDS in the teacher education programme. The initial discussion on HIV highlighted the intersection of discourses of HIV with those of class, gender, sexuality and religion. The Action Research approach (Brown & Wood, 2018) led to further investigations of transformation and social justice, which is a central focus in the Life Orientation subject area.

Life Orientation is the study of the self in relation to others and to society. It addresses skills, knowledge, and values about the self, the environment, responsible citizenship, a healthy and productive life, social engagement, recreation and physical activity, careers and career choices. These include opportunities to engage in the development and practice of a variety of life skills to solve problems, to make informed decisions and choices and to take appropriate actions to live meaningfully and successfully in a rapidly changing society. It therefore not only focuses on knowledge but also emphasises the importance of the application of skills and values in real-life situations, participation in physical activity, community organisations and initiatives. (Department of Education, 2011, p. 6).

This discussion was more critical because the data collection site is an urban South African university that previously catered only for white Afrikaner students. The student population demographics predominantly remained the same with a small proportion of coloured and black students (Brown, 2017; Brown & Wood, 2018). A critical
consciousness approach (Wang & Burris, 1997) enabled a methodological space that linked conceptual knowledge of diversity and society with practical enquiry. Rodriguez and Brown (2009) point out that participatory pedagogy enables young people to “develop knowledge and skills that identify and confront challenges in their lives” (p. 22). This article focuses on the work of five student-teachers, who used the photovoice methodology to illustrate how students with same-sex sexual identities were subjected to othering and discrimination. It is important to note that all these students are self-identified gay men of Afrikaner descent. More so since the author identifies as a queer and black individual who normalised dialogues of diversity in the classroom. Students with diverse sexual orientations were comfortable to unsilence topics such as sexuality. Photovoice is a participatory approach that enables participants to express experiences of a particular phenomenon on their own terms (Mitchell, Stuart, Moletsane, & Nkwanyana, 2006). The first year Life Orientation student teachers took photos across the campus where they perceive how notions of diversity and transformation are either promoted or hampered. Images could include artwork, information boards, statues and names of buildings among others. They then wrote narratives that explain their understanding of transformation. Five students presented photographs of spaces where they experienced homophobic violence with written accounts to highlight sexuality as a transformational issue in this institution. Permission to conduct this study was granted through the institutional ethics board (NWU-00030-15-S2). I also sought permission from students to critically reflect on their photovoice narratives through interviews (Simmonds, Roux, & ter Avest, 2015). Students consented to participate and I informed them that they had the right to withdraw at any time and guaranteed their anonymity. I was conscious that the photos belonged to the students. For this reason I sought permission from all participants to use their photos in this article. I used thematic analysis (Francis, 2017) to identify broad themes that surfaced in the experience of the participants. I firstly developed broad categories of constructs related to students’ experiences and navigation of their non-normative sexuality expressions as extrapolated from their photovoice narratives and interviews. I then developed themes that are theoretically informed (Creswell, 2009).

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

This article identified two main themes: the first addresses the physical geography of symbolic homophobic violence, followed by the geography of punishment and discipline of the non-normative gendered body. I do not want to create an impression that homophobia in this study is inherent to individuals, but rather to argue that issues of the deviant sexual ‘other’ has been ignored and uninterrupted in hegemonic privileged spaces. The article therefore advocates for an undoing of these notions through a framework of anti-oppressive education.

**PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHIES OF SYMBOLIC HOMOPHOBIC VIOLENCE**

To comprehend the norms and regularities of heteronormativity, one has to understand the spaces through which it is constituted, practised and lived (Monro, 2010). Through the naturalisation of the space, the legitimacy of the body is contested. Andrew, a self-identified gay man, presented a picture of a bathroom that can be identified with the demarcation symbol of the male figure. It is important to point out that in what follows, the term ‘effeminate’ is not used in a stereotypical or derogatory manner. I align this discussion with Butler (1990) who argues that sexuality is invisible, however gender marks the individual as a dominant force. Through previous studies with queer students I found that some butch lesbians express masculine traits and some gay men express feminine traits to mark their sexuality (Brown & Diale, 2017).
Gender segregated bathrooms are innocently permeated through notions of safety and dignity (Scherer, 2016). Through Andrew’s narrative, we notice how conflation of sex and sexual orientation within gendered ecologies are implemented through bodily surveillance.

There was an incident close to the male bathrooms. This experience was horrible. A group of males was nearby. I could hear them saying, ‘there he is. Let’s see which bathroom door he enters’. I was instantly aware that my sexuality became an issue again. Then, one loudly asked if I don’t want to give them a fun night so that they could fix me. I was scared for what can happen to me.

The material architecture of the bathroom site is wrapped around social matrices of the heteronormative identity and reduces the body to an object. This taken-for-granted gender marker becomes an enactor of disciplinary power that regulates the body and divides space (Bender-Baird, 2016). The excerpt from Andrew’s interview illustrates how the bathroom becomes a contested space that creates and names the body. His peers assumed a ‘panoptic’ duty that invalidated his effeminate expression from its biological sex through a single readable gaze. The punishment for this deviation was to subject the body to discrimination and violence through verbal assaults and words that injured. Notice how the notion of (symbolic) violence through threats and assaults moves beyond docility to that of fixing, compliance and ultimately re-establishing norms. The geography of the bathroom is more than a (safe) space for relief and comfort – it is a gendered, policed zone where people are forced to choose between the heteronormative binaries, which denies the existence of non-normative expressions. The violence experienced by Andrew emanating from his gender non-conforming expressions juxtaposes the very reason for gender-divided bathrooms that are more often conscripted in safety and comfort.

Another participant, Max, presented a very interesting picture of a gate that is controlled by an access card. This small gate provides access to spaces within the borders of the campus and is not regulated by security guards like many of the major entrances. The presumption is that access gates provide safety to students, staff and institutional property, but one cannot deny the surveillance that is hidden in this process. The movement through the gate transports the individual to different spaces within the same campus that are regulated by multiple forms of values and meanings.

Max narrated that,

‘I was grabbed by the arm as I was about to go through the turning gate and told that gay people do not belong here – they belong in hell. He then punched me. It must have been my clothes that gave away that I am gay’.

This violence and shame at the gate is more than the confinement and exclusion of Max’s access to the university premises – it is an act to eliminate him from personhood. The religious connotation of hell is very significant in this
conversation as this destination can only be reached through the passage of death. It will be an extreme interpretation that the gate is a threat to enact the passage to death. This article confines the analysis to the overt religious intolerance of the non-heterosexual ‘other’. The South African apartheid regime promoted and maintained a religious schema that severely policed sexuality (Francis & Reygan, 2016). Same-sex sexual orientations were branded as evil (Francis & Msibi, 2011; Msibi, 2012a) and criminalised (Barnard, 2003). The remnants of these values are deep-seated and are perpetuated in post-colonial South African society. It is constantly being reproduced (Sutherland et al., 2016). It appears again in Max’s narrative and seems to be a reference that legitimises the violence. For the sake of this discussion, it is necessary to highlight that this everlasting doomed space is scripturally regulated by gates, a destination for those who fail to repent from sin or, rather, who do not conform to certain religious scripts. The ‘inability’ of Max to adhere to heterosexual norms guarantees his permanent condemnation. The gate reiterates the regulation of heterosexuality as the master access card, and the deviant sexual ‘other’ on the other side of the gate, be it the university premises or the after-life, will not be tolerated.

Geographies of symbolic violence are not necessarily confined in spatial terms, but imbued in values of who we are and who is to be included and excluded (Bohle, 2007). The access gate in Max’s experience became a geographical point at which heteronormative power was exercised. The narrative from Max yet again underscores that space and society are inextricably related (Radil, Flint, & Tita, 2010). Drawing back on Max’s narrative, the perpetrator did not exclusively use symbolic violence to express his radicalism for heteronormativity, but coupled it with physical violence to actively reproduce heterosexuality. The incident at the gate did not simply happen, but it was a moment that activated a world of conflicting proximities. The reflection on the incident at the access gate provides a new understanding of how to challenge the spatial conditions of domination.

Daniel presented a photograph of a food outlet at the student centre. The student centre is a social hub with food outlets, a gym, bookshops, banking facilities and other amenities. One can anticipate that the nature of this space could ‘invite’ the student to return more than once a week. In this photograph, I interrogate how the space of basic human (student) needs becomes a contested space along the lines of sexuality.

Daniel shared how,

“it is always crowded inside and outside the student centre. A gay person cannot walk freely because people make jokes that mock you and laugh at you because you look different. I know my hairstyles are different and the way I dress is feminine, but that makes me happy. Because of that I am called names and when the others laugh at me, a person feels like nothing. It happens all the time. This is where I normally buy my food and do many other things. I often think twice if I should go there or would rather consider going outside campus to get something to eat”.

Daniel’s undignified experiences within the public space in this university are characterised by discrimination and (symbolic) violence. The laughter and derogatory name-calling intentionally reinforce feelings of ‘othering’ and displacement within the self. Daniel’s awareness of the ‘other’ emanates from his difference in expression from mainstream hegemonic heterosexuality. He refers to markers that reify same-sex sexualities as the ‘other’. The affirmation of an identity is important for positive feelings and a sense of belonging that eventually provide a state of positive wellbeing (Ghavami, Fingerhut, Peplau, Grant & Wittig, 2011). In the case of Daniel, one can
sense the unhappiness from his experiences. My concern is how these discriminatory responses from his peers may lead to depressive symptoms and low self-esteem as has been demonstrated in other studies (Zeiders, Umaña-Taylor, & Derlan, 2013). In a study of school youth, the results of name-calling, subtle bullying, rejection and discrimination showed an increase in school dropouts (Msibi, 2012a). A recent study found that the persistent embarrassment, stigma, rejection and teasing from peers and teachers led to stress, depression, violence, dissonance and dropping out of school as early as grade 8 (the first year of secondary schooling) (Brown, 2017).

This theme helps to understand the intersections of physical space and symbolic violence when troubling the constrictive heteronormative representational systems and oppressive practices of the ‘other’. It shows how the material world shapes the relationships and regulates the hierarchies of who we are. The unintentional space, with its socially attached meanings, becomes a catalyst that enables symbolic violence to keep things straight (Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014).

PUNISHMENT AND DISCIPLINE OF GEOGRAPHIES OF THE NON-NORMATIVE GENDERED BODY.

In the previous theme, I showed how bodies and their presentations within certain tangible spaces are central to the validations of recognised (heteronormative) sexuality that ultimately assign status and value. Sexuality is an act and is not necessarily what you have (West & Zimmerman, 1987). In this theme, I extend the discussion to how symbolic violence scrutinises and polices the materiality of the body to ensure that it adheres to the rules and regulations of the (heteronormative) environment. The constant heteronormative embodiment of the sexualised man is through the materiality of the penis, and for the woman it is the vagina (Yep, 2003). By locating gender and sexuality in a biological construct, the body becomes a site where the geography of power is evident.

