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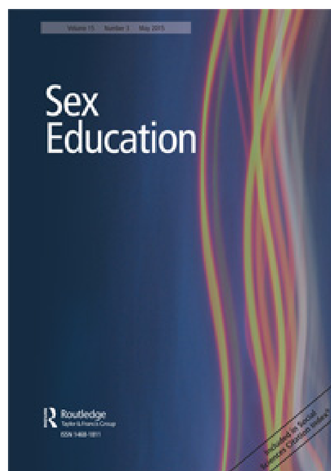

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Stepping out of our comfort zones: pre-service teachers' responses to a critical analysis of gender/power relations in sexuality education

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Stepping out of our comfort zones: pre-service teachers' responses to a critical analysis of gender/power relations in sexuality education

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This paper discusses pre-service teachers' responses to a critical analysis of gender/power relations using examples from a final assessment for an intensive elective unit called Teaching Sexuality in the Middle Years. This unit critically examines gender/power relations, the production of difference, heteronormativity and pleasure and desire, employing a feminist post-structural framework. Despite the focus on critical thinking, reflection and interrogating structural inequalities in this unit some students were resistant or unable to engage with this approach in their assessments, although appearing to do so in workshops. We consider the broad range of sexuality education discourses mobilised by this unit to try to make sense of what looks like resistance but may be something more complex and difficult to negotiate. The paper ends with a consideration of some of the implications of this approach for practice.

Keywords: sexuality education; gender/power relations; sexuality discourses; feminist pedagogy; post-structural theory

There are a number of challenges in the provision of sexuality education in pre-service education programmes. However, one that has emerged in our research and experience of teaching pre-service teachers is translating gender theory into classroom practice. McNaughton, writing in 1997, has pointed out that despite 20 years of research teachers did not often recognise the importance of gender in child development. For her, creating a gaze with 'gender as its object' is central to 'working for gender equity' (2000, 236). In a similar vein, Cammack and Phillips (2002, 125) maintain that issues related to gender are largely absent from teacher education courses in the UK and USA, and that many teachers are reluctant to take up such issues in their teaching practice.

In addition, few school-based programmes or resources in health education engage students in gender analysis of sexual relationships (Ollis and Tomaszewski 1993; Harrison, Hay, and Kokonis 1997; Allen 2005). Of those that do explore gendered discourses, the majority are entrenched in notions of sex and gender differences and sex-role theory (Scholz 2010; Kehily 2002; Harrison 2000; Epstein et al. 2001; Mac an Ghaill 1996). The way programmes most normally use gender is to refer to three binaries: men and women, male and female, and masculinity and femininity. These distinctions position men and boys negatively and in need of change (Haste 2013; Keddie and Mills 2007), and render gender as two stable and fixed categories (Connell 2002, 2009; Alsop et al. 2002).

Overwhelmingly, school-based sexuality education uses the notion of gender in heterosexualised and traditional terms. Ideas most usually centre on the idea of two opposite and different gender categories. In most cases schools use these binaries as if they are uncontested and without any meaningful examination of what they constitute or

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recognition of the differing degrees of power that adhere to them (Jones 2011b; Harrison 2000; Connell 2002, 2009; Mac an Ghaill 1996; Davies 1993). Kehily's (2002) important study of sexuality education in England provides many rich descriptions of the way this happens in practice. The interactions between the teachers and students in her study illustrate the way in which sexuality is conceptualised in the practice of teaching and learning within categorical terms devoid of power analysis (see also Robinson and Jones-Diaz [2005] on dualistic thinking). Martino (1999) argues that using gender as a focus for framing sexuality should draw attention to issues of power and the way it 'operates to regulate and maintain narrow and restrictive ideas about masculinity and femininity' (36).

However, like Kehily (2002) Harrison (2000) found that when gender is addressed in schools it is not usually in relation to issues of power. Rather, the focus is:

> primarily about 'young women': young women as good as young men in equal opportunity discourses and, in sexuality discourses, young women as victims; young women who can't or won't say no; young women as responsible contraceptors; and [. . .] in HIV/AIDS discourses, young women as the initiators of safe sex. (7)

Nearly 20 years after McNaughton's observations we find that some of our pre-service teachers are able to recognise the ways in which gender operates in our classrooms and schools, but that gender is not central to their 'pedagogic gaze' and their understanding of how normative discourses shape students' subjectivities is often shallow and poorly understood and does not often translate into their teaching practices, particularly for primary (elementary) pre-service students.

