

Examples of Research

Chapter 2 Children's Gender and Sexuality: Issues and Debates Defined

Example of research: Children's agency and autonomy in the social construction of gender

Kosminsky and Daniel (2005) spent a year completing interviews with children and observing their play in a favela, or very low-income urban neighbourhood, in the Brazilian city of Marilia. Though they attend to the role of parents and other relatives in dictating some aspects of children's gendered play, such as mothers or grandmothers discouraging doll play for boys while they encourage it for girls, they also emphasize the actions of the children. They argue that 'street games enable the observer to witness the gender relations developed by the children' (32). These autonomous, child-generated relations sometimes reinforce the constraints of gender divisions and stereotypes, but sometimes reconstruct those constraints. For example, Kosminsky and Daniel's observation notes document the ways in which the girls refined the doll play encouraged by their relatives: 'In their own world, little girls could play with dolls and create different situations for their games, such as the doll being a woman who worked in an office or a doctor' (34).

Reflections on the research

Activity

Kosminsky and Daniel's research is based on observations of childhood games. Think back to a game you played as a child, or to a childhood game you have witnessed, seen in movies or read in books. How does this game, either in its format or in the way you have seen it refined by children, reinforce or resist gender divisions and stereotypes? In Kosminsky and Daniel's terms, how does it facilitate your ability to think about 'the gender relations developed by the children'?

Examples of Research

Example of research: Recognizing intersecting inequalities

Ali and colleagues (2001) offer a detailed review of UK research on disability in childhood. Drawing on examples from across 26 selected studies, the authors offer rich descriptions of occasions in which gender, ethnicity and disability intersect to shape a unique set of constraints.

- In one such case, a black, female youth with cerebral palsy did not receive culturally appropriate assistance with her hair care needs in a predominantly white boarding school. None of the staff knew how to comb or plait her hair, and made no effort to learn, requiring elaborate and painful detangling when she visited home during school vacations.
- In another case, Muslim parents with disabled children reported reluctance to use an available respite care centre because their religious preferences were not respected in the way staffing was organized in the centre, with male staff members caring for female children or care provided for boys and girls together when parents preferred segregation.

The authors also find that in many studies youth voices are heard only through adults with disabilities recollecting their childhood experience, a limitation they argue requires greater efforts to hear directly from children experiencing disability, with particular attention to a diversity of voices and backgrounds.

Reflections on the research

Intersecting inequalities will be emphasized throughout this book, and this study reminds us that children's lives are impacted not only by their gender, but also by the unique intersections they inhabit in terms of gender and other forms of inequality. For the children profiled in this article, the everyday experiences of disability are shaped by the intersections of gender, ethnicity and location.

Activity

Thinking about the two examples in the bullets above, briefly outline how staff supervising children with disabilities could better acknowledge the intersections of gender, ability/disability, ethnicity and culture, while also recognizing more fully children's autonomy and agency.

Example of research: Sexual agency in childhood and youth

Canadian youth researcher Hunt (2009) investigates the legislative history surrounding sexual consent age limits in both UK and Canadian law, analysing the specific language and arguments used in legislative and legal documents as well as the specific rules enacted. On the basis of that analysis, he argues that youth sexuality is often framed in terms of protection rather than agency, and that limitations on the right to consent have been further differentiated in terms of male same-sex sexual behaviour, in that anal intercourse had an even higher age of consent. While anal intercourse occurs among heterosexual partners, and male same-sex sexual behaviour encompasses much more than just anal intercourse, Hunt argues that the differential age of consent was shaped by assumptions about anal intercourse being associated with male same-sex relationships.

- In the United Kingdom, this differentiation was removed in 2000; when the age of consent for anal intercourse was lowered to 16, the same age applied to other sexual activity, based on an argument for equality of treatment regardless of sexual orientation.
- According to Hunt, the same argument was not successful in Canada. After a legislative struggle ending in 2008, Canada's previous age of consent for sexual activity other than anal intercourse was raised from 14 to 16 but the age of consent for anal intercourse was left at 18. This still left a differential age of consent depending on sexual orientation and gender, thus constructing what is often assumed to be a male same-sex sexual activity as something from which youth need even more protection.

As Hunt sums it up, this has implications for non-heterosexual youth, and for all youth. 'The age-of-consent regulation not only regulates youth sexual activity but also disempowers youth by defining them as unable to grasp the implications of their actions, thus reducing and constraining – if not at times wholly eliminating – recognition of their ability to consent' (29).

Reflections on the research

Age-of-consent regulations may protect children, but at the same time they offer a clear example of how children's sexual agency is constrained by the state, in ways that vary by nation and, within a nation, can also vary by the child's gender and sexuality.

