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Researching and working with boys in Southern Africa in the context of HIV/AIDS – a radical approach

Abstract :
I make the case for developing an approach to researching boys, which centres on boys' multiple identities and which is self reflexive and addresses processes of identity construction going on in the research. I illustrate this by drawing on my own research with young people in Southern and Eastern Africa (with a particular emphasis on boys in Southern and South Africa). This kind of research, I argue, carries extremely important implications for ways of understanding and working with boys who may be seen as problematic, especially in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In the paper I try to demonstrate how the kind of practices adopted in this research may serve as models for good pedagogic practices in sex education (being introduced, in many African countries, in the light of HIV/AIDS).

Introduction – researching 'problematic' boys and young men

In many western countries, in recent years, boys have been much criticised for being anti-intellectual, emotionally illiterate, uncommunicative, antisocial and delinquent – characteristics that have been identified as marking them out as different from girls. (see eg. Epstein et al, 2001, for a discussion on the moral panic about boys' 'underachieving' in schools in Britain). In Britain, as Griffin (1998) notes, it tends to be working class and black boys who are problematised, and sport, and especially football, has been aimed at them as a way of '*burning off*' and *'re-chanelling masculine energies'* in supposedly productive ways (See eg. Connolly 1998, Lloyd 1990). Such concerns about boys, and notably black boys, prevail, too, in South Africa, though here the focus is less on intellectual irresponsibility and underachieving and more on sexual irresponsibility and violence. In South Africa the emphasis on '*hard*' sports framed in terms of '*the benefits of recreation in combating juvenile delinquency, and as a method of social control in densely populated areas*,' has, with black boys in mind, become an important discourse. (see Nauright, 1998). Some social commentators such as Jeremy Seekings (1996), have argued that much juvenile delinquency in South Africa has its roots in apartheid and is the expression of black young men whose identities as the *'shock troops or foot soldiers in the struggle for political change'* have become redundant in the post-apartheid context. Feelings of estrangement and uncertainty for many young (and older) black South African men have been reinforced, as Liz Walker (2003) has persuasively argued, by unemployment as well as the emphasis in the new Constitution on women's rights. Violence and sexual violence among young black men is presented by these writers as a

response to such feelings and a way of asserting themselves. Young black men in Southern Africa have been particularly problematised in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, with campaigns and literature addressing them, especially, as people with multiple partners and engaging in forms of sexual harassment and violence.

In this paper I argue for ways of researching and working with boys which address the problematic identities in which many boys are invested – which put them and others at risk of HIV/AIDS and violence – without constructing black boys as the enemy. This means treating them as intelligent, creative and caring people and opening up spaces for them to critically reflect on the sorts of identities they routinely construct and inhabit. In proposing this, I draw on a UNICEF funded study (which I co-ordinated with Fatuma Chege) which investigated how mainly teenage girls and boys in 7 countries in Southern and Eastern Africa forged their identities.[1]

In much social scientific research on young people, and notably in Africa, (Davies 1999) young people's voices have been surprisingly mute, reflecting and also reinforcing their marginal positions and identities (James and Prout (1999)). In contrast to this, the UNICEF project aimed to address the young people participating as *active subjects* encouraging them to talk about themselves in reflective ways. We wanted to find out from them what it was like being a boy or girl of their age by developing appropriate methodologies and research relations. With this aim in mind, the young people were interviewed about their relations with and attitudes towards people of the same and the opposite sex, parents and teachers, interests and leisure pursuits, pleasures and fears, future projections and role models. But within these broad themes they were encouraged to set the agenda and pursue issues which they deemed significant to them. The interviewers – a large number of men and women from their early 20s to 50s – were trained to respond to issues the young people raised and not to be judgmental, and in this respect, perhaps, to be different from most adults in conversations with children about topics especially relating to gender, sexuality, fighting and violence. Indeed doing this kind of research involved inverting 'normal' power relations between adults and children.[2] Some of our interviewers engaged the young people in dance and clapping and short ritualistic games prior to conducting the interviews and this seemed to be very effective in helping them feel at ease with the interviewer.