Feminist pedagogy and a focus on gender equity are particularly problematic in our so-called 'post-feminist' world (McRobbie 2007; Gill 2007) where feminism is often met with hostility and/or seen as irrelevant by many young women. Recently, there has been a proliferation of anti-feminist movements and young women have been particularly vocal in their stand against feminism (Women Against Feminism 2014; Valenti 2014). McRobbie (2007) writing on post-feminism points out that within this discourse, feminism is drawn on as proof that equality has been achieved and therefore that it is no longer needed. So that for 'feminism to be "taken into account" it has to be understood as having already passed away' (255).

Gill (2007, 149) has identified some relatively stable features of post-feminism which include:

> femininity as a bodily property; a shift from objectification to subjectification; an emphasis on self surveillance, monitoring and discipline – and the surveillance of others – notions of autonomy, choice and self-improvement sit side-by-side with surveillance, discipline and the vilification of those who make the "wrong choices"; a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment – free choice is seen as central to post-feminist discourses; the dominance of a make-over paradigm; a resurgence in ideas of natural sexual difference (Women are from Venus; Men are from Mars); a marked sexualisation of culture, and an emphasis on consumerism and the commodification of difference. (see also McRobbie 2008; Ringrose 2013)

These relatively stable features do not go uncontested with heated debates taking place around the notions of agency and choice (Ringrose 2013). Nonetheless, they do present significant challenges for feminist pedagogical practice regardless of their uneven and often contradictory mobilisation, which we examine in more detail in the case studies that follow.

In this paper, we outline and discuss two examples of a microteaching assessment task in an elective sexuality education unit, in a pre-service teaching program in an Australian university. This unit critically examines gender/power relations, the production of difference, heteronormativity and pleasure and desire, employing a feminist post-structural framework.

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Feminist post-structuralist theory and practice

Our pedagogical practice is based around valuing student voice and encouraging cooperative learning and fostering a community of practice in the group. We treat students as knowledgeable (Louise-Lawrence 2014) and encourage them to draw on their own experiences to make sense of the curriculum content. Using a feminist post-structuralist framework, we explore the positionality and difference of both learners and teachers in our classroom (Tisdell 1998). Similar to McNaughton, our aim is to increase 'students' discursive repertoires' by 'exercising pedagogical power with feminist intent' (2000, 239).

Cammack and Phillips (2002) explored gendered discourses in education in their study situated in the USA using a feminist post-structuralist approach that sees knowledge creation as a 'social act'. They used their collaboration as a 'type of reflexivity' (123). We adopt a similar approach in our practice and as a theoretical lens to critically appraise our own teaching and our students' curriculum and identity work. Robinson and Jones-Diaz (2005) also believe that educators should be willing to do this difficult work and be willing to tackle issues that are 'personally confronting, uncomfortable, or even somewhat risky' (25). After all, this is what we expect of our students.

Using this framework, we understand the self 'as a site of contradiction and conflict' and subjectivity as 'patterns by which experiential and emotional contents, feelings, images and memories are organised to form one's self-image, one's sense of self and others, and of our possibilities of existence' (Cammack and Phillips 2002, 124). In our work, we seek to make connections between the individual and the social and the themes we focus on are: difference particularly in relation to gender and sexuality; knowledge as a social construction; deconstructing binaries and foregrounding marginalised voices; and identity as constantly shifting and negotiated (Tisdell 1998) and troubling understandings of what is normal and 'commonsense ways of looking at the world' (Robinson and Jones-Diaz 2005, 24).

Teaching sexuality: a context for engaging students in a gender/power analysis

Teaching Sexuality Education in the Middle Years is a unit designed to prepare pre-service teachers to teach sexuality education in primary and secondary schools. It is delivered in intensive mode either as six consecutive days, plus a follow-up assessment day, or as six days at one day per week. It aims to provide students with knowledge, skills, understandings and educational experiences promoting the need for positive sexuality education using current research on young people and sexuality, sexual health and wellbeing; current policy and research on best practice. It critically examines the discourses and frameworks used to teach about sexuality and young people in resources, policy and practice. The unit is developmental in character and sequential in nature. Each day builds on the previous one.