Tony is a self-disclosed gay man with a soft demeanour and long hair that is coloured. He wears very flamboyant clothes and all of these expressions are conflated with effeminate traits (Brown & Diale, 2017). Tony presented a photo of the main entrance of the faculty. This space is commonly known as ‘The Steps’. It attracts groups of students from the faculty who do not have scheduled classes at any given time during the day. The steps allow for a wide-angled gaze over this part of the campus. It is from this space that Tony shared an experience of being surveyed.

I was on my way to the labs when I overheard a couple of guys making comments about me. They were sitting on the steps of the main building. The one kept saying “Oh my soul” in a very feminine voice tone whilst the other one commented on the shoes I was wearing that day. He asked are those “vellies”? And the others replied, no, it’s only straight guys who wear “vellies”.²

² Vellies refers to veldskoen, a shoe that is popular in Southern Africa, especially among men from farming backgrounds. Vellies are made from soft, tanned leather and have rubber soles.
The view of Tony’s body did not just become a site of sexual identity but a site to exercise power. The manner in which the body is covered by clothing and is behaviourally expressed “makes it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly” (Foucault, 1977, p. 173). The rendered mockery of the ‘vellies’ associated with (hetero)sexuality of ‘straight guys’ reinforces the sexing and demarcation of the body through clothing. Tony’s effeminate bodily gestures do not represent the heteronormative ‘straight guy’ threshold and invalidate the masculine values attached to his ‘vellies’. The discursive utterance in a feminine tone of voice buttresses the subjugation of Tony to something less than the ‘straight guy’ (heterosexual) trajectory and legitimises the symbolic violence. In order to govern heterosexuality, symbolic violence is enforced to vilify the misalignment of the body’s communication of its gender identity through the socially attached meanings of dress and gesture.

Another participant, Robert, shared similar experiences. He presented a picture of a lawn close to the main building of the Faculty of Education where he was tormented because of his love of tight clothes.

Msibi (2012b), in a study of gender and clothing in schools, found that learners refused to be taught by a male student teacher who wore tight clothes. The learners perceived tight clothes as un-African for males and a subtle marker that expresses same-sex sexual desires. Robert narrated an account of this type of conflation within the intersections of clothing and gender-making.

Robert narrated,

“I walked across the lawn when some guys called me a moffie3 in tights because of my skinny jeans. I felt very bad and I kept on asking myself why these gay feelings should be in my body. Ever since, I have decided to have a suitcase for the weekdays that makes me blend in with the rest of the guys and a suitcase for the weekend to wear what I like.”

The regulatory disciplinary power does not only act externally, but proceeds to internalise tensions of self-acceptance. The social attachments to gendered clothing serve as a gatekeeper to heterosexuality (Butler, 1990). Similar to Tony’s experience, the denigration of Robert’s sense of dress devalued his identity to what is the (heterosexual) norm. Subsequently, Robert opted to self-regulate the body’s expression in order to avoid visibility of sexual difference, all in an attempt to be ‘certified’ as normal and ‘become’ acceptable. Conforming to the dominant hegemonic expressions at times is used to resist and disrupt the persistent homophobia and rejection in hegemonic, heterosexually-regulated spaces (Brown & Diale, 2017). Again, the body and subsequently the self is subjected to suffering under the pressure and violence of prestigious heteronormative contours.

While considered deviant, the social and cultural processes linked to the non-heterosexual body serve as a structure of power. Symbolic violence serves as a tool to produce and maintain these structures. All of this pressure shapes, regulates, and normalises one’s body in order to fit a normative standard (Ahlvik-Harju, 2016).

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3 Moffie is a derogatory term for effeminate gay men.
CONCLUSION

This article illustrates the increasingly complex dynamics of symbolic violence and oppression in heterosexual geographies. Bourdieu's (2001) framing of symbolic violence allowed for the articulation of the daily experience of discrimination and to show how it proceeds by shaping bodies, which shape the environments in which they emerge. Symbolic violence exerted through space functions as a tactical move to (re)produce and maintain a hidden heterosexual power structure, where those with non-normative sexual orientations are relegated to inferior ranks within the university space. The gender-based and sexuality-related violence in higher education is perpetuated because societal, and subsequently institutional norms have gone unchallenged (Kiguwa & Langa, 2017). The experiences of the students through their stories in this study expose and challenge the narratives of normalcy and ultimately open up an opportunity to undo the disciplinary practices that are legitimised and accepted. Narratives from students have shown how the body is a contested terrain of sexuality within the space where physiology and sociology intersect. The inability to conform to heteronormative expressions by the body that need subjugation to correction creates a battlefield when the self meets with society. Understanding the forms of symbolic violence in certain spaces of power, privilege and oppression (Kumashiro, 2000) allows for more practical and overt forms of intervention that could refute violence emanating directly from compulsory heteronormativity.

Institutions of higher learning will have to expand their transformation education and communication programmes to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the diverse identities that are converging within these spaces in order to create a safe and inclusive learning environment for all. This is a direct call from Education White Paper 3 (Department of Education, 1997) that advocates for equity of access and fair chances of success for all who want to develop through higher education. One way of disrupting the narrow heteronormative landscape in institutions of higher learning is engagement with a framework of anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2000). It promotes an education for sexual non-conforming identities, education about the sexual non-conforming identities, education that critiques privileging and othering, and education that changes the status quo. An understanding of diverse (sexual) identities will empower individuals and institutions to question systems of oppression, how they work, how they are sustained and how they can be contested (Muthukrishna, 2008).

REFERENCES


Symbolic violence and the invisibility of disability

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ABSTRACT
Disability as a social justice issue is not part of mainstream talk. Approximately 15% of the world’s population has a disability, and yet persons with disabilities are systematically subjected to this sort of exclusion. If considered in terms of social power, then persons with disabilities are the largest single minority group. Amongst minorities, exclusion from the social and representational order is a forceful form of symbolic violence. Persons with disabilities are systematically subjected to this sort of exclusion. In the public domain, persons with disabilities are either not represented at all, or misrepresented. The misrepresentation of persons with disabilities takes a host of cultural forms. This paper explores a few examples of these forms, as they can be considered examples of symbolic violence. We explore how negative social value may be internalised, and how this constitutes a form of symbolic violence experienced by persons with disabilities. We argue that persons with disabilities must constantly act against subtle and blatant acts of symbolic violence – including exclusion – and that the necessity of constant resistance characterises the lives of disabled persons. We argue that it is necessary not only to recognise the detrimental effects of having to confront the symbolic violence of a society which is structured for the benefit of those with typical embodiment, but also to frame this social injustice as something which leads to very real and very dangerous exclusions.

Keywords: symbolic violence, disability, sexuality, representation, exclusion

INTRODUCTION
Disability as a social justice issue is not part of mainstream talk, and disability is commonly seen as a special interest or “boutique” issue. This is despite the fact that according to the World disability report (WHO, 2011),
approximately 15% of the world’s population has a disability, making disabled persons the largest single minority group. It is also despite the fact that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) has been ratified by over 150 countries world-wide. Disability is more common than many may think, based on the relative lack of attention to disability in the mainstream, and many countries have expressed a commitment to disability rights. But it remains true to say, as we shall show, that there is a relative silence around disability issues.

Included in the question of the violence of representation, is the violence of lack of representation. This lack of representation includes the violence of hiding issues away and making them into non-issues, a factor well recognised in terms of the history of lack of representation of, and talk about, gender-based violence. Despite some encouraging changes, it remains true that persons with disabilities are vastly under-represented in media and entertainment (Plunkett, 2014), are excluded from thinking and practices about population-based health and social interventions (Rohleder, Braathen, Swartz, & Eide, 2009; Rohleder & Swartz, 2009), and are excluded from politics and business (Barnes & Mercer, 2005; Gartrell, 2010). This is a violence of effacement – a collective denial of the existence and rights to participation of a substantial proportion of the population. This article represents an attempt to act against the violence of effacement. In the sections which follow, we explore exclusion as a form of symbolic violence which is enacted against persons with disabilities, and how the basis of this exclusion is hegemonic conceptions of normalcy. We trace the consequences of the exclusion of persons with disabilities in two parts, first arguing that the devaluations of society may be internalised, and secondly, noting the ways in which exclusion takes form in relation to the sexuality of persons with disabilities.

EXCLUSION AS SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE: THE CASE OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

EXCLUSION AS VIOLENCE

Amongst minoritised groups, exclusion is a potent form of symbolic violence. Morgan and Björkert (2006) write that “The social dynamics of everyday practices are often governed and shaped in many ways by the gendered inequalities and ‘micro-contexts of local power’ which enable forms of normative violence against women to continue with impunity” (p. 444). The same might be said about violence against persons with disabilities, persons of colour, or the aged and youth: inequalities and with them, exclusions, perpetuate the minoritisation of certain subjects. These subjects, because the social status quo positions them as naturally inferior, lack the requisite social capital with which to fully participate in society. As such, their agendas – unless championed by another – go unattended. This phenomenon of exclusion – what Brantlinger (2001) terms the “symbolic violence of hierarchical relations” (p. 5) – feeds the opaque power relations (Topper, 2001) by which daily life is structured.

Symbolic violence, we have seen, operates in part as a deprivation amongst certain groups, of social capital (Conway, 1997). This exclusion is institutionalised and naturalised, conveyed in social norms and encoded in language. One group of minoritised subjects for whom such exclusion is chronically entrenched is persons with disabilities.

In the lives of persons with disabilities, the symbolic violence of the public domain involves either no representation, or misrepresentation. The latter takes a host of cultural forms, of which many can be tracked back to the exercising of medical discourse, biopower, and its creation of docile bodies (Tremain, 2008; Verstraete, 2005). In a world where bodies are, in any circumstance, objects of extremes of culturally condensed controls, the
differently abled body stands out as an affront, an outlier to be corrected (by treatment), hidden or enfreaked (by institutionalisation), or exterminated (by forced sterilisation, prenatal testing and genocide) (Human Rights Watch, 2011; York, 2017). These, clearly, are very real and tangible violences, but exist within a field of symbolisation which is ubiquitous. At the heart of scientific and medical constructions of persons with disabilities’ lives are the notions, on the one hand, of damage and vulnerability, and on the other, of the consequent need for treatment and custodial care. Over the last century, a phalanx of nosological systems have facilitated the classification and measurement of disabled bodies with diagnoses purporting to describe not only the outer (the physical), but also the inner (the mind and psyche). By its nature, symbolic violence may tend towards invisibility, hiding its obliteration of personhood in plain sight, while we all go about our business. But in the case of disability, the workings of such violence have their own, particular deceit. As with women, but perhaps in more florid ways, the symbolic violences of disablist control are convincingly framed, nay, formed, as expressions of care. At its heart, the ideological confusions wrought by disablism attack psychic boundaries (Swartz & Watermeyer, 2008), successfully confounding everyone on questions such as where care dissolves into control, where altruism meets sadism, shame morphs into contempt, and salvation becomes murder. Everywhere in this soup of meanings is the whisper that persons with disabilities are, in some fundamental way, not whole or fully human (Shakespeare, 1994), and must be intervened upon, “for their own good and for the good of society”.