Activity

Look back to the discussion of the institutional, interactional and individual levels of gender construction discussed earlier in this chapter. Hunt's findings document that age-of-consent legislation presents youth with an institutional constraint to their gender and sexuality. How might the age-of-consent legislative history in Canada and the United Kingdom also relate to or create gender constraints for youth at the interactional and individual levels?

Examples of Research

Example of research: Heteronormativity and the social construction of gender in children's worlds

In order to explore how childhood gender is constructed, Riggs (2008) conducted a content analysis of ten advice books for fathers of sons in Australia. He carefully sifted through the advice offered, and the assumptions made, about the 'average boy'. Based on that analysis, he argues:

- The assumptions made about the 'average boy' are not so much reflecting as actually constructing the meanings surrounding boyhood, and assumptions about sexuality are pivotal to what is expected of this average boy.
- These advice books are 'among the prime proponents and manufacturers of a highly normative understanding of masculinity and boyhood' (188).
- Fathers are encouraged to assume their young sons will be attracted to girls and to discourage any 'sissy' tendencies.
- The books' underlying assumptions about the 'average boy' and the naturalness of his attraction to girls are 'informed by a range of heteronormative and homophobic assumptions about boys and masculinity' (186).
- Presumed heterosexuality is recreated in tandem with fundamental notions of gender identity, not as two separate processes but as a single process in which part of the definition of being a boy is to be heterosexually oriented.

Reflections on the research

Parents clearly play an important role in teaching their children lessons about gender and sexuality. Riggs' article focuses on the potential power of fathers by addressing the messages they receive about what is normal and natural for boys, and considering how that may shape fathers' treatment of their sons.

Activity

How do you think Riggs' findings – that advice books for fathers reflect a presumed heterosexuality that is intertwined in a child's gender identity – relate to Davies' (1989) critique of 'sex role socialisation' theories discussed earlier in the chapter? How might what Riggs and Davies suggest be combined in thinking about the role of both parent and child in the gendering process?

Chapter 3 The Social Construction of Gender and Sexuality in Childhood, Key Research Issues and Findings

Example of research: Styles of toy play with sons and daughters

Wood, Desmarais and Gugula (2002) observed experimental toy play sessions between adults and 2- to 6-year-old children in Canada, carefully selecting the toys offered to include some rated as traditional for boys, girls or both. The play sessions were followed by a questionnaire given to the adults about their perceptions of the desirability of each toy for boys or girls. Adults included the children's parents as well as other adults, with each child engaging in multiple play sessions. The researchers found that the adults in their study – both the child participants' parents and other adults – had broader definitions of which toys were appropriate for boys versus girls than prior studies had found. Instead of considering most toys suited to either girls or boys, they found a larger number suitable for both. They took this pattern as an indication of social change, with less gender differentiation in adult attitudes about appropriate toys for children. But even so, the researchers found that when given a choice in the actual play situation as opposed to the questionnaire, the adults, parents included, tended to play with gender-typed toys, especially for boys. Given the age of the children involved in the study, Wood and her colleagues also point out that the children themselves play a part in the process, recognizing the child as an active agent. As they note in their conclusion, 'the bidirectional nature of the interaction between adult and child during play may have modified the play situation' (48).

Reflections on the research

Activity 1

Think about your own memories of playing with toys as a child, and jot down some notes on how your toy preferences might have been shaped by parents or other adults, siblings and peers with whom you played, advertisements you saw and any other factors that come to mind.

Activity 2

Write a brief reflection on whether/how you think your memories demonstrate the 'bidirectional' adult-child interactions that the authors emphasize.

Examples of Research

Example of research: School-based student activism and sexuality

Johnson (2007) discusses the legacy of the first US school-based gay youth group founded in 1972 at New York City's George Washington High School. The founders were primarily students of colour, who sought to create an environment of safety and tolerance in their school and used rights rhetoric to connect their efforts to the larger Gay Liberation movement. '[W]e as gay students demand the same rights (social and political) as "straight" students' (384). While this first school-based gay youth group was founded in a major city, students from a suburban private school are more commonly recognized for having started the first such group. Johnson explores an explanation for the invisibility of the George Washington High School students' efforts in the Gay Liberation Movement, arguing it reflects the movement's tendency to ignore urban youth of colour. 'Racism, classism, and ageism continue to keep the LGBT community unable to represent and honor all of its members, including some of its very first activists' (385).

Reflections on the research

As noted previously, to focus on intersections involves recognizing the ways in which people's experiences are shaped by their location at the intersection of many different identities and inequalities. So, for example, the LGBT students of colour in a lower-income urban high school may be even less visible than their peers with greater economic resources at a private high school, as well as less visible than adult LGBT activists.