Typically, day 1 sets the context and introduces teachers to current research, policy and practice. It also sets the parameters for inclusive and safe classrooms and explores sex, sexuality and gender as a lens for teaching about sexuality education. It also includes 'a taste' of sexuality education pedagogies. Day 2 examines the impact and implications of the discourses currently used to teach sexuality education. It engages pre-service teachers in discourse analysis exercises and teaching approaches to puberty and reproduction. Day 3 draws on the knowledge from the previous days to examine current and best practice frameworks/policies/planning. It also examines gender and sexuality and focuses in on hegemonic masculinities and power. Day 4 continues the gender theme but extends it to look at gender and sexual diversity and includes a large focus on understanding and

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teaching about heteronormativity. Day 5 addresses more contested and challenging issues such as gender, power, violence and pornography. Day 6 wraps up the unit and the focus is on communication/respectful relationships and whole school approaches to sexuality education. Day 7 is set aside for students to undertake their microteaching assessment.

Our pedagogical approach focuses on inclusion of all students and we attempt (with varying degrees of success) to hear and value their opinions and respect their right to be heard. The activities that we employ are designed to assist our students to explore the '*connection between* who they are as individuals and the structural systems of privilege and oppression' (Tisdell 1998, 139; emphasis in original) (in this instance gender). We are strongly cognisant of the emotional and affective dimensions of the challenging work that we do and its effects, on us and on our students.

Although we use Foucauldian discourse analysis as a tool to unpack gender/power relations and challenge students' assumptions about gender relations and normative heterosexuality, we also find it useful to employ Connell's theoretical work on gender with its focus on structural inequalities and hegemonic masculinity as a starting point as it does have explanatory power. Tisdell (1998), in her examination of the historical genesis of various forms of critical enquiry, acknowledges that different feminist theoretical perspectives have influenced each other and that 'these overlapping influences are particularly apparent in ... "poststructural feminist pedagogies"' (141). We have chosen Connell deliberately, in the acknowledgement that many of our students come to us with little knowledge or experience of post-structural theory; that a substantial number have given little thought to gendered structures of inequality, and that some are even hostile to being told that these exist.

The literature that scaffolds the unit is deliberately designed to be provocative and we attempt to move away from a focus on disease prevention and examine children's sexual knowledge challenging the presumption of innocence, sexual pleasure and its absence in sexuality education, the construction of masculinity and femininity, homophobia and normative heterosexuality, sexual violence, sexualisation and pornography (see e.g. Allan et al. 2008; Carmody 2008; Crabbe 2007; Renold 2002). The pedagogy is participatory, activity- and discussion-based and designed to canvass a range of viewpoints and challenge preconceptions.

For example, students undertake a number of activities in which they explore the discourses commonly mobilised in relation to sexuality and sexuality education. Following a presentation of Foucault's technologies of the self (Rabinow and Rose 2003), and an introduction to Foucauldian discourse analysis, students engage in analysis of the movie *Juno* (2007) exploring discourses around sexuality, motherhood, fatherhood, sex and pleasure and responsibility.

We draw on Foucault's (1972, 49) formulation of discourse which he describes as, 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Discourses are not about objects; they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own intervention.' Post-structuralism, in its mobilisation of Foucauldian discourse analysis, 'raises questions about how selves are constituted, how power-knowledge relations change across times, [and] places, and in the context of different social, political and cultural contexts' (Wright 2004, 20).

The unit also presents a modified model of gender that was developed by Sexual Health Information Networking and Education (SHine) in South Australia for a short course in gender-based violence. This model could be said to reflect a more 'relational' understanding of gender reflective of the ideas expressed by Connell (2009). For Connell, 'gender involves a lot more than one-to-one relationships between bodies; it involves a vast and complicated institutional and cultural order. It is this whole order that comes into

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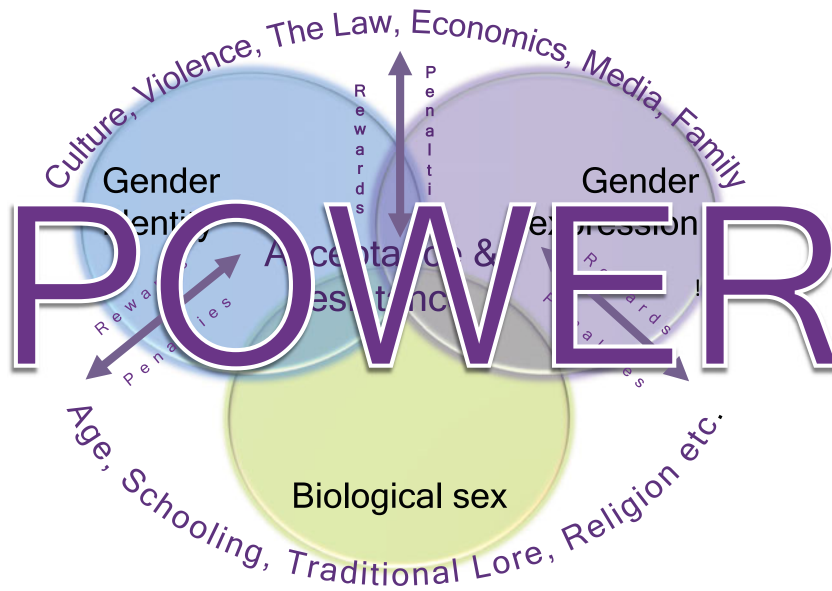

