VIOLENT MASCULINITIES IN BOTSWANA SCHOOLS: A CASE OF THREE SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This paper examines the connection between violence, dominant construction of masculinities and gender identities, drawing on a study conducted in three senior secondary schools in Botswana. Nine teachers were interviewed about their experiences of school violence. Violence in these school resulted in massive infrastructure destruction and loss of lives and sights. The study found that violence is an important signifier of masculinity hence male students actively enacts it. Findings from the study suggest that circumstances leading to violence in schools vary from one school to the other, but violence in all the sampled schools stemmed from issues pertaining to gender and power relations.

1.0 Introduction

Violent masculinities in schools are escalating worldwide, creating a learning environment marked by insecurity and fear. Findings from previous studies such as, Stevens (1997), Mills (2000), Kariuki (2004), Smith (2003) and Cornell (2003) have consistently demonstrated that male students are the main perpetrators of violence in schools. It ranges from common forms of school bullying of male and female students and teacher to extreme acts of violence such as shooting in the United States of America and the burning down of schools in Kenya. Literature reveals that many boys make life and learning difficult for other boys, girls and teachers in co-educational institutions and this is often treated as normal and acceptable behaviour. For instance, remarks made by the Head teacher of Kizito Secondary School in Kenya, following some boys attacking, gang raping 71 girls and killing 19, suggested rape was an acceptable behaviour. According to Kariuki (2004) the Headmaster made the following remarks in a press release "My boys meant no harm to girls but only wanted to rape them." It is this acceptance of male student's aggressive and violent behaviour that is most damaging to schools and their academic missions. If the same aggression or violence were performed by female students, they will be seen as deviant behaviours that need to be corrected.

This study defines violence as any relation, process or condition under which an individual or group violates the physical, social, psychological integrity of another person or group. According to Green Mills (2001) and Ritzer (2008) masculinities are ideas about how individuals gendered as men see themselves, think of themselves and behave towards other men, women and children. Individual men behave in accordance with a set of ideas about what men are. In the context of this study, masculinities refer to characteristics and qualities that are considered typical of men. This then suggests that there are many forms of masculinities in every society.

2.0 Shootings in schools in the West

ISSN 1021-559X /09/2012 Mosenodi Journal © Taboka Ndikimbela Vol. 17(1) Mills (2001) related that in April 1999, two boys walked into their high school in Columbia, USA and shot dead twelve (12) students and a teacher, wounded twenty three (23) others before killing themselves. In New South Wales; Australia, a number of boys were suspended from several schools for

ISSN 1021-559X /09/2012 Mosenodi Journal © Taboka Ndikimbela Vol. 17(1) creating similar acts of violence to other students and teachers. Smith (2003) reported that Mr Lawrence, a headmaster was killed outside his school gate in London as he intervened to break a fight between two male students. Still on shooting dramas, Cornell (2006) narrated a horror in which in 2005 sixteen year old Jeff Wales murdered his grandfather, a police officer, killed the school security officer then preceded to his classroom where he killed a teacher, five students and wounding seven others.

3.0 Violence in Kenyan schools

Incidents of Kenyan massacre that occurred from 1991 to 2001 were the most shocking act of masculinity and violence in Sub-Saharan schools. Kariuki (2004) reported that on the 13th July 1991 shortly after midnight, three hundred and six Kizito Secondary school boys attacked two hundred and seventy one girls. In this attack, nineteen girls were crushed to death, seventy nine were gang raped and others sustained serious injuries. Stevens (1997) narrated the second massacre that occurred on the 25th May, 1996. Male students in Nyeri High School locked school prefects in their cubicles while they were asleep. Four of them were killed by pouring petrol and setting them on fire. The motive of the attack was not known although sources at school said prefects had differed with some students prior to the attack. Still in Kenya, Chepkemei (2002) related another massacre on the 26th March 2001, in which sixty eight (68) students were burnt to death and scores injured by two male students at Nyangubi secondary schools in Machako's district.