As noted, ideology is by its nature stealthy, but as political awareness grows, racial or gendered bigotry may show itself in clearer relief. The dehumanisation which is a result of symbolic violence in the case of disability can be terribly hard to discern, clothed in familial care and compassion, and exercised in deeds which are universally valued as admirable. In a world of immense and tangible precarity for persons with disabilities, identifying the dehumanising meanings wrapped up with care upon which one may depend for one’s very life is, to say the least, perilous.

The symbolic violence to which persons with disabilities are subjected is both institutional and social. Persons with disabilities, we know, are often conceived of, and treated as, planning problems by governmental structures, rather than citizens (Priestley & Hemingway, 2007). Gunder and Mouat (2002) write, “just as [governmental and national] planning can produce public goods and progress towards a better society, it can also be regressive; leading to oppression, exclusion and social and environmental injustice” (p. 125).

SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE, LIVED SEQUELAE

At the level of the social and the body, the impact of symbolic violence on persons with disabilities has also been elaborated. For instance, Edwards and Imrie (2003) consider the relevance of Bourdieu’s (1998) conceptions of the body, including his work on symbolic violence, to the development of disability theory. They examine how the systemic and structured inequalities experienced by persons with disabilities are produced, reproduced, and reinforced by symbolic violence. Persons with disabilities lack symbolic power in society (due to their perceived inability to work as productively as non-disabled persons, for instance), and are positioned – through medical discourse and the symbolic power which underlies it – as “naturally” inferior. This has extended into social life in a number of ways, for instance, in the conflation of ability and personhood, and the conflation of disability and dysfunction.

In relation to the question of personhood, in a recent article for the journal Qualitative Research in Psychology, Swartz and Flisher (2017) discuss the symbolic negation of the value of persons with disabilities, in terms of personhood. They draw on the work of philosopher Eva Kittay (2005), whose work has been key in challenging philosophies of personhood to recognise their limits in relation to persons with disabilities. Kittay (2005) has shown in her work that dominant criteria for personhood, as used in philosophy, exclude persons with severe cognitive impairments from being considered fully human. The work of Kittay (2005) is so powerful precisely because she uses the example of her daughter, who has a profound cognitive disability, to make the case that definitions of
personhood should not be centred on intellect or other aspects of agentic human behaviour which may not be possible for someone like her daughter. In a similar vein, Johnson (2003), a disability activist and scholar with a physical disability, also uses her own experiences to examine disablist ideals of personhood. In a now well-known article for New York Times Magazine, she discusses her experience of interacting with philosopher Peter Singer, a proponent of selective abortion of foetuses who screen positive for disabilities – foetuses who would have grown into persons like herself. Persons with disabilities have their personhood questioned.

Regarding the conflation of disability and dysfunction, Hansen and colleagues (Hansen, Bourgois, & Drucker, 2014) note that since the mid-1990s, when the U.S. restricted public support for low income persons, there was a dramatic increase in medicalised requirements for forms of support for indigent persons. Poverty and disability were further pathologised by making self-pathologisation a requirement of welfare eligibility. Edwards and Imrie (2003) explain that “persons with disabilities’ bodies are subjected to the values of a society that renders them ‘less than valuable’ and inferior to those considered to be the embodiment of ‘normality’” (p. 250). Persons with disabilities have their health and physical “acceptability” questioned.

In Bourdieu’s (1998) full elaboration of the idea of symbolic violence, it is conceived of as “entic[ing] the dominated to contribute to their own domination by tacitly accepting, outside of any rational decision or decree of the will, the limits assigned to them” (p. 12). Edwards and Imrie (2003) apply this to persons with disabilities, noting that “for some persons with disabilities, their way of life, and their bodily identity, becomes something that appears to be natural to them, or where the oppressive nature of the social world is hidden or not necessarily understood as influencing their bodily (de)valuations” (p. 248). As Skeggs (2004) writes, the body is also experienced as a social body, constructed of and imbued with the meanings and values of a society (this is powerfully reflected in metaphor and stereotype, see, for instance, Hunt, Carew, Swartz, Braathen, and Rohleder, in press). As such, persons whose bodies are constructed as flawed, ill, or lacking, might well be expected to begin to understand their embodiment in these ways.

Contributions to disability studies literature over recent years have applied ideas from critical psychoanalysis to the question of “internalised oppression” in disability – a notion which has something in common with that of symbolic violence (Reeve, 2002, 2006). Here, attention is paid to how medicalising discourse may saturate the formative experiences of persons with congenital disabilities, creating identities forged in diagnostic taxonomies and rehabilitation regimes, and within families who are, like most of us, under the spell of biomedical science. Examination of the life trajectories of persons born into a permanent, “disabling” diagnosis renders a picture of distorted social responses at any and all levels of human engagement, mirroring again and again that “you ought not to be like this”, “you need to be put right”, “you cannot go where the others go”, and, most destructively, “if we had known, you would not have been born”. Members of racial or ethnic minorities who suffer demeaning treatment do so in the context of families and other group members who suffer in a similar way, and are thus able to empathise and validate such experiences, making it less likely that they become firmly internalised. Most persons with congenital disabilities grow up as the only disabled person in the family, and probably the entire social network of the person with a disability, having therefore to rely on internal reference points to ascertain whether jaundiced treatment reflects a lack in the other, or is simply the natural order of things given one’s flaws.

SEXUALITY

Whether persons with disabilities understand these devaluations as natural and normal is not the focus of this paper, although it is interesting to consider. Instead, what Edwards and Imrie (2003) note, which is of interest here, is that symbolic violence reproduces a narrow, deterministic, and medical understanding of persons with disabilities, or where persons with disabilities’ bodies are positioned as “deviant and disordered” (p. 248). This is interesting – and disturbing – to consider in relation to one facet of lived experience amongst persons with disabilities which is garnering increasing attention, and happens to coincide with a facet of life with which Bourdieu (1998) was deeply concerned: sexuality.
Symbolic violence is enacted against persons with disabilities, in relation to their sexuality, at broadly two levels. The first concerns non-disabled persons’ constructions of the sexuality of persons with disabilities (Hunt, Carew, Braathen, Swartz, Chiwaula, & Rohleder, 2018). The second concerns persons with disabilities’ internalisations of the negative value attached to their sexuality (Reeve, 2002, 2006).

Let us consider, first, society’s constructions of the sexuality of persons with disabilities (we use the term society, here, but what is denoted is, largely, non-disabled, ableist society). One informative avenue of inquiry regarding symbolic violence, is an exploration of social representations. These encode the social meanings in society, and can work to minoritise and oppress, or value and promote, certain social phenomena. Social representations are the shared values, metaphors, beliefs, and practices through which groups and communities make meaning of social phenomena (Moscovici, 1963).

Where sexuality is concerned, social representations of “normative” and “desirable” sexuality and sexual bodies are hegemonic, dependent on ability, and aligned with gendered aesthetics considered admirable. That is, sexuality is represented as the purview of those who are considered normatively attractive, have typical embodiment, are heterosexual and cisgender, and – usually – are young. This symbolic order serves to exclude persons with disabilities, particularly, perhaps, persons with physical disabilities. Central to the idea of symbolic violence, is that “a particular interpretation of reality is given a seignorial status. A specific outlook is reinforced in such a way that it becomes almost inviolable” (Murphy, Pardeck, Chung, & Min, 2015, p. 118). Indeed, research has shown that persons with physical disabilities are considered to be less sexual (Carew, Braathen, Swartz, Hunt, & Rohleder, 2017; Hunt, Swartz, Carew, Braathen, Chiwaula, Rohleder, 2018) and less gendered (Hunt et al., in press), than non-disabled persons. The attitudes of disabled persons in society reinforce the “naturalness” and ordinariness of situations in which persons with disabilities are excluded (Edwards & Imrie, 2003).

This has profound implications, some of which amount to the “violence proper” against which we contrasted symbolic violence earlier. This is not to say that symbolic violence must result in physical violation in order to achieve legitimacy – not at all – only, that it can also lead to this form of violence (Bornman, 2014; Meer & Combrinck, 2017; Naidu, Haffejee, Vetten, & Hargreaves, 2005; Phasha, 2009; Phasha & Myaka, 2014; Phasha & Nyokangi, 2012). Firstly, persons with disabilities may experience barriers to sexual and reproductive healthcare services (Hunt, Carew et al., 2018), as well as exclusionary or patently harmful attitudes from service providers (Bazzo, Nota, Soresi, Ferrari, & Minnes, 2007; Esmail, Darry, Walter, & Knupp, 2010). Secondly, they may encounter social exclusion at the level of sexual society, and face barriers to sexual development (Hunt, Braathen, Swartz, Carew, & Rohleder, 2018). Thirdly, evidence suggests that persons with disabilities – particularly women – are at risk of sexual violence, due, at least in part, to the construction of their sexuality by society (Bornman, 2014; SINTEF, 2017). In South Africa, a substantial body of evidence attests to risk of sexual abuse amongst women with disabilities, particularly, perhaps, women with intellectual disabilities (Bornman, 2014; Naidu et al., 2005; Phasha, 2009; Phasha & Myaka, 2014; Phasha & Nyokangi, 2012).

Amongst these findings, Phasha and Myaka (2014) noted that non-disabled persons’ attitudes towards persons with intellectual disabilities contributed to sexual abuse of the latter: persons with intellectual disabilities were seen to be inferior sexual partners and thus non-disabled persons were doing them a favour by designing to have sex with them. Naidu et al. (2005) go on to note that, due to stigma and social isolation, women with disabilities endure violence for longer periods of time before reporting abuse, and are less likely to be able to escape abusive partners.

Finally, persons with disabilities may internalise these negative valuations of their sexuality and their place in sexual society – their exclusion from social forums and sexual and reproductive health services – and suffer psychologically and physically as a result. This brings us to the second level at which symbolic violence operates to the detriment of persons with disabilities.
Persons with disabilities may internalise the negative value attached to their sexuality. An important theoretical note which must be made at this point is one concerning symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interaction theory examines the ways in which “societal norms, stereotypes, and judgments affect stigmatised or ‘othered’ groups” such as persons with physical disabilities (Rich, 2014, p. 419). It is particularly concerned with how stigmatised groups may come to internalise negative stereotypes about themselves (Goffman, 1963).