The rationale for conducting this research was to collect information from boys and girls about their lives in order to develop relevant sex educational resources. In response to HIV/AIDS, sex education is being introduced in schools in Southern and Eastern Africa, yet many teachers (as we found in our study) were not sure what to teach or how to teach it, were embarrassed by the subject and tended to preach about the terrible consequences of engaging in sex. As Epstein and Johnson (1998) note, sexuality tends to be constructed as a key marker of adult identity in many societies, with adults wishing 'innocence' on children and imagining them as asexual or as people who *ought* to be. In the paper I try to

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[1] We have written up this research in Pattman and Chege (2003a), Finding Our Voices: Gendered and Sexual Identities and HIV/AIDS in Education, Nairobi: UNICEF.
[2] This approach to interviewing young people was strongly influenced by the study conducted by   Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman on boys in London, Young Masculinites, (2002) Basingstoke: Palgrave

demonstrate how the methods we adopted and the relations we established with our young participants (with the focus on boys in Southern Africa) may serve as models for good pedagogic practices in sex education which must engage, as Epstein and Johnson argue, with the (sexual and non sexual) cultures and identities young people, themselves, develop. I argue that those working with boys (and girls) in sex and HIV/AIDS education should tap into the multiple identities of the young people and aim to be self-reflexive, as we tried to do and be in our research.

Addressing boys and girls as authorities and opening spaces for critical and reflective discussion

Many of the hundreds of (mainly teenage) boys and girls who were interviewed in the participating countries - Botswana, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe - enjoyed being listened to by interested adults and taking the interview in the directions they wished. As one of the researchers in Zambia reported the young people '*really had a lot of issues raised and they said categorically that for the first time they have had a chance to talk to people who were willing to listen to their concerns at that level.*' They were often surprised and expressed pleasure at being able to talk openly about gender and sexuality, and also reported being secretive towards adults generally about their sexual feelings and about relationships with contemporaries of the opposite sex. Sexuality usually emerged spontaneously in the interviews with children of all ages – without it being introduced by the interviewers – most notably when young people were discussing their relations with contemporaries and adults of the opposite sex. Our researchers established relations with the young people which enabled and encouraged them to:

1) Put questions to the researchers about concerns they had regarding relations with boyfriends and girlfriends and with parents and also HIV/AIDS. Clearly they saw the researcher as a figure of authority who was not authoritarian but accessible and interested in them and wanted to help them
2) Talk positively about themselves. This was noticeable especially when the young people were reflecting on the interviews and were often pleased about how much they had been able to contribute, and how significant this was in the interview. It was noticeable, too, when they were talking about the ways they tried to support their friends, even when, in the case of some boys, the topic was fighting.
3) Display powerful emotions (loud laughter, raised voices, surprise, disgust, for example). Laughter, shouting and gesticulating featured in many interviews, and, as I argue when analysing the next extract from one of the interviews, were emotions which boys tended to display much more than girls in mixed group interviews.
4) Raise 'sensitive' issues, for example girls telling the researchers about being sexually harassed by boys and male teachers and boys communicating fears of violence, being bullied, and 'rejected' by girls and romanticising about particular girls. These were, as we shall see 'sensitive' issues for boys because they

undermined popular constructions of boys as self contained and powerful, and were usually, though not always, expressed in individual interviews or diaries the boys kept.

Some assumptions about identities informing boy and young person-centred interviewing

Identities are multiple, constructed and relational

I have argued for research which addresses boys in particular and young people in general as active agents in the sense of encouraging them to reflect and elaborate upon themselves by establishing informal, non judgmental and friendly relations with them. But they also need to be addressed in research as active agents in a more fundamental sense, that is as people who actively *construct* their very identities in everyday forms of interaction, through talk (Foucault, 1979) and the kinds of everyday *performances* (Butler, 1990) which come to be associated with and give substance to particular identities. Identities are not fixed even if they appear to be, even if it seems, for example, to many, that emotional inarticulacy or loudness are fundamental personality characteristics pertaining to most boys at all times. They are not things we *have* but *do* or *perform* and *negotiate* in relation to others and are multiple.