From the above literature, violence in schools is both a pervasive and universal problem. It has however been demonstrated that male students in western countries commonly use shooting while in African states they mostly burn down schools and rape female students. There is no evidence that other countries have found solutions to eradicate this problem. However, it is evident that the problem of masculinities and violence is highly attached to struggle for institutional power in schools.

4.0 Purpose of the study

This study was designed to answer the following questions: (i) Why do male students take the lead in perpetuating school violence? (ii) What factors contribute to gendered violence in Botswana senior secondary schools? (iii) What are the consequences of school violence?

5.0 Theoretical perspectives

The aim of this section is to establish theories that are relevant and have analytical capacity to describe and explain the dynamics of violent masculinities in Botswana's senior secondary schools. The assumption is that schooling systems like all other educational institutions have theories that underpin their practices and policies. The violent masculinities in schools is informed by the following feminist theories; gender difference, gender inequality and gender power relation theory. Although these theories are discussed separately, they are so closely related that the discussion of one theory often overlaps with another.

6.0 Theory of gender role difference

This theory suggests that men and women are situated differently in society, resulting in socially constructed roles that divide everyday activities as masculine and feminine. Although gender role difference

is largely a matter of socialisation, differences in school socialisation of male and female students can lead to inequality and oppression of one group of students. The chief concern of this theory is the extent to which one group has an advantage over the other hence the theory enables the investigation of why male students dominates violent activities and female students remain victims of violence.

7.0 Gender inequality theory

According to this theory; male and female beings are not only situated differently in the society, but they are also unequally treated. Male students are sometimes granted what female students are denied. For instance, it is acceptable for boys to be aggressive or violent, to bring weapons to school and drink alcohol while the same behaviours are totally unacceptable for girls. This theory enables the investigation of factors that contribute to gendered violence in Botswana senior secondary schools.

8.0 Gender and power relation theory

This theory accounts for gender-based power difference in males and females. It also accounts for power distribution within male and female relationships. Gender power relation has resulted with one group (males) perpetuating violence, while the other (females) suffer from subordinate positions of being victims of violence. Struggles for power are central to experiences of masculinities and the cost for pursuing the appropriate behaviour can be heavy and violent. This theory enables the investigation of power struggles amongst boys, between school boys and male teachers and also between school boys and school administrators.

9.0 Method

This study was carried out in three senior secondary schools in Botswana. These schools were selected because they experienced massive school strikes which resulted in extensive infrastructure destruction, loss of student's lives and permanent physical deformities. Interviews were conducted with three teachers from each of the three selected schools. These teachers were purposively selected through the snowball approach. For security reasons, all names of schools, villages and respondents are pseudo. Each interview session was conducted for about 50- 60 minutes. Times and venues for conducting interviews were selected by respondents. Although the interview guide was written in English, conversations were conducted either in Setswana or Kalanga. A digital voice recorder was used to capture data. The researcher then transcribed the data to English. The data was first organised according to individual schools. Then data from each school was then coded according to thematically.

10.0 Findings 10.1 Violence and masculinity in Matsha Senior Secondary School

Several violent activities were reported in this school and male students were in the forefront. Amongst these was the September, 2003 where students went on a drinking spree that resulted in some of them losing their lives. This was followed by the burning down of the science laboratory in the same year. In 2004, four male students burnt down the staff room and in 2005 one male student lost a kidney after he was stabbed with a knife by another student. Although respondents reported that the 2003 incident was not meant to be violent, in my views, the step they took to break into school buildings can be perceived as

violence. The use of coercive force to gain entry to any structure illegally irrespective of perpetrators' moods is highly linked to violence and aggression. The September 2003 ordeal started after an exciting chemistry lesson where students were taught about several types of alcohol including ethanol. In Agriculture lesson, they discovered that methanol (a highly toxic chemical used to preserve insects and other living organisms) contained significant amount of alcohol. Male students became excited about alcohol that was underutilised in their school. They in turn used violence to gain entrance to places where these chemicals were stored. A group of male students stole a bolt cutter from the Design and Technology workshop on one Friday. On Saturday evening, they broke into the Chemistry laboratory and Agriculture storeroom where they stole 5x 5 litres of ethanol and several litres of methanol respectively. It was reported that half the student population drank one or both chemicals. The drinking spree left nine male students dead and two permanently blind. Two months later, final year students demanded a farewell party and when the party was not granted, they burnt down the science laboratory.