According to symbolic interactionists, disability is a primary hallmark of identity (Rich, 2014). Banks (2010), for instance, explains that gender roles are enacted through the performance of certain activities. Persons with disabilities may perceive that these activities are not possible for persons with disabilities, and so the gender of persons with disabilities is negated. As noted, this is evident in recent studies which have shown that non-disabled persons view persons with disabilities as less gendered and less sexual than non-disabled persons (Hunt, Braathen et al., 2018; Hunt, Swartz et al., 2018; Hunt et al., in press).

Further, in order to counter, manage and defend against others’ devaluations, persons with disabilities must employ a variety of strategies to manage others’ perceptions of them and their sexuality (Goffman, 1963; Hunt et al., in press). Goffman (1963) notes that, according to this perspective, “accounts” are made by individuals in order to hide, minimise, compensate for, or negate the socially stigmatised elements of their identities. Accounts, in this rendering, are the excuses and justifications which individuals use in order to account for socially undesirable traits or behaviours (Orbuch, 1997). Desexualisation, here, is a form of symbolic negation of personhood and this leads to exclusion and lack of access.

NUANCING INTERNALISATION AND THE NECESSITY OF CONSTANT RESISTANCE

As noted above, central to symbolic violence is that it “occurs when a person’s…viewpoint [which is undermined by society] is abandoned out of logical necessity. The only reasonable action, in short, would be to suppress an inferior position” (Murphy et al., 2015, p. 119). That is, persons who hold symbolically inferior positions negate their own position and conceptions of reality. Now, while this may well be the case, sadly, for some persons with disabilities, it is certainly not the case for all of them.

Instead, perhaps, what is most evident amongst persons with disabilities is the necessity – for persons acted upon by the symbolic order most powerfully – of constantly having to defend against intrusions, and then sense that one’s own position is inferior. So, while persons with disabilities may resist the idea that they are lacking sexuality, this is always framed against the recognition that their position is framed, by society at large, as an inferior one. This is not only the case for sexuality, no doubt.

This article leads us to some quite fundamental debates about the formation (or existence) of the self. The history of disability globally is a story of segregation and concealment; the international disability movement faces the colossal challenge of mobilising a constituency that is highly dispersed, individually isolated, and, for the most part, disidentifies with its most politically important commonality. Rooted in critical psychoanalysis, the psychopolitics of disability oppression begins with the family and early formative relationships. The social identity of “disabled” is not one encountered “out there”, but “in here”, in the convergence of meanings which coalesce in formative relationships with unusual experiences of embodiment which very seldom escape the assigning of evaluation. Of course, gender and race are not excluded from this sanctum of early meanings, but as alluded to earlier, surely it is different to be a minority of one. For most of the world’s one billion persons with disabilities, finding a way to make both tangible and existential contact with others who have suffered a similar barrage of devaluing projections is both difficult and unlikely. At society’s core it is simply too clear, too common-sensically true that twisted bodies are home to twisted minds, animated by derelict souls; at best, unequipped for any part in modernity’s new frontier and beyond.
Still, it is important to think through disablism as a form of symbolic violence, encoded in everyday life, language, architecture, and social norms. Murphy et al. (2015, p. 119) conclude, “When persons are symbolically violated, their actions are not simply categorised and responded to in a unique manner. Instead, and far more devastating, their existence is eviscerated”. Recalling the works of Eva Kittay (2005) and McBryde Johnson (2003), which both depart from the theoretical and examine the lived experience of discursive constructions of ideas of humanity, Swartz and Flisher (2017) show that “knowledges interact with bodies – knowledges are not abstract entities but are imbued with power, and are matters of life and death” (p. 119). That is, it is necessary not only to recognise the exhaustion of constantly having to gird oneself as a disabled person against the symbolic violence of a society which is structured for the benefit of those not like you, it is also necessary to frame this social violence as something which leads to very real and very dangerous exclusions.

CONCLUSION

The invisibility of disability increases the vulnerability of persons with disabilities. This creates a vicious circle, which both results in the symbolic violence of effacement, and perpetuates the invisibility of persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities are often the victims of violence due to their invisibility in society (Lourens & Swartz, 2016; Mji, Schneider, Vergunst, & Swartz, 2014; Swartz, Bantjes, & Bissett, 2018). Simultaneously, their sustained invisibility creates the circumstances in which violence is perpetrated against them.

One possible conclusion which could be drawn from the above discussion would pertain to how this theoretical understanding of symbolic violence and its relation to vulnerability and exclusion may warrant action on the part of persons with disabilities. For instance, ensuring that sexuality training and sexual education is offered to persons with disabilities (in particular those with intellectual disabilities), and including children with disabilities as a focus group in “anti-bullying” programmes offered at schools, could be useful. However, the onus of rectifying the present relationship between invisibility, exclusion, and vulnerability will require more sustained efforts at the level of society, and on the part of non-disabled persons and persons with disabilities, to change the status quo with regard to disability representation, and increase the visibility of disability in society. It will also involve expanding the representational frame for both disability and – for instance – sexuality, to allow for more inclusive conceptions of social phenomena, to counteract the violence and impositions of hegemonic conceptions of humanity.

There is a broader struggle at stake here and this is the struggle to make disability not only more visible but more possible to talk and think about in the context of other struggles. It is relatively easy, in the context of talk of intersectionality (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013; Crenshaw, 1997, 2005, for example, to add the cipher “disability” to others like “race”, “gender” and “age”, to name a few. But it is much more challenging to imagine a world in which all thinking about violence and what is done to bodies and minds both physically and symbolically, automatically included consideration of those bodies and minds which do not fit the usual categories of the “normal”.

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Relationship between symbolic violence and overt violence in hate incidents in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The study reported here explored the relationship between symbolic violence and overt violence through the descriptions of hate incidents experienced in South Africa. Data were collected during a five-year longitudinal study conducted under the auspices of the Hate Crimes Working Group, using its Hate and Bias Monitoring Form and an accompanying user guide. Thematic analysis was used to create categories, themes and interpretations of hate incidents. Six primary themes emerged: i) the victim is less than human or like an animal; ii) humiliation of the victim; iii) use of extreme overkill or destruction; iv) the victim is to blame; v) messages conveyed by hate incidents; and vi) intentional unfair discrimination. These themes are discussed in relation to the existing body of literature on symbolic violence. We argue that there is a mutually reinforcing relationship between symbolic violence and overt violence in hate victimisation. Symbolic violence creates a society in which hate victimisation of certain vulnerable groups becomes socially acceptable by constructing the circumstances in which overt violence could take place. Overt violence occurs when symbolic violence is no longer effective in controlling vulnerable groups, with offenders blatantly resorting to reinforce power differences between themselves and their victims. Overt violence reinforces symbolic violence by sending a message to victims directly, as well as to their larger communities, in terms of their undesirability, not belonging, and being third-class citizens. Effective violence prevention has to take this relationship into account, especially as South Africa grapples with related legislative and policy responses.

Keywords: symbolic violence, hate incidents, bias; message crimes, violence, prevention

INTRODUCTION

South Africa is a young democracy with a constitution internationally regarded as one of the most progressive, fair and just in the promotion of human dignity, equality, human rights and freedom for all. This country is, however, increasingly also known for its continuous struggle with injustices, as well as endemic violence and crime (Breen, Lynch, Nel, & Matthews, 2016; Harris, 2004; Judge & Nel, 2018). The alarming reality is that the South African Constitution – a declaration by the people for the people (Republic of South Africa, 1996) – is inadequate, in and of itself, in upholding the values and rights enshrined therein without supporting legislation. A case in point is the recently Cabinet-approved Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development [DoJ&CD], 2018) aimed at the protection of those
who are targeted on the basis of characteristics, such as their race, nationality, religion, sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression.

Recent research conducted under the auspices of the Hate Crimes Working Group (HCWG),\(^2\) reports on the reality of such hate and bias incidents in South Africa, as well as the effect these incidents have on victims, communities and society as a whole (Mitchell & Nel, 2017). The HCWG research that informed the study on which this article is based, highlights how intolerance, prejudice and injustices in this country fuel animosity, hatred and hate victimisation, affecting the everyday lives of many.

Acts with criminal intent of terror, civil unrest and war often involve overt violence, i.e. the intentional use of physical force to inflict injury or damage to property (Van der Linden, 2012). Importantly, violations of people’s rights can also comprise extreme psychological violence, humiliation and intimidation, verbal abuse and hate speech; an assault on the mind, similar to a physical blow to the body (Van der Linden, 2012). Less visible, more subtle forms of violence, which often are not perceived as violence, form the focus of this article. Pierre Bourdieu (2001) contributed greatly to the understanding of how symbolic violence, in particular, transpires in everyday interactions, such as language, spatial arrangements, social practices and dispositions, as well as in legislation (Stewart, 2014).

Before illuminating what is understood by hate incidents, the primary focus of this article, symbolic violence, is discussed and expounded to explain how these acts transpire and how they relate to overt violence in hate incidents in a mutually reinforcing manner. It is important that policy makers and practitioners, and others, tasked with violence prevention, take note of this form of violence due to its emotional and psychological effect on the victim. As with hate victimisation (Breen et al., 2016; Nel & Breen, 2013), it is safe to assume symbolic violations also not only affect the psychological well-being of the individual victim, but the outcome extends beyond the victim, to the group to which the victim belongs or is perceived to belong.

**RELEVANT BODY OF LITERATURE**

**SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE**

Violence can be defined as an extreme form of aggression that could result in acts such as assault, rape or murder. Factors that contribute to violence range from frustration, exposure or observing acts of violence, observing others’ actions as hostile, even when they are not, and provocation resulting from environmental factors (American Psychological Association [APA], 2018). Violence, however, is not limited to overt acts of physical harm such as abuse, force or infliction of pain, but more often includes subtler acts of psychological harm, that involve assaults on the dignity, identity and sense of worth of the victim (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois, 2004).

In examining the concept of psychological violence, one has to understand certain social practices and processes we engage in our everyday lives (Thapar-Björkert, Samelius, & Sanghera, 2016). The levels of suffering inflicted by subtler forms of violence are frequently enabled by institutional processes, discourses, inequalities, indifferences and power relationships (Scheper-Hughes, 1996).