This way of conceptualising identities has important implications for conducting research and what to focus on as findings. Rather than seeing interviews as a means for eliciting the truth of who our interviewees are, as if they possess an essence which can be bought to the surface (by skilful interviewing) and which the interviewees, if willing and able, simply describe, interviews (and other forms of research) should be seen as sites, themselves, in which identities are constructed and negotiated. This means focusing not just on what boys say in interviews but their performances which include what they say and how they say it, their body language, their emotional tone as conveyed in laughter, silences, interruptions etc. There are no essences of masculinity which determine the views, feelings and behaviour of boys, rather versions of masculinity are always performed and negotiated by boys in interviews in (implicit or explicit) relation to femininities, as we see in the following mixed group interview with 16 year old Zimbabwean boys and girls.

Boys in Zimbabwe performing outrageously in relation to girls

On the UNICEF project the young people our researchers interviewed tended to speak about boys and girls as opposites with nothing in common. For example, when asked whether they would like to change sex for a day, young teenage boys in Kenya expressed horror at the prospect, constructing boys as active, free and strong and girls as passive, tied to the home and emotionally and physically weak. Girls in Kenya also presented boys negatively as 'loud,' 'rough' and 'rude,' though some envied boys their freedoms to stay out late and mix with friends, and wanted, for this reason, to change sex.

These are not simple descriptions of the gendered Other, but are highly pejorative and convey powerful messages about how boys and girls should act or perform. Many researchers in the West have observed how these sorts of gendered constructions are played out in schools, with boys, for example, monopolising talk in mixed groups, as well as by being loud, provocative or 'funny', often by being 'naughty' or through various types of threat to girls. (See, for example, Spender 1982; Francis 1998; Connolly 1998; Gilbert & Gilbert 1998). We found that these 'performances' characterised some of the interviews we conducted with boys and girls in mixed-sex groups. I want to examine one such interview with 16-year-old girls and boys in Zimbabwe. Here the boys not only asserted themselves in relation to girls by dominating the conversation, but also by speaking about them in contemptuous and provocative ways. Whether they engaged in the sort of behaviour they described or not, what was clear was that in the interview they were eliciting much laughter from other boys by talking in self-consciously outrageous ways about girls as objects; as things which they 'opened' and threw away.

Canaan (B):   These days, kids have big bodies, by the time she gets to Form One she will be having affairs.

Interviewer: Even those in Grade 4 and 5 (aged 10-11 years)?

Kokayi (B):   Eh…yes…those in Grade 4, yes; those are the ones we are jumping for these days (laughter).

Interviewer: Why do you go for such young girls?

Kokayi: You know what, yes, us boys have an oppressive nature, once I sleep with a girl I lose interest in her so usually I want to go for those who still have 'intact-closed presents' (laughter and grumbles).

Interviewer: What presents?

Kokayi: Official opening; when you sleep with a virgin!!

Interviewer: So how do you feel about it?

Kokayi: I feel good it is nice. After the official opening, you can just ditch her

Interviewer: So if a boy dumps you what do you do?

Daya (G):   It depends on how much you loved him. If you really loved him, you will be pained.

Kambo (G):   A…I won't feel that way. I will actually look around for a replacement boyfriend and I will show off to the boy who dumped me.

Moyo (B):   That's when I will beat you.

Chipiwa (G):   Why should you beat me, isn't it you would have dumped me.

Canaan: Yes I will beat her because what she will be doing to me is painful, showing off to me

Chipiwa: But it is you who would have ditched me.

The boys, here, were forging a common identity as powerful, funny, and hedonistic males by talking outrageously about girls. The presence of girls in the interview only served to make them appear, in the eyes of each other, particularly outrageous and funny. It may be that the girls were silent as the boys spoke because they were so uncomfortable and did not want to be humiliated and abused further. However, the interviewer was concerned to give them the opportunity to respond to the boys. Significantly he had to put questions specifically to the girls to draw them into the conversation, and the effect of this was to generate a gender polarised and heated exchange in which two girls resisted boys' potential constructions of them as 'used goods' and the boys tried to re-assert themselves. What was apparent in this exchange was how quickly the boys' tone changed from humour to hostility when the girls started challenging them. This and the initial reluctance of the girls to speak no doubt reflected the ubiquity of double sexual standards, whereby boys derived status, and girls were condemned for speaking explicitly about their heterosexual needs and desires.