In 2004, four male students burnt one male teacher's working area. This included his chair, table and all books that were lying on the table. It is not clear how they gained entrance to the staffroom and how they managed to burn just that teacher's space. According to reports from the interviewees, the four students confessed to police investigators and reported they hated the teacher because he was too rigid. Rigidity in this case may be taken to signify the masculinity gender order. A rigid teacher may be a tough teacher who does not allow male students to take control hence they (male students) feel the need to fight and act violently to defend their masculinity position. All four were expelled. In another incident in 2005, two male students engaged in an argument and they later fought. One drew a knife and stabbed the other. The cut was so deep that it destroyed one of the victim's kidneys and it was later removed. The perpetrator was suspended for the whole term.

11.0 Violence and masculinity in Matsha Senior Secondary School

Matsha Senior Secondary School experienced massive destruction of infrastructure as a result of violent strikes that took place in June 1998. One Sunday evening just before supper, students went on the rampage and destroyed classrooms, laboratories and offices. They broke windows and burned down some buildings. They targeted cars belonging to teachers whom they felt encouraged ethnicity together with those who had intimate relationships with female students. Although female students were initially not part of this activity, male students forced them to take part.

12.0 Factors that contributed to the strike

It was reported that students had complained that they were not fairly treated by some staff members. Their complaints were either not addressed at all or they were not addressed satisfactory. The two main students' contentions were ethnicity and male teachers' intimate relationships with female students.

13.0 Ethnicity

Respondents reported ethnicity as one of the concerns that triggered the Matsha strike. It was reported there were profound inequalities observed during classroom interaction, parents' reception by school administration and teacher promotions. It was reported that some Kalanga speaking teachers gave class instructions in Kalanga despite the fact that some students did not understand it. In many instances new concept were introduced in Kalanga language. Non-Kalanga speaking students felt left out and ignored or rather discriminated against, hence educational attainment was largely at the advantage of Kalanga speaking students.

In another episode of ethnic discrimination, it was reported that students observed and officially reported to the school administration an anomaly in which parents who paid visits to their children in Matsha Senior School were not given equal treatment. It was reported that when Setswana speaking parents came to see their children, they were offered chairs to rest by the lawn and wait for their children. Contrary to this, Kalanga-speaking parents who came for the same mission were treated differently. Although they too were asked to rest by the lawn, they were provided with meals at lunch time. Students reported their observation to the administration, but the administration gave them a cold shoulder.

The other issue pertaining to student dissatisfaction was teachers' promotion. According to the three respondents, students felt promotion in Matsha Senior Secondary School was not on merits; rather it was based on tribal grounds. In their opinion, respondents confirmed that indeed this was true of the situation. One respondent quoted a student who bluntly said to him "We are aware that teachers from the south region are not promoted." The issue of ethnicity touches the corner-stone of power relations. When teachers give instructions in languages that exclude other students, discrimination is deeply felt.

14.0 Intimate relationships between male teachers and female students

Interviewees reported that one of the main causes of the June 1998 strike was male teachers' intimate relationships with female students. They confirmed such relationships were very common and the administration turned a blind eye to them. This, however, did not go down well with their male counterparts who felt school girls belong to them, not teachers. In the event of the struggle, coercive power or violence remains the only tool suitable to determine who has control over schoolgirls and who does not. Winning a girlfriend over another male opponent is a very strong signifier of masculinity. It places the winner at the hegemonic level.

15.0 Other violent activities

Besides the June 1998 riots, respondents reported two unique violent cases that happened in January and Mach 2007 respectively. The first incident implicated a male boarding student who found thorns spread all over his bedding when he returned from evening study. The perpetrator could not be traced and the motive of this wayward behaviour could not be established. In the second incident, another male student found his blankets soaked with raw sewage water which contained visible deposits of human faeces. Following some investigations, three male boarding students were tied to this horrific activity. They appeared before the disciplinary committee and were expelled from boarding.