Figure 1. A relational understanding of gender. Source: Adapted from SHine SA (2011).

relation with bodies, and gives them gender meanings' (56). Connell's interest in what constitutes 'gender as a social structure' through examining the 'enduring and extensive patterns', characteristics of the way gender relations operate and within which individuals and groups act and play out gender (2002, 9), is the focus presented to pre-service teachers.

The model is used to examine relations of power and inequality that enable gender-based violence to be reproduced historically and politically through social institutions such as the law, family and so on. Pre-service teachers critically examine Connell's idea that 'the positions of women and men are defined, the cultural meanings of being a man and a woman are negotiated, and their trajectories through life are mapped out' (2006, 839). The model is presented to students as a series of overlaying *PowerPoint* slides starting with the three circles gender identity, expression and biological sex, which are then unpacked historically and culturally (see Figure 1). By looking at the way social structures are 'historically constituted', students examine 'possibilities and consequences for action' (Connell 2009, 74) and enable or resist the reproduction of gender-based violence. The final slide is overlaid with power as the key ingredient in this relational structure.

Methods

Ethics approval was granted from our university to collect data on pre-service teachers' experience of the unit and their preparedness and readiness to teach sexuality education following its completion.

Data were collected from successive cohorts of pre-service teachers undertaking the unit between 2009 and 2013. Students elect to complete a pre- and post-unit online survey. Follow-up focus-group interviews have been conducted with 20 students who indicated on the survey they would like to participate and student assessment is analysed. For the purposes of this paper, however, we have chosen to examine two group examples of students' work (one group of two women and one group of three men) in their first

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assignment in this unit (from our 2011 cohort) that required them to develop a lesson to teach to their peers. The reason for selection is that both groups focused explicitly on teaching about gender at the primary (elementary) level and all were students who had enrolled on their course immediately after completing secondary school. Given our previous observations about the absence of a gender focus at this level and concerns by others about the place of feminism in young people's lives, we felt it important to concentrate on this group.

The examples that follow are however indicative of similar responses to our teaching focus from primary pre-service teachers since the unit was first developed and delivered in 2009, and have caused us to question our own socio-critical approach, and how this translates (or not) into our practice as pre-service teacher educators. As well, it is useful to examine pre-service teachers' various strategies for re-working their responses to address the assessment criteria without engaging with a gender/power analysis and presenting gender in a unitary individualist neoliberal framework discussed by Leahy et al. (2013). We were concerned that we had reinforced traditional notions of gender rather than assisting pre-service teachers to see gender as dynamic and structured around relations of power. Related to this was their choice of focus and assessment, which was about understanding and changing individual behaviour.

The assignment we focus on is the first assignment, a microteaching activity conducted in small groups. It is designed to give students an opportunity to teach sexuality education to their peers. Students are able to select any area of sexuality education so long as they provide a rationale for how it relates to the state-based curriculum framework and the literature. Grading is based on their ability to teach, the rationale for their approach, appropriateness of the approach and engagement with the topic and literature. Students typically prepare a *PowerPoint* presentation that provides a rationale for their focus and demonstrates engagement with the unit literature. They then teach one or two activities that they would use if they were teaching this lesson in a school. Some pre-service teachers develop their own activities; others use activities from existing resources. These *PowerPoint* presentations and activities are then uploaded onto our online learning repository as teaching resources for the cohort.

Analysis

Our microteaching examples are analysed using Tiffany Jones's (2011a) framework for examining sexuality education discourses. Using a revised version of a model first developed by Kemmis, Cole, and Suggett (cited in Jones 2011b, 166), Jones identified 28 discourses that she categorised under four Orientations – Conservative, Liberal, Critical and Postmodern. In addition to providing a lens to unpack particular understandings of gender, power and sexuality, her model focuses on how this is translated into pedagogical practice. She maintains that the 'discourses … [mobilised] in these areas have varied over time yet remain active in contemporary sexuality education' (166). Naming the discourses being drawn upon in classroom activities and the messages these send are important precursors to understanding relations of power and their effects.