Group dynamics such as these pose serious ethical dilemmas for teachers committed to a pupil-centred approach. If teachers are to encourage young people to speak openly about sex and sexuality in class, they must work hard, like our interviewers, at developing friendly, non-judgmental relations with learners. Nevertheless, as we see in the example above, one consequence of this may be boys not only dominating talk at the expense of girls but also abusing girls. (I pick up on this dilemma when discussing single sex and mixed group work in sex education in the conclusion.)

Boys performing in contradictory ways

Longstanding cultural discourses make the acquisition of certain identities for certain groups of people more likely than others. For example, males as loud and spokespeople, females as quiet and spoken for, males as 'proposers' and females as 'proposed'. (a particularly popular, and, I shall argue, problematic version of heterosexual relations articulated by the young people) But research which addresses boys as active subjects needs always to ask why boys are so invested in particular kinds of identities (see Hollway,1979), even those, indeed especially those, which are so often taken for granted as essential features of masculinity.

In the UNICEF project, boys seemed to be most invested in constructing and presenting themselves as tough, loud, funny and different from girls in group interviews. They were much more misogynistic and likely to talk about girls in derogatory or impersonal ways when being interviewed in groups rather than when being interviewed individually, (cf. with Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002) and especially when writing diaries which we asked some of our participants to do.

When writing up their diaries, which they were asked to do at the end of every day for a week, the young people were given certain questions. These were about significant

events, emotions and relations, were open – ended and encouraged the diary keeper to elaborate and provide illustrations. The diaries provided rich accounts of young people's everyday lives and the significance attached gender and sexuality. Furthermore, they generated material about young people which was not accessible through group interviews and which indicated how different they could be when reflecting upon themselves and their relations with the opposite sex in different contexts.

In group interviews some boys boasted about sleeping with and dumping girls, and, as we saw, often embarrassed girls by this kind of talk in mixed interviews. Yet in the individual interviews and in their diaries the same boys were quiet about this. In their diaries many of the boys – particularly in South Africa – wrote highly romanticised accounts of their girlfriends or potential girlfriends, (sometimes accompanied by the kind of idealisations of girls as carers, soft, advice givers, which featured also in individual interviews) as well as heartrending pieces about being dumped by them. These were conspicuous by their absence in the interviews. The following are from South African boys' diaries:

> Mpumelele: I was disappointed by the bad news she told me. She told me that she did not love me anymore. I thought of slapping her, but I did not see any use in hurting her, so I left her and went home. She is the only girl I truly love. She has all the qualities I need in my dream girl.
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> Andrew: Having sex with the girl you love, it was the most happy moment, my ears were ringing, we kissed until our lips got swollen, our eyes turned red, and our bodies stiffened.

Though Mpumelele writes about how he 'thought of slapping her,' it is not his capacity for violence (which he decides not to engage in) which takes centre stage in this piece, but his love for her and his sadness at loosing her. And though Andrew writes explicitly about sex, he does so not in the impersonal and misogynistic way it was often addressed by boys in group interviews, but as something intensely personal   and experiential.

Prominent in the diaries of boys, though absent especially in the group interviews, where boys often constructed themselves as physically, emotionally and sexually tough, were their vulnerabilities, fears and anxieties about heterosexual rejection and about getting physically beaten by other boys and teachers.

Accounts about being rejected by girls fuelled the anger which many boys expressed , notably in group interviews, with sugar daddy relations, that is heterosexual relations between girls and older richer males. This anger was directed not so much at the sugar daddies, but the girls for prostituting themselves and exchanging love for money and status. (See also Lindegger, 2005). Through their anger with these girls and the 'just desserts stories' they often told about them getting pregnant, HIV/AIDS and dumped, they re-assured and re-asserted themselves, detracting from their vulnerabilities as initiators and providers in heterosexual relations. They were vulnerable because there were always older, richer males who were better at doing these. Indeed, the presumption that boys were initiators in heterosexual relations give rise to a proliferation of age - gender hierarchies, with boys, as we saw in the extract above, often talking about having sex with younger girls.