Activity

Ask people you know whether their school had a GSA. Once you find someone who says yes, ask them what they remember about the students who were involved in terms of their racial, class, gender and sexual orientation identities. Compare what they tell you to what Johnson argues about the way the George Washington High School students' legacies were shaped not just by their sexual orientation, but by the intersection of their sexual orientation with other important features of their social identities.

Example of research: Gendered images in magazines for Korean girls

Nam, Lee and Hwang (2011) conducted a content analysis of advertising images in the three most popular magazines for adolescent girls in Korea, comparing representations of Korean and Western models. A few quotes summarize their approach and findings:

- *Research question*: 'What are the prevalence and nature of gender stereotypical portrayals in Korean fashion magazines targeting adolescent girls, and how do these portrayals vary as a function of models' race and gender?' (227)
- *Advertisements analysed*: 'We selected 60 advertisements at random from a randomly selected issue (month) of each magazine title per each season resulting in a total of 720 ads from the three magazines' (227).
- *Findings*: 'Korean women were portrayed more often as smaller and shorter than the opposite gender, smiling, pouting, and with a childlike or cute expression than other groups . . . Western women were more female-stereotypically portrayed with their mouth open and in revealing clothes or nudity than any other group . . . while in general all women were stereotypically portrayed, the particular stereotypes associated with women from each race were distinctively different' (234).
- *Implications*: 'Although the current study could not determine which gender images are more likely to be modeled by Korean adolescent girls, it is reasonable to infer that they are prone to emulate what they perceive to be accepted or ideal female roles portrayed by Korean women' (234–5).

Reflections on the research

This research study offers an important reminder that gender patterns in media images can further vary by race, ethnicity, nationality and other intersecting identities. The question is not just how might depictions of males or females reinforce or work against gender stereotypes, but how might those depictions relate to stereotypes of particular racial/ethnic groups as well.

Activity

Locate a magazine aimed at children or adolescents that is read in your country, and flip through the advertisements for pictures that include people. Do you notice any patterns related to gender, and if so, do they seem to vary by ethnicity? What messages about gender or sexuality, and their intersections with ethnicity, do you think any patterns you noticed might convey to young readers?

Examples of Research

Example of research: Heteronormativity and girls' peer cultures

Myers and Raymond (2010) focus on how heterosexuality is constructed and negotiated in children's peer cultures among young girls, nine years old and under. They use focus group interviews to explore the way these girls are active in 'co-constructing heterosexual ideals' (168). As they talked to their study participants about media, they quickly found that the girls 'redirected the conversation to discuss heterosexual crushes, sex, and dating', a pattern that leads the authors to conclude: 'Girls as young as the first grade proclaimed themselves "boy crazy"' and thus 'worked together to define girls' interests as boy centered' (174). The focus group method, in which they interviewed these young girls in groups of about five to ten, allowed the authors to watch the girls interacting with each other, strengthening their ability to conclude that the girls were influencing each other to adopt and embrace a heterosexual framing and express heterosexual interests. They concluded that the girls 'learned that to be an "appropriate" girl, they should perform heteronormativity for other girls' and '[i]n so doing, they reinforced the gender binary in which girls are measured – and measure themselves – by their relationship to boys' (185).

Reflections on the research

Activity 1

Myers and Raymond argue that the 'boy centeredness' that emerged in their focus group data is a product not of some natural interest these young girls each happened to develop individually, but rather a product of their group interactions within their peer culture. Think about how you might design a research study to tease out the interactional-level process that produces this kind of self-definition among young girls, in order to explore how peer cultures establish or magnify pressures towards heteronormativity.

Activity 2

In their article, Myers and Raymond do not report on whether or how they shared the results of their research with the girls who participated or with their parents or teachers. If you conducted the kind of study you designed in Activity 1, do you think it would be important to share the results with the participants? And if so, what effect do you think would be appropriate for you, as an adult researcher, to try to have on the girls' autonomous peer culture?

Chapter 4 Gender, Sexuality and the Family

Example of research: Differential discipline for sons

During extended fieldwork in rural Vietnam, Rydstrøm (2006) observed parents' and grandparents' interactions with boys and girls, and documents the harsh physical discipline that some fathers and grandfathers use with boys. She considers this physical punishment in the context of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which prohibits it, but also in the context of traditional norms of male power in Vietnamese society. She argues that deeply held notions of the honour due to older men shape how fathers and grandfathers react to boys who do not show respect and obedience to their male elders: 'they do not accept such opposition from a (male) youngster. The men lose patience, fly into a rage and end up using physical punishment' (343). In the process, they construct a particular notion of masculinity for boys, one that positions 'men as superior and powerful' but also as emotionally 'hot' and prone to violence. Through this kind of discipline and the form of masculinity it valorizes, Rydstrøm argues that a 'cycle of violence can be passed on from one generation to the next' (343).