Jones' framework was developed following an extensive review of literature and examination of sexuality education programmes and teaching resources. Despite the limitations of such models, her framework is a useful thinking tool for our reflective practice in that it provides a schema of 'orientation-based sexuality education discourses' (272). Jones describes in detail the features of each of the four orientations identified but for our purposes here we will only outline some characteristics of each, some of the related

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sexuality education discourses, the associated pedagogic practices evident in each discourse and the construct of the child that these are predicated on.

Robinson (2008, 115) has argued that innocence is the 'ultimate signifier of the child' and 'is a constructed social and moral concept'. She also maintains that psychological discourses contribute to the dominance of developmental theory and these discourses 'constitute the child in opposition to the adult and perpetuate a cultural binary between adult and child'. This discourse sees cognitive and physical development on a continuum related to age. Both of these discourses are evident in Jones' Conservative orientation.

In the Conservative orientation, 'maintaining the status quo' and transmitting prevailing 'values, beliefs and practices of society' is the focus (372). Pedagogic practice is teacher led and knowledge is 'authorised' (373) and unproblematically transmitted. Methods of transmitting this knowledge are lecture- and text-based.

Children are constructed as either the asexual Romantic Child (377), innocent and in need of protection or the Knowing Child who is able to understand the biological functioning of the body and how to prevent disease. One of the main discourses is Abstinence Education, and sexual activity is viewed as harmful and shameful unless it occurs within a long-term committed relationship.

The Liberal orientation in contrast teaches 'sexuality skills and knowledge for personal choice/development' (378). The teacher's role is as leader and facilitator and methods include discussions, role-plays, debates and practising skills (373). Comprehensive sex education is characterised by a focus on controversial issues and values clarification. The child construct in this discourse is on the continuum of developing, actual or informed sexual decision-maker and in the Liberal feminist version we see the 'Gendered Decision-maker' (378). In this orientation, 'Students identify aspects of society in need of reform, but leave untouched questions of radical change to beliefs or practices' (372).

The Critical orientation has a strong social justice focus and the role of education is to create a better society. Students are expected to be able to identify inequities and 'instigate "real-world" social action to redress these' (372) and there is greater acceptance of 'adolescent sexualities' (379). Characteristic sexuality education discourses are anti-discriminatory, inclusive, safe and supportive. Children and young people are constructed as sexual, gendered, global, local and ethnic citizens. Pedagogical practices include 'critical analysis of popular culture texts and images, viewing and creation of alternative texts, student activism, whole-school reforms' (373). The Safe Schools Coalition (Victorian Department of Education and Department of Health 2013) provides but one example of such whole-school reform in the Australian context.

The final orientation described by Jones is the Postmodern orientation, which aims to theoretically explore 'sex, gender and sexuality frameworks and positions' (379). Sexuality education discourses are, among others, post-structuralist, diversity education and queer. The focus in this orientation is on representations of 'reality', and the deconstruction of texts 'about sexuality and gender, and [a consideration of] how sexual identity plays a central political role in emancipation' (379). The teacher's role is often that of provocateur and 'devil's advocate'. The child in this orientation is 'the social construct', 'the sexed social construct', 'the cultural subject', 'the sexed subject' and the 'sexual subject' (380).

What is evidenced in our teaching, and in the students' responses to the microteaching activity represented in the following two examples, is that we all adopt multiple orientations to education, with their concomitant epistemologies, sexuality education discourses, pedagogic practices and constructs of the child (and in our case this also includes our own constructs of our students).

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Microteaching examples

Doing gender

> After participating in EEH315, what stood out quite distinctly was evidence that much bullying, violence, and unacceptance of others in schools stems from the basis that we live in a society, whereby "some groups or roles are favoured over others" (Butler).

The two third-year pre-service teachers who developed this lesson provided a very strong rationale for focusing on gender with grade 5 and 6 students. They made reference to a number of key aspects of a feminist post-structuralist framework that is used to examine gender in the unit. Drawing on the work of Renold (2002), they made reference to her ideas that 'Children are subject to pressures of compulsory heterosexuality' where to be normal involves the projection of a coherent and abiding heterosexual self (416). This group used Epstein et al. (2001), to maintain that these notions underscore much of children's identity work and peer relationships which can allow individuals to be marginalised if they do not fit 'heteronormative categories'. In addition, they drew on Connell (2002) to discuss the impact of teachers' enforcement of 'hierarchical binary categories' – male and female – based on socially constructed identity labels deemed appropriate in the primary school.