It was in diaries and not in the interviews that some boys reflected on being initiators of heterosexual relations through 'proposing love,' and implied that this was not an easy position to adopt. 'Proposing love,' a commonly used phrase in all the countries in our research, was always something that boys did to girls, and encompassed a range of ways of initiating displays of sexual interest, from asking a girl out to calling her 'sweetie' and 'baby.' It has rather formal connotations, as if heterosexual relations have to be initiated through a specific declaration of interest and intent (by the boy) rather than emerge more spontaneously through interaction and friendship. Indeed, it is, I suggest, precisely because of the investments of boys and girls in identifying in opposition and not mixing with each other that the expression of heterosexual attraction is constructed in this formalised way. If boys and girls are assumed to have little in common, how else are boyfriend – girlfriend relationships initiated other than through a specific 'proposal?' While boys talked about 'proposing' to girls in group interviews, this was not presented at all as potentially problematic and little or no mention was made of the girls' reactions, the impression given that boys got their way. In diaries, however, as we see in the following extracts, one where the proposal was successful and the other where it was unsuccessful, proposing love is shown to be a high risk activity, with success or rejection impacting significantly on the proposer's very sense of identity as a male. Indeed in the first extract Israel, a 16 year old, South African boy, presents 'proposing love' not only as something boys do, but as a test of manhood:

> Israel: 'I was relaxing at home, then I decided to take a walk [and] immediately I saw a girl that I wanted to talk to. I went to her and greeted her. I talked to her about my love for her. She refused because she said she had another boyfriend. I told myself that I cannot be defeated by this girl. I persuaded her for a long time until she said she is still going to think about it. I also persuaded her until she accepted me. I did not feel anything that day because of excitement. When I went to see my friends, I told them about my new girlfriend. In that afternoon, I saw this new girlfriend in the shop and she told me that she has rejected her old boyfriend and then I was excited that I am alone with this girl now. I felt that I was in the moon. My friends confronted me that I was really a man…'

Part of the pleasure and excitement that Israel feels derives from telling his friends about his new girlfriend, and his friends affirming that 'I was really a man'. He writes about how he 'cannot be defeated' by this girl, as if, through his persistence, he will conquer her. This suggests that the stakes are high in 'proposing love,' that it carries with it the prospect of 'defeat' – not only in failing to 'win' a girl, but also in failing as a man. As we see in the following extract from the diary of another teenage boy in South Africa, when the girls are white and the boys are black, rejection may take a devastatingly racist form:

> I went to town with my friends. I enjoyed that day very much but there was one thing that broke my heart as we were strolling in town. We saw four white ladies. We stopped them [and] they shouted at us saying we must leave them alone. They called us 'Kaffirs'. We went back very sad, we went back home… we went to check on our girls…

This extract vividly illustrates the importance of addressing how gender intersects with 'race' as an aspect of identity, especially in the context of a black majority society with a legacy of white political and economic domination. We see in this encounter how the black boys (as powerful boys) stop the girls, and how the girls (as powerful whites) resist their advances by constructing them as an inferior 'race.' Significantly, the boys did not retaliate or assert themselves in the face of such racism. They were clearly not in a position of power in relation to the girls; on the contrary, they became sad and deflated and went home. They then went 'to check on our girls' – 'our' presumably, in this context, referring to black girls.

Fighting (boys fighting boys) was spoken about at length in the interviews, notably by the South African boys, who also wrote detailed accounts of violence in their diaries. Talk about violence in the group interviews was often robust, humorous, and aggressive, and particular boys with reputations for toughness and violence were described with awe. Sometimes boys in the group – usually big boys – were pointed out, with respect and humour, as people other boys did not challenge. If violence was almost idealised in some of the group interviews with boys, the costs of violence for them featured much more in their diaries.

Not ironing out contradictions

It is important not only for understanding but also for working with boys *not* to iron out the contradictory accounts and performances of boys on their own and in groups. The diaries and individual interviews do not provide insights into what boys were *really* like, in contrast to the group interviews; rather these radically different ways of presenting themselves by the same boys, in the different modes of research, suggest that contemporary young masculinities, in the South Africa, may be lived and experienced in quite contradictory ways. The view expressed by some of the girls who were interviewed that boys can express their real (and unproblematic) selves so long as they are not with other boys clearly sets severe limits on this actually happening, (especially given the boys' professed reluctance to mix with girls) and may *contribute* to boys being troublesome (in groups). Rather than aligning with boys on their own in opposition to boys in groups, the aim in research and education with boys must be on highlighting and encouraging them to explore the contradictory ways they position themselves on their own and with others.