Reflections on the research

As a Swedish researcher studying Vietnam, Rydstrøm's criticism of Vietnamese customs might imply that violence against children is not an issue in more developed Western settings. Unfortunately, violence against children is evident throughout the world.

Activity

Search the internet to learn more about corporal punishment laws and rates of violence against children within families in your own country. Activism aimed at reducing corporal punishment is also evident worldwide. For an example from Vietnam, check out the corporal punishment project of the Centre for Studies and Applied Sciences in Gender, Family, Women and Adolescents (CSAGA at www.csaga.org.vn/) in Hanoi. Then see if you can find some similar project in your own nation by searching online. How does comparing Vietnam to your country help you think about the complexities of defining abuse according to the UNCRC while also recognizing the unique context of each culture?

Examples of Research

Example of research: Judgements by others in everyday social interaction

In my own research (Kane 2006), I have explored how parents think about gendering their 3- to 5-year-old children in the USA. My interviews with 42 parents of children in this age range turned up many references to worries about how they or their children would be judged by others if they failed to live up to the gender expectations that surround them. Following other scholars in gender studies and symbolic interactionist sociology, I refer to this social pressure as 'accountability', the way in which we are all accountable to social assessment by others in the everyday interactions of our lives (see Chapter 2 for more on interactional-level social construction of gender). In my study, accountability to others was especially and frequently mentioned as a reason for encouraging young children to follow gendered rules when:

- The child in question is a boy, reflecting the greater social pressure for gender conformity placed on boys;
- The parent in question is a heterosexual mother, reflecting a general tendency these women felt to protect their sons from rejection by peers but also a particular concern about pressure from their children's fathers, who they say tend to judge gender non-conformity by boys harshly;
- Or the parent is gay or lesbian, reflecting the additional judgement these parents feel flows from a homophobic society; as one lesbian parent put it 'I feel held up to the world to make sure that his masculinity is in check' (169).

Reflections on the research

Activity

My research focuses on the idea of accountability, which I define as 'the way in which we are all accountable to social assessment by others'. In the three bulleted examples above, to what social pressures or assessments are parents accountable? And how might accountability affect:

- Parents of intersex children,
- Parents of gay or lesbian children,
- A single father raising daughters?

Example of research: Public policy shaping sexuality-related parenting practices

The title of a research study by public health researcher/advocates Baptiste and six colleagues (2009) summarizes nicely their purpose: 'Increasing Parental Involvement in Youth HIV Prevention: A Randomized Caribbean Study'. Working in Trinidad and Tobago, the authors note strong support from the Prime Minister's office. With increasing rates of youth HIV infection and low rates of condom use among sexually active male youth, the authors and other public health professionals in Trinidad and Tobago hope to see parents get more involved in communicating information and monitoring activity among their adolescent children. To encourage and test that outcome, they designed the 'Trinidad and Tobago Family HIV Workshop', which promotes 'effective parenting as a 'protective shield' around youth that buffers them against personal, social, and cultural sexual pressures' (497).

The researchers identified parents of 12- to 14-year-old children, randomly assigning the parents *and* their children together to either a control group that completed a general workshop or an intervention group that received the more intensive, targeted 'Family HIV Workshop'. Using pre-test and post-test questionnaires, the authors (2009, 495) conclude that the intervention had the following positive effects:

- Increased parental knowledge regarding HIV;
- Increased general communication with adolescents;
- Increased conversations about sex with adolescents, including conversations about sexual risks and sexual values;
- Increased monitoring of adolescents.

On the basis of these changes, the authors argue that the workshop intervention is an effective way to increase parental involvement in youth HIV prevention efforts.

Reflections on the research

Activity

How does this study reveal the role that research can play in activism? And what do you think about the way the workshop described in the study involves an active role for both parents and youth?

Examples of Research

Example of research: The intersection of race, gender and expert advice as parents navigate gender reaffirmation

US researcher McGuffey (2008) interviewed parents whose sons were participants in a group therapy program for sexually abused boys. McGuffey's participants were parents of sons who had been abused by other relatives, neighbours, family friends or babysitters, usually men. In an approach that attends to the role of race and class in shaping gender and sexual identities, he argues that parents often respond to the sexual abuse of their sons by engaging in a process of 'gender reaffirmation'.