16.0 Violence and masculinities in Tutume Senior Secondary School

Tutume Senior Secondary School has experienced several violent activities that resulted in suicidal deaths, burning down of dormitories, vandalising of solar panels in boys' hostels and stealing of valuable school properties such as gas cylinders. This school is also characterised by regular fights between male students. From 2002 to date this school has experienced several riots that ever before.

17.0 Day students barred from the weekend school entertainment

It was reported that in 2002, the school administration took a position to stop day students from attending weekend entertainment in the school. Day students were not amused and they responded by sanctioning boarding students from shopping in the village. This meant boarding students should do their shopping inside the school premises only. Following this misunderstanding, it was reported two male boarding students sneaked out of the hostel during the week on a beer drinking mission. On their arrival at the drinking spot, they met the day students. A fight broke between the two parties. As the fight intensified, the boarding student fled lest the boarding master discovers their absence from the hostels.

On their arrival at the hostel, they mobilised and formed a larger group capable of challenging day students. The following Saturday was an exit weekend for boarding students, hence boys were ready for the fight. The two groups met and fought in the village, but the fight did not end there. The fight was to be continued the following Monday in the school premises. Teachers were warned about the Saturday fight which was to continue the next Monday. On that fateful day, each party member (day and boarding students) brought with them some weapons such as pangas, sickles, needles, screw drivers, axes, knives and other sharp objects. Immediately after assembly the fight continued. Teachers intervened and stopped it before it got out of hand. The weekend following the Monday fight, fire broke in the male students' hostels and some dormitories were burnt down and all students' belongings were completely destroyed.

18.0 Suicide

The second fire broke out a week later. This happened after one male student had a misunderstanding with the male Deputy Head Prefect over his misconduct. It was reported that the boy made threats such as "I feel like doing something terrible and commit suicide." Two days after these threats, three dormitories were found gutted with fire. The Minister of Education closed down the school for five weeks. The perpetrator was suspended for twenty school days but he committed suicide before returning to school. Soon after the death of this student, the student's community accused the Deputy Head Prefect for the death of their classmate. It is reported he quarrelled with one female student who also blamed him for the death of the student who committed suicide. The female student bitterly screamed "O ithaya o re ke Kitso (not his real name) yo o mmolaileng." Upon hearing this accusation, the Deputy Head prefect battered the female student so heavily that he left her bleeding and she sustained several stitches on her head and shoulder. The Deputy Head prefect was sent home to call parents. The next day he was reported to have committed suicide.

Committing suicide is self-violence, but it may also be viewed as a signifier of masculinity. In this context, suicide was enacted because the perpetrator who was also the victim felt his power was under threat or it had been taken away from him. The victim felt there was nothing he could do to regain his power. Suicide results from the fear that one has been excluded or demoted from a higher rank of masculinity to the lower level where he was no longer influential or in control. For instance in the case of

the deputy head-boy, this was a post that carried with it personal satisfaction, including respect, honour, and influence among other boys. For him to be suspended obviously meant two things; first, it meant he had lost the post of deputy head-boy and a prefect. Secondly, the consequences of losing these posts suggest that he has moved from the hegemonic level of masculinity to the marginalised level and as such he remains powerless. It is this desire for power and fear of powerlessness that drive not only the school boy but male beings in general to commit suicide. Feeling powerless and acting tough by committing suicide is acting masculine.

19.0 Alcohol consumption

Alcohol intake is highly connected to violence in that it gives its consumer the courage to be violent. The latest fire outbreak in this school was linked to alcohol intake. It occurred on the 27th March 2007 and left five male dormitories completely gutted. The suspect was a male student whose conduct had been very bad. It was reported he had gone drinking the previous night. After the drinking spree, he forcibly slept in one village house. The house owner reported the matter to the police and he was detained till the next day. After he was released from prison, he went straight to the boys' hostel where he met two other male students who were on sick leave. The trio engaged on a social conversation and he finally narrated his previous night's drinking experiences. As friends listened carefully to his story, one of them indicated that his behaviour was unbecoming and warranted him a suspension. He bluntly responded by saying "If I go I will not leave without destroying this school." Later that day, five dormitories were burnt down. The suspect was sent home to call his parents. At the time of this data collection 15th May 2007, neither he nor his parents had reported to the school administration.