What the very different and contradictory accounts of boys in these different modes of research suggested was that boys were *both* powerful and vulnerable. Whereas in the group interviews they seemed to be displaying aspects of what Connell calls 'hegemonic' masculinity - confidence, assertiveness, anger and raucous humour – when talking about a range of themes and issues connected to their interests, identities and relationships, in the diaries and in individual interviews many of the same boys were addressing the sorts of problems for boys and men incurred by trying to live up to the unrealistic expectations imposed by these hegemonic ideals and fantasies.

Mixed interviews: girls challenging boys to address contradictions

In many of the mixed-gender interviews the girls and boys occupied different and opposed positions, both physically, with the boys and girls sitting in same gender groups, and discursively, as illustrated in the extract above from the mixed interview. It was not easy for girls, especially from poorer and rural backgrounds to challenge boys in mixed interviews, for fear of being ridiculed and abused. Responding to this, the Zambian research team organised group interviews in two stages. First, same-sex group interviews were held on the topic of problems they and people of the opposite sex experienced. Following this the boys and girls came together to present and discuss their findings. The Zambian researchers found that in some of the mixed plenaries the girls were as outspoken and critical as the boys, and attributed this to the confidence and support they had gained in the single-sex group. And under these conditions the girls challenged the boys to become more reflective and critical, not (just) by attacking them for abusing or insulting them but by drawing their attention to the kind of problems which aspiring to being tough and strong generated for boys. Among these, for example, were boys competing with other boys through fighting, being teased if they had small penises, being blamed by teachers and parents if they failed to outperform girls, being less able to talk about their emotions with and get support from their parents and being expected to smoke and drink and get into trouble. Significantly the boys did not re-assert themselves as tough and strong in response to these 'challenges' but seemed to align with the girls and began to focus critically not only on the negative impact of hegemonic male values for them but also for girls. In these mixed group interviews/discussions many boys, for example, expressed criticisms of sexual harassment of girls.

Straight Acting

Boys are not naturally 'tough' but have to work hard, we found, at constructing themselves as this, through *demonstrations* of misogyny and homophobia. (See Nayak and Kehily's (1996) ethnography of young people at a school in Britain for a graphic account of homophobia as a *performance* in which many of their male participants were engaged.) The former were particularly conspicuous in the interviews themselves, but some boys also made it clear through laughter and shows of disgust that they were not gay. In South Africa, in particular, certain boys expressed fears about befriending other boys lest they be called 'gay' or 'homosexual'. This was an issue initially raised by the girls – probably because it was too contentious for the boys to be seen to be doing so. Boys also spoke in derogatory terms about 'mama's boys', from whom they differentiated themselves as tough, macho boys. Other recent studies on boys and young men in South Africa. (see eg. Ratele et al 2005, and Salo, 2005) have also found how invested many boys seem to be in distancing themselves from other boys they construct as 'moffies' or boys who are perceived as effeminate and weak and not very heterosexual. Such characteristics are linked as features of boys who are seen not to be *proper* boys. The boys' misogynistic and homophobic performances were intended as assertions of power, yet their effect, ironically, was to restrict what boys could do and

say. Ratele et al, 2005, for example, found that boys who were seen to mix with girls as friends were liable to be denigrated as 'moffies,' and, in our study, as mentioned, the prospect of being labelled similarly restricted possibilities of boys developing close relations with other boys. I suggest that the idealisation of girls and women by many boys as carers, nurturers, advice givers, is, in part, produced by denying these as identities for (proper) boys. (See Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002, on the huge costs for boys in general – not just for boys constructed and vilified as gay – of British boys' investments in homophobia.)