The lesson was designed 'to give children the ability to deconstruct the stereotypes of both gender and sexuality, particularly those represented in the media'. In line with the curriculum guidelines at the time (VCAA 2005), this would allow them to 'examine and challenge generalisations and simplistic portrayals of people and social and cultural issues' (lesson rationale).

The activity chosen for their microteaching task formed part of a lesson that included a sequence of three activities collectively called 'Identity and Acceptance'. Using a *PowerPoint* presentation, these pre-service teachers walked the group through the scaffolding that would be undertaken with primary-age students prior to and following this activity. They started with a rationale that connected gender and sexuality to 'hegemonic and heterosexual ideals' and explained that students would first be involved in 'analysing various media such as television, film, books and magazines for stereotypical representations of masculinity and femininity'.

The second lesson in the sequence of three was the activity chosen for their assessment and involved a role-play. The group informed their peers that:

> Each student will have a sticker on their forehead which they cannot look at. On it will be written something about that person that may or may not conform to the ideal of "normal". They will also be given a "role" card, and this is the open personality they will represent. Students will then be divided into groups of approximately 5 or 6 and will then talk to each other. They are not to reveal to others what is written on the student's stickers, but they are able to discuss the issues that may be on other people's heads. The students will have a set amount of time to socialise with others, and as they are doing so will be asked to consider some of the following:
>
> - As you talk to other people, think about the person they are representing.
> - Are there any negative or positive thoughts you have about that person, based on what is on their sticker?
> - Do you feel that people are treating you differently because of what is written on your sticker?
> - Were there people you did not want to talk to?
> - Are there any judgements you make about other people?
> - How did you feel?

The activity finished with a group discussion after students had looked at their sticker. The focus was on deciding whether they would have behaved differently and whether they were aware of who was on their sticker.

After the role-play, the group then described the remainder of the lesson. This included analysing 'how they [the media] influence us to believe what is normal'. Looking at how areas such as families, disability, same-sex attraction, weight issues, other cultures and class are portrayed, they focused on 'How might it make people feel who fit into these norms? In what ways can people be damaged if they do not fit in?'

This microteaching activity focused on questioning gender stereotypes through an analysis of popular cultural texts. The predominant construct of the child represented here is that of the gendered developing decision-maker. In this version, gender is seen as integral to identity. Liberal feminist approaches to sexuality education focus on 'the effect of gender on decision-making', which should not 'limit possible choices' (Jones 2011a, 383).

What is interesting about this case study is that liberal, critical and post-structural discourses are all employed in their approach. The young women presented a rationale that was firmly positioned within a theoretical framework that drew on the complexity of feminist post-structuralist theory (Jones' Postmodern approach, 2011a, 2011b). At the same time, however, their aim to critically analyse the impact of gender on 'social relations' employs a 'critical approach' that falls short of adopting 'an oppositional position in relation to the dominant order' (Jones 2011a, 372). This is because it does not interrogate the investments that children and young people may have in their positioning within heteronormative discourses and practices of masculinity and femininity. The group's focus on questioning stereotypes in the media holds the promise of problematising this hegemony, but this is watered down by their focus on behaviours, feelings and gender roles. In addition, their focus on fostering in students an acceptance of difference and a belief in the right to 'be who you want to be' is situated in a [neo]-liberal focus on choice biographies (see Wyn and White 1997; Gill 2007, for example) which individualises structures of difference and by so doing ignores the social construction of gender/power relations.

Gender violence

The following micro-lesson was planned and presented by three young male pre-service teachers and was titled 'Gender Violence'. Despite overwhelming evidence that the majority of victims of gender-based violence (GBV) are female, this group chose to focus on violence against men. The presentation started under the heading 'Gender Violence Against Men' with the following (unreferenced) statement:

> The magnitude of the problem is difficult to determine. Even in normal situations, sexual violence often goes unreported. The factors contributing to under-reporting – fear of retribution, shame, powerlessness, lack of support, breakdown or unreliability of public services, and the dispersion of families and communities – are all exacerbated in refugee situations.

One of the slides that followed provided these statistics:

- Over one in three victims of domestic homicide in Australia are male.
- At least one in three victims of family violence in Australia are male.
- As many young people have witnessed physical domestic violence by their mother against their father, as have witnessed it by their father against their mother.
- Equal numbers of young males and females have experienced domestic violence or have been forced to have sex by their boyfriend/girlfriend.