Symbolic violence is regarded as a form of internalised oppression or humiliation, the legitimisation of inequality, and hierarchies of expressions of class power that could take on many forms, such as sexism, heterosexism,

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\(^2\) The Hate Crimes Working Group (HCWG) is a multi-sector workgroup that was established in late 2009 with the common goal of lobbying for interventions to address hate crimes in South Africa, and has been playing a pivotal role in advocating and lobbying for legislative changes significant to hate crimes (Nel, Van Wyk, & Mbatha, 2013).
racism and xenophobia (Bourdieu, 1997). These forms of oppression or domination exist within a so-called ‘established order’, with certain rights, privileges and injustices. These forms are very often overt and exercised through various social practices, found in, among others, political, economic, cultural and social structures (Bourdieu, 1997; Bourgois, 2001; Weininger, 2005). Through such social practices, a collectiveness is formed, and so-called symbolic boundaries are established between different groups. It is within these symbolic boundaries, where individuals are placed in different categories, that various forms of oppression are exercised. During these processes, individuals develop attitudes and dispositions, creating a self-established symbolic power that frames how oppressors act towards others, as well as how the oppressed believe they should behave in everyday engagements (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002; Weininger, 2005).

Considering how oppression operates, political violence typically refers to violent acts administered in the name of a political ideology or movement, often enacted by a government, the police or the army (Bourgois, 2001). Structural violence refers to the political-economic structures of society that contribute to conditions of physical and emotional harm that include high morbidity, poverty, exploitation and abuse of people (Bourgois, 2001). The concept of everyday violence can be described as routine practices and manifestations of violent incidents of intolerance and misrecognition that are experienced as normative by the vulnerable group(s) (Bourdieu, 1997; Scheper-Hughes, 1996). As evident from the HCWG research, such oppressive and violent everyday acts are too often perceived by victims as acceptable, tolerable and even natural (Mitchell & Nel, 2017). The result is that perpetrators regard their actions as a form of moral righteousness, by promoting some sort of deceptive social order and conventional set of norms, whether socially, political or economically, that marginalise individuals or groups, invalidating and eroding their rights (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois, 2004; Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016).

Acts of symbolic violence are exercised through cognition and misrecognition, knowledge, sentiment and deception. Psychological, symbolic forms of violence may instil greater hurt and harm than physical violence (Bourgois, 2001) precisely because it is invisibly embedded in various symbolic structures of social behaviour, communication and cognition and frequently regarded as legitimate by perpetrators and victims alike. As a result, this form of violence is referred to as ‘silent violence’, where victims give consent unwittingly to the oppression, victimisation and violence and thereby lose their voice (Bourdieu, 2001; Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016; Wacquant, 2004).

HATE INCIDENTS

In everyday life, intolerance, bias, discrimination and misrecognition of individuals and groups are experienced, paving the way for hate victimisation of those who do not conform to certain norms or expectations. Hate incidents may include acts of bias, but also crimes motivated by prejudice towards someone’s identity or immutable characteristics, including their race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, ethnicity, disability or other similar attributes and/or a combination thereof. Such violent incidents may include damage to property, assault, rape, murder, discrimination, hate speech and intimidation (Harris, 2004; Nel & Breen, 2013). Hate speech involves any intentional form of communication that is hurtful and harmful, and portrays hate, a threat, abuse or insult to a person or group of persons who share similar characteristics or beliefs (DoJ&CD, 2018). Hate incidents also (implicitly) aim to communicate a message to members of a targeted group that they are unwelcome, that they do not fit the norm, and that their safety is at risk (Breen & Nel, 2011; DoJ&CD, 2018; Noelle, 2002).

In our country, crime in general is of great concern; however, it is in particular violations targeting vulnerable groups, such as non-nationals and sexually and gender-diverse people, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual (hereafter LGBTIQA+) that have attracted international attention (Breen et al., 2016; Nel & Breen, 2013). Despite numerous efforts to prevent them – including campaigns, as well as changes to the legal landscape to protect and promote the recognition of marginalised groups – hate incidents persist (Breen et al., 2016; Browne, Bakshi, & Lim, 2011; Harris, 2004; Nel & Breen, 2013).
Considered as ‘crimes of ignorance’ (Harris, 2004), prejudice, stereotypes, assumptions and misinformation are a causal factor in driving hate incidents and thereby the related fear thereof (Nel & Breen, 2013). This prejudice and misinformation are at times propagated in critical societal structures such as education systems, police services, and even in healthcare services (Mitchell & Nel, 2017). Aggressors are blinded in terms of the wrongness of their actions by their judgements of ‘difference’ as threatening, and the perceived societal approval of engaging in violence and/or discrimination (Walters, Brown, & Wiedlitzka, 2016). In fact, “most, if not all, hate crimes are linked by perceptions of threat. Threats can be linked to economic stability, access to social/state resources, people’s sense of safety in society, and/or values and social norms” (Walters et al., 2016, p. 9).

The pervasiveness of prejudice-motivated victimisation, the harm inflicted, and their lasting impact on safety and belonging, and resultant living in fear, are of grave concern (Judge & Nel, 2018; Nel & Breen, 2013; Walters et al., 2016). This continuous fear of harm is and should be the barometer for policymakers, practitioners and politicians when implementing and advocating mechanisms to protect at-risk individuals and communities and prevent such hate victimisation (Browne et al., 2011).

In further exploring how injustices and domination impact on marginalised individuals and groups, we need to gain insight into the concept of ‘misrecognition’.

**MISRECOGNITION**

Societies characterised by injustice and unfairness perpetuate the unequal participation of some individuals and communities by misrecognising their moral worth (James, 2015). ‘Misrecognition’ refers to the social processes, in everyday life, where someone, or a group is not recognised for what they are or for what they stand; the legitimacy of their identity is disregarded. These people and/or groups are also misrecognised because they were not previously recognised, and in some instances continue to be marginalised from social structures by hegemonic societal norms (James, 2015).

Hate incidents are a form of domination that authorises and legitimises self-imposed arbitrary shared norms of misrecognition. Important factors in determining how people experience prejudices and violence and that prevent vulnerable groups in particular from participating as equal partners in society – and thereby misrecognising their being – include class structures as well as cultural, national, religious, educational and institutional barriers. Therefore, symbolic violence is not only an interpersonal violence, but a form of violence that is embedded in political and business structures and institutions, in addition to social ones. In this manner, power relations are perceived not for what they actually are but “in a form which renders them legitimate in the eyes of the beholder” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. xiii; Fraser, 2007).

Traits or characteristics of the norm – for example, language, dress, gender, sexual orientation and/or religion – become the drivers of domination and symbolic violence. Examples from the HCWG research that informed the study on which this article is based, include persons being beaten up for being a sex worker, or for being lesbian or gay, while deeming these categories of people as less than human; parading a person half naked in public for being different from the norm; and/or people of a different colour, religion, race or national origin being regarded as disposable items.

As a result of our colonial roots and legacy of apartheid, race-based incidents of hate are of particular relevance to South Africa. In the past – and some may argue that this remains the case today – race constructed our social, political, economic and psychological reality, and in a sense operationalised the repression, oppression and violence that occurred (Nel & Breen, 2013). Nel and Breen (2013) purport – and this is also evident in the original study that informed this article – race is but one of the characteristics that contribute to some people being misrecognised.
Across the world, an increase in global migration is being experienced in the form of refugees, asylum seekers and/or immigrants. Non-nationals are frequently regarded as ‘outsiders’ who are targeted in xenophobic attacks on the basis of their ‘foreignness’. In this regard, South Africa has repeatedly made news headlines in recent years for the misrecognition of non-nationals – in particular those from other African countries by, for instance, violating their rights, damaging their homes, property and/or belongings, and threatening their physical safety in waves of xenophobic attacks across the country (Breen et al., 2016; Harris, 2004; Nel & Breen, 2013).

A further example of hate incidents in South Africa that has been widely reported is the misrecognition of people due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression, through the targeting of members of LGBTIQA+ communities. Such individuals are stigmatised for their perceived sexual and gender ‘deviance’, and they frequently become victims of discrimination, harassment, hate speech, name-calling, threats and assault (Judge & Nel, 2018; Nel & Breen, 2013). These homophobic and/or transphobic acts of misrecognition are shaped by religious and cultural beliefs regarding homosexuality as a sin or as something that needs to be stopped before it spreads (Judge & Nel, 2018; Nel & Breen, 2013).

Having provided an overview of symbolic violence, hate incidents and misrecognition, we now move to the discussion of the methodology and findings of the current study.

**METHODOLOGY**

South Africa has various Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) that serve a range of sectors vulnerable to hate victimisation. Historically – and in the absence of hate crime law – some of these organisations have been using their own systems for the monitoring of hate incidents targeting their constituencies. Such disparate ways of monitoring, among others, impairs advocacy efforts to impress on government the importance of an urgent legal response to hate victimisation, given the nature and effect thereof. To remedy this situation, the HCWG developed an instrument, the Hate and Bias Monitoring Form, for use in a wide variety of vulnerable sectors, with the specific purpose to monitor hate incidents within their constituencies.

The development of the Hate and Bias Monitoring Form and its supporting user guide was informed by an international body of literature and consultation with CSOs, governmental structures, universities and individuals in the private sector. To gain a better understanding of the nature and the psychological effect of hate incidents, the HCWG undertook a longitudinal study spanning five years (2013-2017) and conducted in five provinces of South Africa (Mitchell & Nel, 2017). Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of South Africa (Unisa).

Data were collected by participating organisations, by monitoring media sources and through fieldwork. Fieldwork comprised of face-to-face interviews with victims, witnesses and caseworkers, as well as working through available organisational case files. Mostly quantitative data were collected, with some open-ended questions. The cases were screened using the definitions of hate crime, hate speech, and intentional unfair discrimination, together referred to as ‘hate incidents’. This was done in accordance with a draft policy framework for combating hate incidents of the DoJ&CD and the Foundation for Human Rights made available for stakeholder consultations shortly before the research commenced (Nel et al., 2013).

3 A **hate crime** refers to any crime committed under the common law against (a) person(s), property, or (an) organisation(s), motivated by bias (Nel et al., 2013).

4 **Hate speech** refers to the public and intentional uttering of hatred towards another group, based on bias, with the intention to incite violence (Nel et al., 2013).

5 **Intentional unfair discrimination** takes place when victims are discriminated against in any way, based on an immutable characteristic (Nel et al., 2013).
Of the 1 026 cases documented, 945 were suitable for data analysis. The majority of the recorded cases related to nationality, sexual orientation and gender identity, religion and race (Mitchell & Nel, 2017).

For purposes of this article, only aspects of the qualitative data of the original HCWG study were further analysed. This analysis focused on the descriptions of the incidents, previous incidents and the effect of the victimisation on the victim. Thematic analysis was conducted to classify data, categorise it and create themes. Co-coding was done to ensure the trustworthiness of the themes that were identified. The interpretations of the data were constructed by repeated re-engagements with the data. Each incident description contributed to the interpretation to create a global picture of the outcome of hate incidents (Blacker, 2009; Joffe & Yardley, 2004).