Conclusion: Some implications for working with boys in sex education

I want to conclude by developing some of the implications of the UNICEF research on young people, gender and sexuality, for ways of working with boys and (and girls) in particular in sex and HIV/AIDS education, focusing on how the research practices themselves provide models for good pedagogic practices.

'Hard sports' as the solution compounds the problem
'Working with boys' must encourage boys to become less invested in constructing themselves in opposition to girls and their versions of femininity, in contrast to . popular approaches which advocate 'hard sports' (in the British Home Secretary's words, *Guardian, 27th September*) as potential 'solutions' to the 'problem' of boys. Like fighting, football was an important medium through which boys actively positioned themselves in hierarchical relations with other boys, and as different from and better than girls. This is not to critique HIV/AIDS education initiatives going on in amateur football clubs in South Africa: football provides a means of gaining access to many young men and such initiatives are taking advantage of this, though, in the absence of girls, are likely to be limited, (for reasons I explain below). My critique is aimed, rather, at ways of working with boys based on the assumption that boys are very different from girls in being intrinsically tough and active and that 'hard' sports are safe and productive ways for channelling their energy.

Boys and girls working together researching each other
'Masculinity' must not be reduced to a discrete essence when working with boys, rather it should be addressed in the plural and relationally, and this means not only that girls and femininity must feature as important topics in such work, but also implies (ideally) that working with boys should also include working with girls.

In South Africa there has been a long tradition of single sex schooling for white children, and in spite of the state's commitment to mixed schooling, single sex, state subsidised and private schools are the norm for white and relatively affluent children of other 'races' who now attend the formerly white schools. However single sex schools reinforce assumptions about essential differences between boys and girls, and, of course, make it impossible to work with boys with girls to encourage possibilities of cross gender friendships and alliances. Partly because both boys and girls in the UNICEF project tended to construct members of the opposite sex as a different species, some of them

were desperately keen to know (when interviewed in single sex groups) what members of the opposite sex said about them. Sex educational and other programmes at school should build on this and develop activities which *require* boys and girls to work together to investigate how they think about themselves and each other. For example, boys and girls could alternate between being interviewers and interviewees, asking and responding to the same sorts of open ended questions which generated so much interest and enthusiasm around the themes explored in our studies.[3] Programmes need to be developed where boys and girls see the point of working together, where the input from both is seen as necessary, and not where they are compelled to sit together and do similar tasks. As Holland (2003) and Prendergast and Forrest (1997) note in their research with pupils in their early years and in secondary schools in Britain forcing boys and girls to work together may actually succeed in polarising gender relations.

Single sex and mixed groups
Our research – in particular the experience of interviewing young people in single-sex and mixed groups in the UNICEF study – suggests, however, that single-sex group work should form an integral part of life skills and HIV/AIDS education. In such groups, girls in particular feel more able to participate with confidence and to express their desires and concerns without being labelled in derogatory ways. However, single sex classes, like single sex interviews, may reinforce assumptions that boys and girls are essentially different and in opposition to each other. In the mixed group discussions, boys and girls are in a better position to learn from each other about their problems, concerns and views. For this reason, I would advocate a carefully weighted combination of single-sex and mixed group discussions as part of a comprehensive strategy for HIV/AIDS and life skills education (see Pattman, 2002). In Zambia, where girls and boys were interviewed together, *after* being interviewed in single sex groups, the girls were particularly confident and fluent and able to engage in critical discussion with the boys, and this may provide a model for good practices in HIV/AIDS and life skills education.

Addressing different gendered selves in different contexts
Rather than addressing girls and boys as unitary gendered subjects, I want to argue for approaches in HIV/AIDS/sex education which explore with girls and boys the different and contradictory ways they present themselves and talk about sexual desire and the opposite sex in different contexts. As in our research, boys and girls could be asked to keep diaries, anonymous extracts from which could be read out and discussed in lessons, taking discussions in directions which are perhaps not normally traversed in class. Drama and role plays improvised and performed by the pupils also offer effective ways in which pupils' multiple and contradictory identities may be addressed in class. (See Pattman, 1996)

Not constructing boys as the enemy from whom to protect and separate girls

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[3] I have produced, with Fatuma Chege, a pupil's handbook for sex and HIV/AIDS/life skills education with exercises and activities framed around extracts from the interviews and diaries, and aimed at encouraging boys and work together and reflect on the identities they routinely forge and inhabit. These are currently being piloted by UNICEF in schools in Southern and Eastern Africa.