- Worried that same-sex sexual abuse might shape their son's eventual sexual orientation, many parents sought to bolster their son's masculinity and heterosexuality despite the therapy programme's emphasis on gender and sexuality as fluid and all forms of gender and sexual identity as worthy of validation.
- McGuffey views the kind of hyper-masculine behaviour that has been identified among some sexually abused boys as shaped at least partly by parents: 'it is the parents in this study who push and encourage their sons' participation into hegemonic forms of masculinity out of their desire for heterosexual boys' (235).
- That hegemonic, or culturally validated, form of masculinity involves 'sports, the objectification of girls and women, emotional detachment, and homophobia' (235).

McGuffey finds this pattern particularly notable among non-white families, as the trauma of same-sex sexual abuse 'heighten(s) anxiety over racial subordination that increases their investment in traditional gender reaffirmation' (217). In other words, though generally of comfortable economic status given the cost of the therapy programme, the non-white families participating face the additional burdens of racial inequality in the United States, burdens that may make establishing a socially validated masculinity for their sons feel all the more important to them.

Reflections on the research

Activity

How do race and gender intersect in shaping the accountability pressures that the parents in McGuffey's study seem to feel? How do you think those pressures might differ if the parents were less economically secure?

Example of research: The voices of children from lesbian families

Lubbe (2008) explores the experiences of eight children in lesbian families in South Africa, a particularly interesting national context given nearly two decades of legal decisions that have significantly expanded the family rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people. In the author's own words, key aspects of the study are as follows:

- 'My interest for investigating lesbian-headed families is to explore what happens to children of lesbian parents when they move from their homes into the world and how they negotiate the possible difficulties inherent in inviting the world (in the form of close friends, classmates, peers, other significant adults) into their family homes' (327).
- 'I chose narrative inquiry (a series of in-depth weekly interviews) because it attempts to understand and represent experiences through the stories that individuals live and tell' (328).
- 'The findings revealed that a common denominator among all eight children was that they were acutely aware of the propensity of people to react in diverse ways to the notion of lesbian-headed (households) and the idea of such couples raising children. This awareness endowed them with unusual sensitivity that characterizes all their social interactions' (355).

Lubbe documents that the children she interviewed faced stigma and discrimination in some of their social encounters, but also support and acceptance in others, emphasizing social change and children's strength in actively negotiating their social worlds.

Reflections on the research

Activity

Consider Lubbe's research on the children of LGBT families in South Africa, as well as the patterns noted previously regarding gay and lesbian parents in four other nations by Stacy and Bibliarz (2001), Bos and Sandfort (2010), Clarke and Kitzinger (2005), Hicks (2008) and Švab (2007). What do you notice about variations by national context in the pressures surrounding parents as they gender their children and what strikes you as similar across these studies?

Examples of Research

Example of research: Sexual identity rights

Chan (2006) offers a detailed analysis of existing laws, conventions and policies related to what he calls 'sexual minority identities' in a global context, with particular attention to UK legal policy. He argues that the UNCRC should be applied to the protection of sexual minority identity rights of youth in the United Kingdom and globally.

Sexual orientation is a human development occurring primarily prior to or during adolescence. It should therefore be hoped that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – the foremost international instrument vis-a-vis children's rights that all but two states, namely the United States and Somalia, have ratified – would explicitly address the attendant issues and concerns in a legally binding framework. Unfortunately, the CRC fails to mention sexual orientation in its entire text (162).

He considers this failure troubling, but also asserts that it does not prevent the CRC from being applied to protect such rights. He goes on to argue in detail, using previous research studies, theories of adolescent development and a thorough review of legal decisions from around the world, that Article 8 of the UNCRC, the section that addresses the child's right to identity, should be applied to sexual minority identities of youth so that their autonomy and rights are respected fully. Regardless of what their parents or others around them may believe, Chan emphasizes the adolescent's rights.

Reflections on the research

The rights of 'sexual minorities' in general, and of 'sexual minority youth' in particular, are controversial, with some religions and nations more open to a variety of sexual identities than others.

Activity

How would more attention to 'sexual minority identities' in national and international law, such as the UNCRC, impact children, youth and families? What tensions do you think would arise as various nations considered the application of Article 8 to this topic?

Chapter 5 Gender, Sexuality and Education

Example of research: Race, class, gender and identity at school

Bettie (2002) conducted ethnographic research in a high school in California, United States, to explore intersections of race/ethnicity, class and gender among white and Mexican American high school girls. She finds that the white students were more often tracked in advanced courses than Mexican American girls, due to stereotypes of the latter group, which contributed to the upward mobility of white students. But among those who were upwardly mobile, she also found racial/ethnic differences in how they experienced that process of class mobility.