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Six prominent themes emerged during the analysis of the data, namely:

- the victim is less than human or like an animal;
- the humiliation of the victim;
- the use of extreme overkill or destruction;
- the victim is to blame;
- the messages conveyed by hate incidents; and
- intentional unfair discrimination.

The findings are discussed by themes, including some case examples relevant to each theme.

Although all 945 cases were included in the data analysis for this study, only cases that were collected in the public sphere are utilised as examples. This includes media cases, incidents on social media, and incidents occurring at meetings open to the public. Such case examples are provided verbatim and unedited. All the other cases are reported on in an aggregated way, with no identifying information shared. Protecting the identities of the participants in the study was deemed to be of the utmost importance as the identification of victims of hate may lead to further victimisation (Mitchell & Nel, 2017). Moreover, anonymity was contracted with participants in the original study that informed this article.

**THE VICTIM IS LESS THAN HUMAN/VICTIMS ARE LIKE ANIMALS**

The attitudes of the offenders indicate that the feelings or emotions of the victim are of no concern. For instance, after an incident in which a white man urinated on the head of a black man at a local club, the offender stated, “I don’t see anything wrong with urinating on a black person.”

Victims are targeted because they are, for instance, viewed as just foreigners, Muslim people or LGBTIQA+ individuals. LGBTIQA+ individuals are seen as disposable in statements, such as, “Istabane must be stoned”, indicating that victims are considered to be lesser beings than offenders in some way. Considering a victim as less than human or to be an animal, relieves the moral weight of treating a victim in a degrading way (Smith, 2011).
Victims are not afforded basic human rights, such as the right to live. Children become nothing more than collateral damage in a war of hate directed at some sector of society. For instance, comments were posted on the Facebook page of *Carte Blanche* stating, “Should kill Chinese children for the cure for a hangover” and “[Chinese people are] the most despicable things on this planet.” In addition, a representative of Black First Land First (BLF) noted on ANN7 that she hopes that all white people would be killed.

Those targeted by hatred are at times likened to animals and treated accordingly. For instance, telling a non-national to sleep outside indicates that they are considered animals, or in some instances worse than animals (Harris, 2004; McRobbie, 2004).

Further indicative of the endemic anti-black African racism in the country, Penny Sparrow, a white middle-aged realtor from KwaZulu-Natal, raised ire with a controversial Facebook post in 2016 in which she likened black beach-goers to monkeys and for which she was subsequently fined for racist hate speech by the Equality Court. Also consider the following examples:

- “Jews are pigs” (Facebook post)
- A resident of Hout Bay, Western Cape, posted on Facebook, “Too many Africans are flocking to Hout Bay. Soon there will be nothing left of it. They [black people] are monkeys and need to be tied to a rope” the resident continued, “They [black people] are like stupid animals.”

In social media posts, several references were made to the targets of the hatred – in particular non-nationals from other African countries and black Africans, in general – in derogatory terms, such as ‘cockroaches’, ‘pests’ and ‘like a f***ing plague’. As explained in the following quotation, perpetrators have to justify their actions to make it morally acceptable to treat another human being in such a demeaning way:

For those committing violence, it requires an enormous amount of moral presumption for the perpetrators of these acts to justify the destruction of property on a massive scale or to condone a brutal attack on another life, especially the life of someone one scarcely knows and against whom one bears no personal enmity (Juergensmeyer, 2000, p. 11).

**THE HUMILIATION OF THE VICTIM/S**

Offenders often go beyond committing a crime, by humiliating the victim/s in public, which would not be necessary had the motive of the incident merely been criminal activity. The examples below demonstrate how humiliation serves as symbolic violence.

In one case, targets of hate, accused of witchcraft, were stripped naked and paraded around by the perpetrators, while others were called to witness, mock and laugh at them before they were murdered.

Following a dispute between co-workers, “a [non-national] man was stripped naked, sprayed from head to toe with enamel car paint…, paraded down a busy road” (Umraw, 2015).

Following a rape by three offenders, “the half-naked and bleeding [lesbian] woman ran to the neighbours” (DeBarros, 2015).

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8 Investigative journalism television programme.  
9 Pan-Africanist and revolutionary socialist political party in South Africa.  
10 A 24-hour television news channel in South Africa.
Sometimes targets of hatred are singled out during public gatherings. For instance, a pastor called LGBTIQA+ congregants out by name in church, condemning them as ‘sinful’.

Targets of hatred are often asked inappropriate questions, making them feel uncomfortable in places where they are meant to feel safe, e.g. clinics or churches. The bodies of murder victims are left naked. Victims are treated as ‘circus freaks’ for being different in some way. The humiliation of victims often leads to shame. This humiliation is used to keep the victims ‘in their place’ (McRobbie, 2004).

**THE VICTIM IS TO BLAME**

Assumptions about victims, fuelled by stereotypes, are made based on the fact that they do not neatly fit into what is considered socially acceptable or normal. Misrecognition is evident in the blaming of the victim. The violence experienced by victims is misrecognised and normalised as a consequence of what is considered ‘indecent’, ‘inappropriate’, or ‘socially unacceptable’ behaviour (Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016).

Victims are advised to take safety precautions, instead of offenders being forced to take control of their own behaviour (Morgan & Björkert, 2006). Victims often do not challenge the behaviour of the offender, but rather find ways to avoid it as a result of the behaviour of the offender being misrecognised as intrinsically how they are (Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016).

Victims are repeatedly blamed for their own victimisation. As illustrated in the following, when a target of hate is perceived to be or acts in a way that is considered socially unacceptable, offenders rationalise that they warrant their victimisation, “They [Jewish people] got what they deserved in the Holocaust” (Social media post).

Individuals are blamed for crimes without any evidence. In some instances, the blame is linked to targets of hate in a completely nonsensical way, such as, “The fires that devastated Cape Town this week are the fault of gay and lesbian Capetonians” (Facebook post by a Cape Town pastor). Non-nationals are blamed for the high levels of crime, for instance, “Nigerians are selling drugs to ...[local] children” and “[l]abelled foreign nationals as criminals”. LGBTIQA+-related examples include, “[h]omosexuals are spreading HIV”, “[b]eing gay is sinful and any association will turn others gay” , and “[t]his [homosexuality] must stop before it spreads to other areas”. Victims consider why they were attacked on a night out: “[t]hey [offenders] must have assumed we are homosexual”.

After beating up a (black) domestic worker, the (white) offender offered the following explanation for his actions, “[h]e had mistaken her for a prostitute” (Segar, 2014).

The examples mentioned here demonstrate how offenders rationalise their behaviour, arguing that the victims deserved to be treated in such a manner. The purpose of the overt violence is to restore the status quo – i.e. behaviours deemed acceptable within a community – that is generally maintained by symbolic violence.

**THE USE OF EXTREME OVERKILL OR DESTRUCTION**

Overt violence takes place when symbolic violence is no longer effective in the domination of certain groups, usually because circumstances have changed (Grzyb, 2012). Changing circumstances include policy or law reform. For instance, being LGBTIQA+ is no longer against the law in South Africa, challenging heteronormative male dominance through the empowerment of LGBTIQA+ individuals. Overt violence then takes the place of symbolic violence (Grzyb, 2012).
The victimisation often goes beyond what is necessary to commit a crime. A robbery is not just a robbery; everything is destroyed during its execution. A body is mutilated beyond any necessary means to commit a murder. There is a complete destruction of the victims and/or their possessions. This is illustrated in the following examples:

“Half naked body [of a lesbian woman] found …a toilet brush rammed in her vagina” and “They took everything.” In another instance, the body of a young lesbian woman was found. Her “eyes were taken out and her private parts mutilated” (Mametja, 2016). Another body was found “mutilated and burnt”. Three generations of women believed to be practicing witchcraft were “kidnapped, tortured and paraded naked, …their faces badly disfigured” after being hit with blunt objects.

Overt violence reinforces symbolic violence by communicating the message: “The way you live (or who you are) is not acceptable”. This message hits home, not only to the victim, but to the larger community, as well as to those who have similar characteristics as the victim. Using this message to instil fear in others reinforces symbolic violence. In turn, symbolic violence creates the circumstances in which overt violence targeting vulnerable victims becomes socially acceptable, thus demonstrating the mutually reinforcing and cyclical relationship between overt violence and symbolic violence.

MESSAGES CONVEYED

Hate incidents are intended to send a message to the victim specifically, or to the sector of society of which the victim is a member. For instance, these messages, among others, include that they do not belong; that they do not deserve basic human rights; that they do not have the right to practice their religion; or that they are not allowed to dress the way they want to.

Daily harassment reminds victims that they will not be able to escape their victimisation. These messages reinforce symbolic violence by telling victims that they have no power. Examples hereof are, for instance:

- “Tell themselves [gay men] that they are a man, not a woman” (Venda community leader at a public meeting describing that LGBTIQA+ individuals will still have a chance to repent and change their behaviour);
- “Go back to Europe, this country belongs to us, not you white scumbags” (Facebook post by black individual);
- In an SMS sent out once a booking has been made for their ‘date night’, a restaurant stipulates that “same-sex couples are not welcome”;
- “Nazi Germans were justified in killing European Jews” (Social media post directed at the South African Jewish Board of Deputies);
- “Will show you that your lifestyle is wrong” (Told to a lesbian woman, during a rape incident);
- The vandalisation and smearing with blood of a mosque in Kalk Bay, Western Cape; and
- Placing a pig snout on the ledge outside of a mosque in Simon’s Town, also in the Western Cape.

While words indicative of Islamophobia were not used in the last two examples the message of a total disregard for Muslim religious values are explicitly communicated by highly offensive actions. Not allowing victims to forget that they are not welcome aims at ensuring that they do not attempt to change the social order. Repeatedly exposing victims to such messaging increases the internalisation thereof. This is also evident in other South African research (Harris, 2004) where non-nationals reported that hatred towards them, the constant reminder that they are not welcome, and the fear this instilled, were worse than concerns over their legal status, job security or financial difficulties they faced.

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11 The umbrella representative spokesbody and civil rights lobby of the South African Jewish community.
INTENTIONAL UNFAIR DISCRIMINATION

Symbolic violence is evident in the withholding of services or rights, neglect and indifference experienced by victims of hate incidents (McRobbie, 2004). By denying non-national and LGBTIQA+ persons access to services, such as medical care, police services and the services rendered by the Department of Home Affairs, they are placed in a position of less power.