In research on pupil's experiences of mixed schooling in South Africa, Robert Morrell (2000) found sexual harassment of girls by boys to be a major problem, and argued for the provision of more single sex schools to provide safe and supportive environments for girls. The problem, however, with separating girls from boys, is that it denies possibilities of girls and boys working together to develop less polarised relations with each other, relations which do not entail sexual harassment. For it is precisely because boys and girls construct themselves in opposition to each other, a situation reinforced by their separation , that boy-girl relationships, when they do occur, are likely to be sexualised and marked by 'propositions' initiated by boys and sexual harassment perpetrated by boys against girls.

A much better strategy, in my view, would be to focus, with boys and girls together, on the benefits for both of developing more egalitarian – sexual and non sexual cross gender relationships. As indicated, the kinds of problems arising from popular constructions of males as initiators and providers in heterosexual relations, such as boys risking rejection and a slight on their identities as macho males, and girls having to put up with sexual harassment and being the objects of unwanted proposals, were raised and discussed by boys and girls in mixed groups following single sex group interviews, without boys and girls taking sides against each other, on the contrary appearing to align with each other.

Male teachers conveying unfamiliar models of masculinity
By adopting young person centred approaches, the male interviewers conveyed important messages to boys and girls about possibilities of males being caring and sympathetic, for these tended to be constructed, by boys especially (in diaries and individual interviews) as qualities residing in girls and women. Some of the boys in Botswana and South Africa idealised women teachers as people they felt able to talk to about problems, precisely because they perceived the men teachers as hostile to them and likely to beat them. Male teachers need to be like our male interviewers and relate to pupils in ways which do not invite these gender polarised constructions, and show that males can be caring, sensitive, approachable, non authoritarian, non aggressive and pupil centred, and that violence is not synonymous with being male, and something which girls (and boys) have to put up with. Similarly they can show that males can develop close and caring relations with girls, which are non sexual, and non harassing. Sexual harassment not only by boys but also teachers and other men was a major problem for girls, according to our interviewees.[4]

Sex education must address boys' investments in homophobia as a major problem for them as well as the immediate victims of their homophobia

There has been a growing research literature on homophobia in relation to the experiences of gays and lesbians in South Africa, an excellent example being the

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[4] As well as the handbook for pupils, Fatuma Chege and I have produced a handbook for training sex/HIV/AIDS/life skills education teachers. Again this is learner centred (with the teachers in this case the learners) and engages with the identities of the teachers through various activities framed around extracts from interviews and diaries with young people and teachers and observations of lessons. This is being piloted by UNICEF

collection of papers, Defiant Desire, edited by Gevisser and Cameron (1994). Our research and other recent studies in South Africa, which I have cited, suggest,, however, that we also need to focus on the significance of homophobia in the lives of young men who identify - most rigorously - as straight. In Defiant Desire there is an important chapter on 'policing' but this concerns state repression of homosexuality in apartheid South Africa and its impact on the gay and lesbian community. It is important to encourage boys, in sex and HIV/AIDS education, to reflect upon the micro and everyday ways young boys and men routinely *police themselves* and gender boundaries through homophobia and misogyny, at great costs to them as well as to boys invented and vilified as 'moffies' and to girls.

Sex education should not focus exclusively on sex and HIV/AIDS

Sex and HIV/AIDS educational programmes should not focus exclusively on sex and HIV/AIDS, but more generally on what it is like to be a young person today and address young people as active agents. (See Walsh et al. 2003, for an example of this kind of sex education practice in South Africa) When we adopted this approach in our UNICEF research, our interviewees were engaged, reflective and animated, talking a great deal about gender and sexuality but introducing these topics *themselves* and on their *own terms* as they discussed their lives and relations more generally. They did not show the signs of 'HIV/AIDS fatigue', (the boredom and frustration induced by the constant stream of images and messages about the horrors of HIV/AIDS) which many of the HIV/AIDS teachers claimed their pupils showed. (Pattman & Chege 2003)

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