Whites often do not experience themselves as members of the racial/ethnic category white but as individuals. Without a cultural discourse of class identity, they do not readily experience themselves as members of a class community either. Evidence of this can be seen in the way white, working-class, college prep girls expressed their experience of how education was distancing them from their parents. They did not articulate this as a distancing from their working-class community; their pain was more often articulated in relationship to an individual family, not a people. For white working-class students, this can be an advantage. Their mobility is less complicated because they are not made to feel that they are giving up racial/ethnic or class belonging in the process. (420)

Reflections on the research

Bettie's findings have implications on the institutional level; she explicitly notes their relevance to social and educational policy, namely the importance of bicultural education in addressing the intersecting identities of students – in this case race/ethnicity and class – and in helping students understand 'the possibility of being middle class and maintaining a racial/ethnic identity of color simultaneously' (420).

Activity 1

The girls Bettie (2002) describes are all from working-class families, thus sharing the same starting point of social identity in terms of class and gender. How do their educational experiences shift what they might expect their class identity to become as they grow up, and why – according to Bettie – does that shift feel more complicated to the Mexican American girls than to the white girls?

Activity 2

How does your answer to the previous question document the importance of intersecting identities in shaping upward mobility?

Examples of Research

Example of research: Gender and scout camps in four nations

In a comparative study of four nations, Nielsen (2004) explores the consequences of two 'gender models': gender equality (focusing on equal opportunities for males and females) versus gender complementarity (focusing on different opportunities by gender but attempting to value them equally). Nielsen addresses the two models by 'studying children/young people who are in the midst of learning to apply' them (207), relying on observations at scout camps and interviews of scout leaders and scouts (ages 11–15) in Denmark, Portugal, Slovakia and Russia. Nielsen traces the gender models to socio-political and historical factors in each country, and identifies the role of scout leaders in fostering gender complementarity models in Russian and Portuguese camps versus gender equality models in Slovak and especially Danish camps.

- In Russia, 'the consequence of the complementarity model in this setting is a hierarchical structure created by the visibility of boys' contributions and the invisibility of the girls' (217).
- In Portugal, 'boys are excluded from the female sphere as much as girls are confined to it. At the same time, however, both genders maintain . . . a symbolic hierarchy of gender complementarity that places boys' psychological needs before those of girls' (218–19).
- In Slovak camps, Nielsen argues that boys are dominant, but also that the 'sheer existence of a discourse of gender equality provides girls with a language that they use to formulate their discontent' over their subordination (220).
- In Danish camps, '[t]he girls strive to make themselves allowed to be in the boys' arena' and any 'breach of the equality contract made the Danish girls angry' (222).

Reflections on the research

Nielsen's study highlights the fact that schools are not the only formal settings in which children are educated, with scout camps as just one specific example of an organized setting in which adults convey particular lessons to groups of children.

Activity

Along with scout camps, what other non-school settings do you think educate children about gender expectations?

Example of research: Gender, sexuality and HIV/AIDS education

In a 2009 study in South Africa, Bhana explores the role of gender and sexuality in HIV education in two Durban primary schools. Bhana analyses 'life-skills' lessons, focusing on the pedagogies and discourses that shape what students learn. Her evidence contains excerpts from classroom conversations between students and teachers during life-skills lessons. The teachers focus on transmission – rarely, if ever, referring to sexual transmission – and the care of HIV-infected persons, and neglect to incorporate issues of gender, sex and sexuality into the classroom discussion.

The pedagogical approaches at both schools did not engage with the cultures, lives and identities of young children, short-circuiting children's opportunities to develop into critical thinkers. Important in HIV/AIDS education is the forum for children to openly discuss HIV/AIDS, sexuality and gender . . . The social ramification of HIV/AIDS is evident in the ways teachers address issues around stigma, discrimination and discourses of care, and the ways in which discourses of sexuality are ignored, overlooked and silenced. (176)

Bhana suggests that teacher-training programmes could affect a valuable pedagogical shift in structuring HIV/AIDS education curriculum and programmes to highlight the relevance of social stigma and other social issues to HIV/AIDS.

Reflections on the research

Activity

Bhana concludes that 'pedagogical practice should tap into the rich potential of children, acknowledging their agency and sparking off discussion that can address divisive gender and other social inequalities reinforced by the epidemic' (176). How might schools like the ones in Bhana's study approach this? What kind of impact might any approaches you come up with have on the perspectives of a new generation of South Africans?