20.0 Discussion

Findings from this study show that violence in the three senior secondary schools was gendered and masculinized hence it all stemmed from power struggles within the patriarchal gender order that exists within schools. Mills (2001) views violence in schools as one that subsumes the notion of coercive power; that is power over others. This is demonstrated by students struggle for power.

21.0 Fights among male students

Fights among male students are demonstrated in Tutume Senior Secondary School when day students were barred from school entertainment, they in turn protected their territories from male boarding students. Informal rules were put in place and male boarding students were sanctioned from shopping outside school; they were not allowed to date non boarding girl friends; they could no longer drink beer freely outside school. This decision created hostility between male day and boarding students and the hostility has been passed from one group to the other in the form of power struggle. The fight between male day and boarding students was first reported in 2002, to date, day and boarding students do not see eye to eye, yet they learn in the same classrooms and receive instructions from the same teachers. Above all, the relationship between boarding and day students has created an environment that is not conducive to positive learning. It has so far claimed two students' lives. As if this was not enough, it earned the school and Botswana government millions of pula to repair the burned down hostels. In Matsha senior secondary school male students fought the school authority because of what they viewed as discrimination or unequal

treatment of students by some teachers. By doing this they were directly engaging onto power relation and displaying violent masculine identities.

Although the extent of fighting and use of dangerous weapons differs from one school to the other, fights in all the three schools are used both as instruments and indicators of masculinity. As male students engage in fights, there is always a winner and of course, a loser. Parties that win fights gain popularity amongst the student community; they are honoured and also feared by student body hence their masculinity is clearly displayed. Aggression and fights are known activities that test, qualify and place individuals or group of masculinity actors in different levels of masculinities. The dominant are placed in level of hegemonic masculinities while the defeated individuals or groups are placed in the subordinate or marginalised masculinity position. This then suggests the term masculinity, goes beyond sex difference to the way male differs among themselves.

Marginalised or subordinate masculinities are described by Fein et al (2002) as those males who occupy the bottom rungs of masculinities. Male class monitors, prefects, head prefects, deputy head prefects and sports champions enjoy the hegemonic positions. They are honoured, respected and remain very influential figures within the students' communities. However, they need to continuously protect their position lest they lose the prominent masculinities together with all the powers attached to it.

22.0 Alcohol intake and violence

Alcohol intake is closely linked to aggression and is also a signifier of masculine. Male students from all the three schools reported picking most of their fights whilst out drinking in the village. In Tutume, boys frequently sneak out during school days to drink. For instance, one male student got so drunk that he lost direction and forcibly insisted on spending a night at the house nearest to the shebeen he has been drinking at. This kind of behaviour confirms Mills (2001) findings that alcohol intake is an important signifier of masculinity and has obvious links to masculinized violence. Therefore, in my views, male students in Matsha drank ethanol and methane in an effort to prove their masculine identity. By forcing open the two laboratories; it was yet another episode of identifying boys' masculinities

23.0 Weapons in the school

After conducting an unexpected search of boys' lockers, desks, under beds and other personal places, numerous dangerous weapons were found in all the three schools. I personally saw these weapons in Tutume Senior Secondary School where the search was conducted two days before my data collection exercise. This confirms findings by Benbenishty (2005) in the study in which they examined the connection between bringing weapons to school and student violent behaviour. They found that indeed some students bring weapons to school because they are being victimised and fear for their safety. On the other hand, the presence of these instruments in male students' space confirms their continuous struggle for power and use of coercive power.