Turning a victim away from a hospital in an emergency indicates a complete disregard for the life of a human being. Moreover, as illustrated in the following example, some victims are even denied the right to education based on their religion: a Rastafarian child was suspended from school in Cape Town in 2016 because he had dreadlocks. The case highlights a mix of prejudice on the grounds of both religion and race because the underlying assumption informing the school’s uniform codes, that certain hair aesthetics are ‘professional’ and ‘neat’, is anti-black African, in many ways.

Intentional unfair discrimination may mostly be considered as a form of symbolic violence, however, when medical services are denied, a life may in fact be lost. Denial of education may change the way an individual’s life turns out. Even though the wounds inflicted may not be physical, the act of refusal is violent, with the possibility of severe consequences.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this research confirm that violence is not limited to overt acts of physical harm, but frequently presents itself in symbolic acts of psychological harm and hatred that assault the dignity, identity and sense of worth of marginalised groups and their members. Furthermore, this article explains how symbolic violence transpires in the everyday interactions between people that reinforce the power differences between the various groups of society and how it is related to overt violence in hate incidents in a mutually reinforcing manner.

Overt violence occurs when symbolic violence is no longer effective in controlling vulnerable groups, with offenders resorting to reinforce power differences between themselves and their victims overtly. In turn, symbolic violence breeds the circumstances in which overt violence becomes socially acceptable behaviour, thus creating a society in which hate victimisation of certain vulnerable groups becomes normalised. In particular, overt violence reinforces symbolic violence by communicating to the victims, as well as to their larger communities, that they are unwanted, third-class citizens and because they do not conform to established societal norms, are underving of any respect, human dignity and/or regard for their safety. The violence experienced by victims is misrecognised and normalised as a consequence of what is regarded to be indecent, inappropriate or socially unacceptable behaviour and/ or identities. In this manner, overt hate victimisation and symbolic violence are mutually reinforcing and cyclical.

Effective violence prevention has to take this relationship into account, especially as South Africa grapples with legislative and policy responses to hate victimisation. Policy makers and practitioners, and others, tasked with violence prevention, need not only understand the damaging reinforcing relationship between overt and symbolic violence, but also its debilitating emotional and psychological effect on our society and the individual victim(s). As with hate victimisation, symbolic violations have a wider debilitating effect on victims, their communities, and the broader society, thus undermining social cohesion.

The law has both practical and symbolic utility: not only does it create public awareness by condemning criminal acts and violence, but it also establishes crime categories that enable monitoring effort, aimed at prevention (Ududec, Peltonen, & Niţă, 2015). Accordingly, there have been repeated calls by civil society for an appropriate response to hate victimisation in South Africa. These calls have translated in considerable progress being made
in recent years in developing policy (DoJ&CD, 2016) and legislation (DoJ&CD, 2018) to addresses such violence towards specific forms of identity. The recent Cabinet-approved Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill (DoJ&CD, 2018) is a vital step towards the protection of those vulnerable to misrecognition and being targeted, among others, on the basis of their race, nationality, religion, sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Although a legal response to hate crimes is only one form of intervention necessary to address the complex intersection of bias and violence, it can serve as an important tool – especially to combat impunity and improve access to criminal justice for victims. The ‘symbolism’ of law reform is of utmost importance, as is the platform provided by the legal system from which to condemn violating behaviours. Such measures will not only send a clear message to society that hate victimisation, discrimination and misrecognition will not be tolerated, but will also strengthen the role of police and justice officials in holding perpetrators accountable and increasing access to justice for the victims (Breen & Nel, 2011; DoJ&CD, 2018; Ududec et al., 2015). Thus, it is in the South African government’s interest to fast-track the finalisation of the proposed hate crime legislation.

The practical restrictions and challenges for interventions aimed at the prevention and combating of overt and subtle violences ought to be recognised, upfront, however. Indeed, responding to hate victimisation remains a complex societal matter globally because such incidents require attitudinal, behavioural, and social changes. Accordingly, breaking the mutually reinforcing relationship between symbolic and overt violence in hate victimisation requires a multilevel approach, including partnerships and interventions from multiple agencies, such as government, legislators, law enforcement, and all relevant institutions, to practitioners, society and each member of our communities (Walters et al., 2016).

Understanding the relationship between symbolic violence and overt violence, and the efforts required to create awareness, entails a continuous educational process. Greater public awareness of the harm done by such violence to victims, communities, social structures and ultimately also democracy, is needed. To address the social causes underlying hate victimisation, interventions aimed at increased diversity awareness in communities, and education and training programmes for service providers, are required. Stereotypes must be examined in order to understand how harm, suffering and fear is caused and instilled by hierarchies and dominance. Indeed, the beliefs and attitudes that underlie hate victimisation need to be challenged on multiple levels (DoJ&CD, 2016; Walters et al., 2016).

A move towards a more community-focused approach with interventions that are empowering, educative and restorative in nature may be called for. Ideally such efforts should be spearheaded by government, but other relevant role players, practitioners, CSOs, researchers, and community members, too, have a role to play in initiating community dialogues and encouraging participation.

Such community dialogue and interventions should create a safe environment aimed at responding to hate incidents that occur in communities, informing participants of legislation set out to protect their rights and dignity, what is regarded as a violation, what avenues of recourse are available, and how they, too, have a part in reducing the occurrence of hate. It should be explained how such acts of hate, misrecognition and intolerance not only affect the individual, but seriously compromise the well-being of a community and society.

Through dialogue, trust can be instilled and confidence enhanced in law enforcement officials in order to utilise the resources that are at their disposal. Reporting processes, too, should be streamlined to optimise their use. These interventions should send a message to perpetrators, as well, making them aware of the consequences and that individuals know their rights. In this manner, social cohesion can be created and reinforced in an attempt to prevent hate incidents in all of their overt and subtle forms.
REFERENCES


POEM

Selotape for bullet holes

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I hadn’t visited my mother in a while but when I entered my old room the roof had changed

The hole was missing and covered in large strips of selotape
Meant to hide but clearly there. The bullet hole was not invisible even though I couldn’t see it

Mother, why do you rarely leave your house?

Why are you afraid of the boy you watched grow up and his gun?

Why don’t you take it?

All of you, all of us. Why do we watch our sons and brothers and cousins and long-lost friends die?

The sound of a bullet shooting from a gun is no longer scary to us.

I can tell you how I woke up that night, shards of glass everywhere and the bullet right there, next to me.

How many rolls of selotape can Bishop Lavis, Elsies River, Manenberg, Ravensmead and Uitsig sell?

They think we’re uncultured, no real ‘tongue’ mocking our mother-tongue as if it wasn’t born in the kitchen of slaves. Uneducated the stats say. Fatherless the stats say. Selotape their mouths I say.

This tongue can speak Kaaps with meaning but has to speak to you like this. So you can understand.

For your sake.

I have seen boys find family in gangs, real brotherhood and fatherhood shown at the consequence of a gun.
How else? When men were left powerless and landless and man-less. How else do you take it back but by taking the little land you can see with a gun?

Coloured man, with your roots all mangled up in every part of history I wish my mother would take your gun.

I wish you felt more like a man. I wish we could selotape the words you were called. Are called.

I wish your search for a pa didn’t need to leave you at the mercy of a father you never wanted to have, teaching you how to load a gun, not ride a bike.

Do you think we can selotape the parts of history they left us out of? Or maybe rip the selotape off our own skin and let them see the bullet holes

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CONFERENCE REPORTS

“Maybe you are just not angry enough”

Refiloe Makama

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In August 2018, I attended a conference on decolonisation and Africanisation. I was so excited about this conference, particularly because of the keynote speakers. The keynote addresses were not set to be delivered by the usual, traditional speakers who are invited to academic events. They were a combination of exciting, dynamic speakers whom I have enjoyed listening to on different platforms.

The opening keynote address was presented by a prominent traditional healer, who is a frequent guest on South African radio stations. The address was powerful and inspirational and set the tone for the conference. The speaker emphasised the significance of understanding African spirituality and celebrating being an African. The speaker suggested that as Africans, we should not disregard our own ways of being in favour of a foreign doctrine, which has led us astray. She also suggested that the social ills in society are a reflection of how we the people of Africa have failed the individual. The speaker suggested that we return to ourselves by embracing our African spirituality instead of identifying with a foreign religion that finds fault in African leaders. This address was well suited for the conference as it touched on all the conference themes such as decolonisation, identity, spirituality, well-being, etc. The opening keynote address was preceded by a spiritual dance, with the audience invited to participate. A few people stepped out of the room, while some, including myself, stayed inside but chose to watch rather than participate. I chose not to because I had never participated in such a ritual before and to do so for the first time, in that context, would have been an inauthentic performance of my spirituality. It is, however, common amongst many African peoples to include song and dance in ceremonies; inviting all ‘ancient wisdom’, as articulated by the keynote speaker, to these ceremonies. Perhaps considering that the theme of the conference was De-colonisation and Re-Afrikanisation: A Conversation, this kind of opening ceremony was felt by the organisers to have been suitable for the occasion. In this piece I will discuss three points, African spirituality, Africans and Exclusion.

I remember when I started to grow dreadlocks it was considered, by some, that I was making a political statement. At the time, I didn’t understand the politics of hair and simply chose a style that was manageable for me. I remember being called names like “Jah lady” and “African Queen”, “natural beauty” and so forth. Yes! While it was complimentary, it was an imposition of an identity I had not taken up for myself. Additionally, these labels suggested to me that anything else was simply unacceptable. There seems to be an idea of what it means to be African or what it means to black and those that transgress these set standards of blackness can experience ridicule or rejection. It was strange for me that at this conference, in a space where we claim to fight for black people’s ability to think and choose, the parameters for what they may choose are still set for them, only this time set in the name of decolonisation, Africanisation and even black pride.

According to Horsthemke (2004) “Africanisation is generally seen to signal a (renewed) focus on Africa, on reclamation of what has been taken from Africa” (p. 571). While this definition was not the official definition of
the conference, it speaks to my experiences of the conference. In the effort to de-colonise and re-Africanise, there was no room for a conversation. For many at the conference, it seemed as though African spirituality is about going back to a way of being and expression as well as the rejection of all that is foreign – the language, customs, and religions.

The rejection of Christianity was particularly emphasised. It came as no surprise to me that Christianity came under the spotlight as a tool that was used by the coloniser to legitimise their oppressive actions. An additional point against Christianity was the image of the blue-eyed, straight-haired Christ that positions black people as inferior. The criticism levelled against organised religion was warranted, however as a Christian who does not believe in the straight-haired, blue-eyed Jesus, I felt it was not the place nor the time to engage with the idea of an African spirituality that includes all faiths. While I can blame my silence on the hostility of the space, maybe I was silenced by own lack of bravery and fear. Fear that I could be wrong and that instead of being corrected, I would be ridiculed for not ‘getting it’.