Examples of Research

Example of research: Masculinity in the kindergarten classroom

Jordan and Cowan (1995) explore 'what happens when children encounter the expectations of the school within their already established conceptions of gender' (728). The study is based on observation in an Australian kindergarten classroom and focuses on the warrior narratives in which boys engage: '[N]arratives that assume that violence is legitimate and justified when it occurs within a struggle between good and evil'. While in the classroom free play was encouraged, the teacher discouraged warrior narratives, leading to 'a contest between two definitions of masculinity: what we have chosen to call "warrior narratives" and the discourses of civil society – rationality, responsibility, and decorum – that are the basis of school discipline' (728). The pre-existing peer culture of boys and girls was both impacted by, and impacted, teacher treatment of students – the teacher intervened in cases where boys engaged with warrior narratives, but did not intervene when girls quietly played in the doll corner. Thus the girls experienced their peer culture as validated by the school, while boys experienced the school setting as discouraging their preferred enactments of gender.

Reflections on the research

Activity

In Jordan and Cowan's study, the teacher intervened to discipline boys in the context of their warrior narratives, but did not intervene with girls' playtime in the doll corner. How might these teacher interventions, or lack of intervention, disadvantage both boys and girls?

Example of research: Openly gay school athletes

Anderson (2002) investigated the experiences of openly gay athletes on school sports teams in the United States. Anderson's study is based on qualitative interviews with gay student athletes, over half of whom were open about their sexual orientation. In his words: 'I look to sport as a site of contestation for the construction and reproduction of masculinity by qualitatively investigating how gay athletes challenge orthodox assumptions of masculinity by publicly coming out as gay within their high school or collegiate athletic teams' (861). Anderson focuses on primarily heterosexual sports teams, and demonstrates that many openly gay male athletes have positive experiences on their teams, especially if they are strong players. Still, they felt pressure to conform to a heteronormative framework: '[T]he informants in this study were victimized by heterosexual hegemony and largely maintained a heteronormative framework by self-silencing their speech and frequently engaged in heterosexual dialogue with their teammates' (874). In Anderson's study, athletes' expressions of sexuality are shaped by the peer culture of their teammates, with heterosexual athletes able to express their sexuality while their openly gay peers are expected not to do so.

Reflections on the research

Anderson comments on how the acceptance of openly gay athletes as team members illustrates teams as a site of tolerance – even though gay teammates on dominantly heterosexual teams may not be accepted as gay, they are accepted as athletes.

Activity

Based on your own experiences or the experiences of others you know, what role do you think sports, and other extra-curricular activities, can play in changing the gender and sexuality-related peer culture within schools?

Chapter 6 Gender, Sexuality and Media

Examples of research: Gender, sexuality and music

Songs, chants and children's sexual agency

Izugbara (2005) uses field observation and focus groups to explore the role of musical verses in shaping local understandings of gender and sexuality in a Nigerian study addressing not mass media but local traditions. Recognizing boys as active agents in shaping their own peer culture, Izugbara seeks to illuminate 'the role of the verses in defining the erotic spaces and meanings on the basis of which young boys organize, constitute, and base their sexual conducts' (55). After identifying a series of songs and chants that were well known among the boys, Izugbara goes on to explore their impact. Though respectful of the songs and chants as elements of the boys' peer cultures and a potential source of positive sexual education and agency, Izugbara concludes that the verses express and construct a 'heady mixture of paternalism, aggression, systematic subordination of women . . . coupled with a rejection of homosexuality' and 'condemn female autonomy and agency' (72).

Objectification of women in popular song lyrics

Music conveyed through mass media in the United States is the subject of a research study completed by Bretthauer, Zimmerman and Banning (2006). They studied the lyrics of 100 popular, commercially distributed songs, identifying six separate gender-related themes that emerged across the lyrics. They argue that common among these themes is an emphasis on men's power over women, the treatment of women as objects and violence against women. With an audience primarily made up of adolescents, Bretthauer and colleagues consider the lyrics of these songs to send powerful messages about gender and heterosexual relationships.

Reflections on the research

These studies draw similar conclusions despite their very different geographic locations and their emphasis on local versus mass-marketed music. Treating songs as texts that convey social meanings, the authors of both articles argue that music enjoyed by adolescents can reinforce heterosexuality as well as traditional gender inequalities, celebrating male power, strength and control while casting girls and women in passive, subordinate roles.

Activity

Pick a popular song that you remember from your youth, and search the internet for the lyrics (there are a variety of song lyrics sites on the internet, such as www.azlyrics.com). Print out the lyrics, jot notes in the margins about any gender or sexuality related messages you think the lyrics convey and then reflect on what impact – if any – you think these lyrics may have had on your ideas about gender and sexuality.