Although the students did not cite a reference for these statistics, the information on them can be traced to the website of the One in Three campaign (Biddulph and Hamilton

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2014). These statistics are incorrect according to a report published by the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse (National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children 2009). What is interesting about the citing of them in the context of this paper is the focus on men as victims of violence, with a YouTube reference later in their presentation showing a clip from the 'Violence Against Women – Australia Says No' campaign (Australian Government Canberra 2006) first aired in 2006 that seems to contradict their claims. The presentation then goes on to focus on the effects of GBV on children and how they might be supported in the school context. The students developed an activity based on the derogatory comments made about a female journalist on air by Australian shock jock Kyle Sandilands during his morning radio programme in November 2011. The aim seems to be to get students' opinions on his tirade in order to come to better understand 'what's violent?' However, in a very short rationale for their activities (including an activity about 'what makes a good friend') the group state: 'The focus is on being proactive and promoting positive relationships rather than delving into abuse.'

Utilising the curriculum framework current at the time (VCAA 2005), the group referred to both Civics and Citizenship and Health and Physical Education (HPE) domains as part of the strand Physical, Personal and Social Learning in the Victorian Essential Learning Standards as a rationale for their focus. For example under HPE, it is said that:

> Students become more aware of the broader world .... *They adapt and analyse beliefs and generalisations associated with characteristics such as gender and discuss the validity of such classifications...* (students' emphasis). Students learn about establishing and maintaining relationships with others and consider views of what is right/wrong, good/bad, acceptable/unacceptable.

In addition, under the Civics and Citizenship domain the students cited the following:

> The family is the first learning environment for students and provides them with a sense of belonging, basic social skills and experiences, and learning about values such as respect, fairness and care for others – values which underpin a community. Students develop their social skills and understanding of norms and values through learning with others.

The group provided the following rationale for this focus:

> Before we introduce our activities we will go over the concerns previously raised by the group [us talking to pre-service teachers] about dealing with sensitive issues such as domestic violence with a class. Therefore the emphasis on our three activities: *"What's violent? Brainstorm", "Weight of word's activity" and "what makes a good friend?" activity* (students' emphasis) is on being proactive and promoting positive relationships rather than delving into abuse.

In this microteaching activity, we can see what may be described as a collision of discourses. Trying to tease out what is happening here is complex. Despite care in explaining that we were not turning the spotlight on the men in the class as perpetrators or possible perpetrators when we presented statistics on GBV, in this instance our actions appeared to have the opposite effect. Although we were careful to acknowledge that men can be the victims of GBV, the students' focus on men as victims has the effect of positioning women as perpetrators of violence, without any reference to why they might choose this course of action. Our attempts to focus on the institutionalised discourses that produce the conditions of possibility for unequal gender/power relations, and to move away from a focus on the individual, are lost when these young men feel as if they are being positioned as perpetrators.

By turning their focus to promoting positive behaviours, the explicit goal of the mandated curriculum, GBV, becomes invisible in the teacherly pursuit of making young

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people the ideal 'good citizens', citizens who adopt community values such as respect, fairness and caring. This results in an inability to explain those who do not demonstrate good citizenship other than to view them as 'not like us'. To do otherwise may be too confronting to one's sense of self.

As well as the focus on good citizenship, the child that is imagined here is also the Romantic Child, innocent and in need of protection, and the approach taken, as characterised by Jones, is the None/Non-approach; the content is seen as 'inappropriate for schools to disseminate' (Jones 2011a, 377). GBV morphs into a focus on positive behaviours because it is incomprehensible within this conservative discourse, with its claim to universal values, for good citizens to be perpetrators of GBV. In addition, within the conservative discourse the focus on children as innocent, and access to knowledge as developmental, makes it almost incomprehensible that children should be exposed to knowledge about GBV in the primary school and, as McNaughton (1997, 322) points out, 'Privileging the developmental gaze silences gender differences'.

Robinson (2008, 115), in her investigation of the moral panic associated with 'childhood innocence', points out that this promotes ideas of both personal and professional risk and can therefore 'act as a powerful social control mechanism', thus having the effect of maintaining 'dominant power relations' reinforcing/reconstituting gendered binaries. It is clear that these young men felt profoundly challenged by the positioning of men as perpetrators of GBV, resulting in their difficulty in engaging in a meaningful way in exploring this issue (Lawrence 2014, 33).