24.0 Intimate relationships in secondary schools

Of the three schools where I collected data, only one school, Masunga indicated the concern regarding male teachers' intimate relationships with female students in the same school. Although it was not mentioned in Matsha and Tutume, this may not be interpreted to mean that intimate relationships between male teachers and female students do not exist in these schools. In my own view, intimate relationships were not such a pressing issue at that time. On the other hand it is also possible that teachers may have some reasons not to mention it. One other important finding is that, the concern regarding male teachers' intimate relationships with female students in Masunga was reported by female teachers and the male teachers did not mention it. When probed, the male teacher indicated he could not remember such incidents. In Tutume Senior Secondary School, the concern of intimate relationships was raised as a result of a power struggle between boarding and day male students over their counterpart female students. Male day students in Tutume Senior Secondary School took a stand that male boarding students should not date or develop intimate relationships with female day students and the vice versa was true. Crossing these boundaries warranted a fight between the two factions.

In Masunga the scenario was different; here some male teachers were reportedly having intimate relationships with female students. It was also reported that teacher-student intimate relationships were some of the major causes of the June 1998 riots. Male teachers were seen to have gone outside their territories; they have belittled male students by opting for intimate relationships with their female counterparts. In the two scenarios, male struggle for intimate relationships is seen as a crucial aspect of masculine identity. Female students are viewed as objects whose decisions to engage in relationships are controlled by male students. Male students decide whether or not female students fall in love with a teacher, day or boarding student.

25.0 Conclusions

This paper highlights issues around the construction of masculinities and violence that have implications for schooling. Gender relations and boundaries within the schools are part of the hidden curriculum and informal learning through which masculinities are identified and reinforced. Informal policies and code of conduct are as important as formal ones. Ethnicity is closely linked to violence and it is enshrined within the theory of power relations. This then suggests schools that accommodate students from different ethnic groups run the risk of facing conflicts that result from the struggle not only for masculinity positions, but also for situating each ethnic group. Each ethnic group continuously fight to be accorded the respect it deserves. Violence is viewed as a very significant signifier of masculinity in schools. It is for this reason that female students do not commonly take part in violent activities unless they are forced. Female students often get caught in the power struggles that continuously occur in senior schools. Not all masculinity has equal status within the masculine gender order. In the masculinity hierarchy, hegemonic masculinities are prominent, influential and they set rules that should be followed by those in the rank of subordinate masculinities as well as female students. Finally, school administrators and teachers in general do not seem to take keen interest on students' complaints hence students felt left out even when decisions that concern their lives are taken.

26.0 Recommendations

There is no quick fix and ready-made solution that can be implemented in every school to remedy the damage caused by violent masculinity. Each school has its own culture which shapes the masculine identities. Because of this reason, one recommendation may suit one situation and fail the other. Cornell (2004) cautions that focus on threats alone can be counterproductive. This suggests that there should be interventions in response to problems or conditions that generate the problem such as those that are discussed above. Fein (2002) and Heilbrun (1997) recommend that threats assessments should lead to interventions designed to reduce the risk of violence. Although immediate threats may be resolved through assessments, if the main condition that generates the threat persists, the chances of the problem re-occurring remain high. Below follows some basic recommendations that should form framework for curbing and controlling violent masculinities in Botswana schools.

27.0 Regional Educational Psychologists

In addition to teacher counsellors already assigned to secondary schools, there is a need for the Ministry of Education to create posts of Regional Educational Psychologists. These would specifically and professionally deal with some investigations concerning students' violent threats and negative attitudes towards their colleagues, classmates, teachers and school administration. Teacher counsellors are restricted to three sessions of consultancy per case. Following this, they are required to refer the problem to psychologists. But this is not what is happening in our schools; teacher counsellors are overwhelmed with tasks they have not been trained for. Further, psychologists will be better placed to professionally deal with the school community as a whole. School counsellors are juniors to most school administrators and this may pose a problem particularly in arbitrating conflicts in which a school administrator is at fault. In Masunga Senior Secondary School, students had on several instances indicated they were not happy with the culture of the school. The 2007 incidents where male students soaked their counterpart bedding with drainage water, placed thorns in the other student's bedding, are some indications that there are some problems. Instead of simply expelling such students from boarding, assessment could be carried out by professional psychologists to identify motives of such acts.

28.0 Action research

Violence or threats reported or observed in the schools should be regularly investigated by teachers, counsellors, psychologists and students. Such site-based investigations will help distinguish between substantive and transient threats.

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