There was also some emphasis on the importance of those who identify as African to at least speak an African language. The danger of such a notion of Africaness is that it results in the exclusion of people who do not speak the language. This is not only the rejection of those whose ancestry can be traced to Europe or America, but limits being African to an aesthetic – in other words, clothing, language, food and expression – and then many, including myself, fall below the ‘Africaness bar.’

It seems to me that the performance of blackness is legitimised through the exclusion of others that do not perform this blackness correctly. Amongst these are black peoples who believe in ‘foreign gods’, black people who do not speak particular languages, and perhaps black academics who are supposedly dependant on their white counterparts. I attended a session where two white colleagues presented their work. At the end of their presentations the floor was opened for questions. Unfortunately, the majority of the audience was not as interested in the presenters’ work as they were in the colour of these presenters’ skin. The questions raised in this session were less to do with what had been presented, and more about the presenters’ legitimacy to be at the conference and to speak on decolonisation. The comments were not based on the integrity of the work presented, but instead on the speakers’ right to study black lives. As important as it may be to think through positionalities and interrogate the racialised, gendered, and classed positions of researchers, the dismissal of people based purely on the colour of their skin can be, and is, problematic. Considering the on-going conversations about who can research whom, and what are important truisms in conducting research, the imperative is on us to engage dialectically with what this may mean in the context of de-colonisation and re-Afrikanisation. There was a strong demand for the two white presenters to always position themselves within the decolonial conference which was unfair since there was no such expectation of anyone else at the conference.

What saddened me is the level of anger my colleagues expressed at the conference. Not only was it made clear that the white researchers had nothing valuable to contribute to the conference, but their very presence was disrespectful to the conference agenda. At one point one respondent said to the white presenter that it is time for white people to excuse themselves from ‘black spaces’. The respondant went on to say that the insistence of some white people to participate in black spaces would result in war because it seems like the time for civil engagement has come to an end. These sentiments were echoed by another respondent asking the speaker if she had plans to go back home, because there will come a time when all white people are sent back in a boat, as they had done to black people. While anger and frustration is expected and understandable in the face of injustice and untransformed institutions, the levels of anger and frustration directed at individuals, rather than systems, is misplaced. I asked myself in that moment if rejecting the work of white scholars simply on the basis of their pigmentation is the failure to separate the structure from the individual subject. In that moment the university and the conference space – which should be a space for critical intellectual engagement and debate – became a space of hostility. The white colleagues became the oppressors and were almost required to account for all that was wrong with the system.
Academic spaces are, and should be, spaces of intellectual debate, but appear to have become, as in the case of this conference, spaces for like-minded thinkers to speak to one another, agree, and go their separate ways (Connell, 2018). At this particular conference, I felt that most people spoke to one another in one voice – a dangerous, exclusionary voice. A voice so loud and so intimidating, it silenced me. In that space it seemed as though the idea of a decolonial and Africanisation agenda is to shut the mouths of non-black speakers and those regarded as echoing the dominant oppressive voice.

As I sat at the conference, I thought to myself: am I failing the movement? We are the angry black women, and god knows we have plenty to be angry about. But I was not. No, I was simply not angry, or rather not angry enough, as one of the colleagues told me. Perhaps the system that gave me a reason to be angry has also taught me the ‘appropriate’ way of expressing this anger, especially in spaces like this. In academic spaces one ought to express one’s frustration with critical engagement. One is taught to write and speak in the third person where it’s never, “I Refiloe Makama,” but the author, where I have separated the ‘research’ from experience, because when the two mirror each other, the anger paralyses. Now what? Here I was in an academic space; a young, black, female, emerging academic, amongst other black academics and I was uncomfortable. I felt like a misfit. Why was I not this angry? Have I missed the plot? Did I not understand the injustices?

The problem with the notion of the mystical, great Africa that once was, is that not only can we not recover it, but it limits Africa’s and Africans’ sense of worth in the past, and thus the need not go back in order to reaffirm Africa and Africans. This still sees colonisation as a point of departure. Africaness is reduced to performance which then leads to research and conversation that simply focuses on traditions, dance, song and/or language; where poverty and disease are paraded alongside cultural dance as the only aspects of the African continent. The Kumbaya version of Africa seems to me to be the Africa that was escribed by colonisers as primitive, uncivilised and it is the Africa we have been fed, the Africa that is centred around the singing and chanting and an Africa that continues in the singing and dancing. The Africa we sell to tourists. I feel quite uncomfortable with positioning myself as an exotic subject with a strange language, in colourful clothes, if any clothes at all, participating in these interesting customs. I wondered how my African identity is wrapped up in my ability to speak Sesotho and keeping my hair natural. Why is being African limited to a particular expression? Clearly this is the kind of essentialist ideology most black scholars try to resist. Have we not tried to resist the ideology that black people, black lives, customs, and traditions are not entertainment for the European gaze? I was quite disappointed that, within an academic space, efforts to decolonise were not centred around producing knowledges about Africa and about the world, or Africa as a site of knowledge production rather than a site to be studied.

In conclusion, from this conference, I take away the significance of celebrating African beauty, and the boldness to speak up about the frustration of being displaced in one’s country. While it is important to reclaim space and languages, one should be careful about, at the same time, taking up another identity that may be oppressive.

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Humility and fear: Meditating on a theme

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The theme of the 24th Psychological Society of South Africa Congress, “listen with humility… act with integrity” instilled much fear in me as I contemplated responding to an invitation to present at a symposium that would be part of the congress. My discomfort stemmed from the knowledge that it had been deemed necessary to centre the invocation: “listen with humility” and “act with integrity”. I wondered who it was that needed to be reminded to listen in such a manner. Were these not psychologists, is that not what they do in any case? From which worlds do these people come that such petitions needed to be made? Why was it necessary that the kind of listening we were being asked to practice be of the humble variety? If there was no humility in how people listened before, how did they listen before this moment?

REFUSING TO LISTEN WITH HUMILITY… WHILE ACTING WITH INTEGRITY?

While I cannot speak for all students, the position of the black student within the discipline of Psychology is made difficult by the weight of our history within it. The artist Buhlebezwe Siwani speaks of the fear that is etched into the mind of the black child (The Narrative, 2018). As a method of survival, we were taught to fear. To be fearful of authority and those who lord over us. Faced with these personages, we would recoil and attempt to take up as little space as we can. In this way, we become non-threatening, the perfect students. The danger of this conditioning comes where our cultural understanding of being in the world becomes a vehicle for agency-destroying fear. The notion of respect for elders transmutes into deference for those in positions of authority.

The idea of humility is not foreign to my sense of being. Neither is the idea of acting with integrity. It is after all expected of me as a Xhosa man to act with honour and integrity. This is what distinguishes me from a child. However, in the context of engaging with a discipline that I have for the longest time held with deep suspicion, the demand that I ought to do what I have been socialised to enact in my engagement with others seems to me as threatening as the necklaces that donned the necks of ‘impimpi’ in 1980s KwaZakhele, Port Elizabeth. From the beginning, I had to position myself in relation to what was being addressed in the theme. I became aware of the differences between my worldview and that of the people who had to listen with humility. Given that I have for the longest time been listening to Psychology speaking at me, I was convinced that the work I was coming to share required that the profession should listen to what I had to share, even if for a few minutes. I noticed a similar determination among all the young researchers I listened to at the congress.

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2 Editors’ note: Necklacing refers to an act of direct violence that was used against people deemed to be ‘impipi’ during the apartheid era. As editors, we were concerned with how the metaphor could potentially trivialise (in a similar way to when rape is used as a metaphor) these acts of physical violence. However, we hope that Matutu’s use of necklacing to refer to his pain and discomfort at the conference serves to make visible and palpable the harm caused by symbolic forms of violence, as well as make clear the difficulties of talking about symbolic violence without reference to direct violence.
This being my first conference, I believed that if I were to leave the congress more enlightened it would be principally thanks to the speakers in the programme sessions that I curated for myself as means to affirm my work and to broaden my thinking. It was in fact, the responses from the floor, as it were, that moved me to do something. This is not to say that the speakers had nought to give, but rather that participants’ responses to the numerous presentations told me more about the state of our discipline than what was often said from the podium.

Within my rather curated experience of the congress, the following instances stood out: first, the plenary programme centered African Psychology. The overarching concern among all the speakers here was our relationship with those with whom we do research (i.e. our research participants). Starting the congress in this unapologetic tone laid the foundation for the questions we would ask ourselves as we moved between venues: why did they frame that work in that way? Who was it written for? What were they assuming about those participants? Secondly, our problems with engaging with culture in meaningful ways was brought to the fore. So too, the estrangement of black scholars who return to communities that do not recognise them – having been duly enculturated into Western ways of thinking about psychological phenomena. Lastly, our inability to engage with not only the relational ontology of African Psychology, but also our failure to understand the implication of how we frame our research questions, was highlighted in the plenary roundtable.

As a student interested in ethical conduct in research settings, I approached the various forums with a heightened sensitivity on how research subjects were handled. For the most part, there seemed to be an awareness that our methods and approaches are integrally ‘choices’ and that we ought to hold ourselves accountable for how we choose to represent those with whom we do research. At times presenters purposefully worked outside the silos that evolve into disciplinary closets (e.g. Boonzaier; Helman; Segalo; Peters; van Niekerk); others sought to disrupt the very process of ‘doing research’ (Mahlo, Baloyi, & Sodi; Matutu). There were instances where the sessions were so charged that we all realised we had tapped into a moment, a place we could not come back from: knowing that we cannot continue to render as strange what to some is most familiar. One attendee posed a question to a presenter: “why did you choose to use a colonial frame to analyse this data?” The name of the presenter is not important. However, that exchange revealed to us how our discipline’s monolingualism and inability to engage with difference leads not only to what Musila (2017) refers to as epistemic (dis)articulation, but points to the danger of essentialism when confronted with ‘the other’. This, and other exchanges like it, pointed to the differences in how scholars took their politics. Gone were platitudes and polite smiles, what we had in that moment was sincerity and discomfort. I like discomfort. It is how we enact our integrity. We felt it when Dlamini and Ratele laid bare the reality of black psychologists as ‘safe bets’, so too when Calata illustrated how a cultural analysis of African epistemology could be splendidly undertaken while pointing to the value of genuinely ‘knowing’ the subject of research not as artifice, but in the true sense that one may arrive at through the prism of language.

The congress has shown us why we should not rest in comfort as we re-imagine the realities of the life worlds of those who are ‘made strange’ by our discipline. We should stop at nothing short of coming out of our collective disciplinary closets towards an epistemically aware consciousness. This position gathers more urgency when we consider, as Kessi and Boonzaier (2018) have argued, that the philosophies we draw on to explain social phenomena are a choice.
REFERENCES


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