As well, the discursive dominance of developmental discourses in education is in direct conflict with the feminist discourses we employ in our teaching in relation to what is considered appropriate knowledge and pedagogical practice (McNaughton 1997).

What are we to make of this?

Leahy et al. (2013, 177) drawing on Rose (2000, 322) employ the concept of curriculum assemblages to demonstrate the discursive messiness inherent within curriculum texts and to argue that these manifest themselves as:

> ... a hesitant, incomplete, fragmentary, contradictory and contested metamorphosis, [characterised by] the abandonment of some old themes, the maintenance of others, the introduction of some new elements, a shift in the role and functioning of others because of their changed places and connections with the "assemblage" of control.

This messiness permeates our microteaching examples and has made us think critically about the way we teach, how we teach and the difficulty of using a feminist post-structuralist analysis with teacher education students in a post-feminist world. But, how could it be otherwise? McRobbie (2007) suggests that there is a double entanglement that 'comprises the co-existence of neo-conservative values in relation to gender, sexuality and family life... with processes of liberalisation in regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relations' (2007, 255), and Jones reminds us that there '... is certainly no flawless, universal sexuality education that would suit every student and context' (2011a, 166). However, having said this, she asserts that some of the approaches canvassed in her paper are '... more or less damaging to particular students and social groups' (166).

Jones (2011a, 166) also points out that post-modern discourses may be 'too "complex"' for some students and many educators. Many of our students have no prior critical engagement with critical/post-structural readings of gender/power relations, or the skills in deconstruction to understand the social construction of sexualities and gender.

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Our own development of our understandings of gender and the theoretical journey we have engaged in to come to a point at which this is the lens we use to make sense of gender/power relations has been a long one, and we are still learning. If we are honest, the simplistic understandings used by our students were also used by ourselves in the early days of our work in gender. We should not be surprised, therefore, as Connell (1987) reminds us, that our students understand gender relations through their own socialisation in the family, schools and popular culture, in the absence of what others may see as the 'sociological imagination' (Nash 2013). Akin to this, McNaughton (2000) calls for a shift from the 'ethics of individualism' to an 'ethics of critical collectivism' (246). Tisdell (1998, 147) draws our attention to the 'emotion of fear', which can be mobilised when ideas that are contrary to our ways of knowing ourselves are too 'scary' to even consider. There was some evidence of this taking place in the young men's group in our final example.

This paper raises questions about how best we can develop students' understanding and ability to recognise and critique dominant discourses and their contribution to inequitable practices. From this experience, and within the limited time available to us in this unit, providing articles that utilise a feminist post-structural perspective is inadequate, presenting a framework for understanding gender/power relations is inadequate, and not having the opportunity to unpack students' work collectively is inadequate. This leaves us with the challenge of re-imagining an alternative approach in this practice-based unit. Somewhere in this process we need to engage pre-service teachers in the work of reflective reconstruction and move from perceived normative truths about gender and sexuality, to exploring the range of 'truths' that operate in available and contested discourses outside the fixed and unitary categories and binaries they currently operate within. This might involve reflection on, and deconstruction of, relations of power that produce inequity and discrimination. Most importantly, a process that seemed to be missing in our teaching is a focus on new ways of doing gender, so that our pre-service teachers can expand their discursive repertoire and employ these in their teaching practice.

Robinson and Jones-Diaz (2005, 234) point out that in order for someone to change their discursive location 'there has to be more investment in the shifting than what is offered through remaining'. This shifting investment was evident in a post-unit interview conducted with one of the young men in our final example. We asked him to reflect on his learning in the unit and we were particularly interested in his response to our focus on pornography and gender-based violence, as this was a new addition to the curriculum, which had provoked strong reactions from many of the students. This student admitted to enrolling in the unit only because he had failed another unit in the course. He was also somewhat dismissive of the horror that some of the female students exhibited when watching a documentary we showed on GBV in the porn industry, saying: 'I found it awkward being in a room with people who were offended by it … like I almost felt like they were a bit naive – I expected [them] to see what I saw.' However, he went on to say that this experience had 'opened his eyes to a lot of stuff':

> … even me watching this documentary and then discussing with my mates then that's a small step you take. For me, never again have I watched it, just because I was like nah. Then you tell your mates and now they're offended by it. I've worked in a school now for six years, some of the subjects we do, I'm like, I can't see how this is going to help our teaching whereas that one would have been so good for everyone. It should be, in my eyes, a core subject. (Interview, 6 August 2013)

This discursive shift, although only one example, does provide us with a degree of hope.

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