Example of research: Star Wars and masculinities

Bettis and Sternod (2009) offer a close reading of the messages about masculinity in the six films of the hugely successful Star Wars series, focusing on social change over the 15 years between the first set of three films (released between 1977 and 1983) and the second set (released between 1998 and 2005). With attention to the intersections of race and class with gendered representations, they argue that the central character of the second trilogy, Anakin Skywalker, can be read as rejecting hegemonic masculinity. '... the contradictions between the man Anakin is becoming (emotional and loving) and the man the Jedi want him to be (controlled and stoic) cause him to rethink the hegemonic norms in which he was trained' (33). Bettis and Sternod go on to contend that Anakin's violent disfiguration in the final instalment demonstrates that 'men and boys who reject the dominant mode of masculinity put themselves at risk' (34). Though they consider other readings as well, a reminder that media content is open to multiple interpretations (a topic considered more fully in the third key question of this chapter), their argument that the films offer a critique of hegemonic masculinity is an interesting one to contemplate.

Reflections on the research

Most of the more traditional social science research reviewed in this chapter uses content analysis to measure the frequency of gender stereotypes and gender imbalances in representation in media texts. Bettis and Sternod's approach is not one of counting, but rather reading the same text in several different ways. As they put it, 'popular films can be read in multiple ways because they contain multiple and contradictory meanings' (22).

Activity

Select a popular film with a target audience that includes children or adolescents, and that you think has some kind of gender or sexuality related meanings. Briefly outline at least two different readings one might offer in terms of messages the film sends about gender or sexuality.

Examples of Research

Example of research: Race, gender and media messages about beauty

Gordon (2008) set out to measure the impact of media on African American girls, focusing on their attitudes towards the importance of appearance and beauty. Based on survey data from girls ages 13–17, Gordon explores exposure to what she calls ‘Black-oriented’ television programmes, songs/song lyrics and music videos as media genres and the girls’ appearance-related attitudes. She is particularly interested in how important ‘being (physically) attractive’ is to the girls themselves and how important they think it is to girls’ futures more generally. Most of Gordon’s conclusions are consistent with previous research, documenting that ‘exposure to and identification with media portrayals of Black women as sex objects whose value is based on their appearance may contribute to African American girls’ emphasizing beauty and appearance, either in their own lives or for girls in general’ (253). She concludes her article by hoping her findings ‘will spark continued exploration of how media portrayals can limit African American girls’ conceptions of who they are and what should be important in their lives’ (255).

Reflections on the research

Activity

Gordon suggests that media portrayals of African American girls and women have implications for youth media consumers. While we may not always be able to change what is portrayed in the media, we have the agency to influence how these portrayals are interpreted and to think critically about how these portrayals impact our lives. Jot a few notes about some ways one might be able to spread awareness and start conversations that remind media consumers of their agency to determine how media messages influence their lives.

Examples of research: Two studies of alternative youth cultures

Skater girls

Kelly, Pomerantz and Currie (2005) interviewed Canadian girls who participate in skateboarding culture, delineating how they used this alternative culture to distance themselves from the mainstream culture of femininity that other scholars have termed 'emphasized femininity'. In the local context of the girls interviewed, emphasized femininity was identified with girls who 'spent their time shopping for fashionable, sexy clothing; applying makeup; flirting with boys; and talking about fashion and popular music' (245). The skater girls, on the other hand, 'produc(ed) themselves in relation to alternative images found, for example, among peers at school, at skate parks, on the streets, in songs and music videos, in skater magazines (online and in print), and so on. The alternative authority of skater girl discourse gave the girls . . . room to maneuver within and against the culturally valued discourse of emphasized femininity' (245).

Emo gay boys

Peters (2010) draws on personal interviews, magazine articles and other cultural records (like photographs) to investigate how music and fashion are employed by gay boys who identify as 'emo' to define and shape a subculture. He describes the emo look as 'White, or at times vaguely Asian, with kittenish features, stick straight and dark hair, and milk white skin' (131). 'Its etymology comes from emotion(al), gesturing towards music and a lifestyle that prizes human emotions, structured through an aesthetic that emphasizes depth and seriousness' (132). Peters traces this phenomenon of the 1990s through to a more contemporary variation that is explicitly queer, marked by androgynous clothing and linked to a particular music scene, a 'distinction of emo' adopted by 'queer boys, between the ages of 14 and 22 (approximately) who are identifying with their homosexuality and who have adopted emo style to express their desires as an aesthetic that counters both gay and straight mainstream visions of (hyper)masculinity' (135).

Reflections on the research

Focusing on mainstream mass media may imply a homogeneous popular culture in which all children within a given geographic area internalize the same media messages and behave in very similar ways. The skater girls and the emo gay boys serve as reminders that many alternative subcultures exist, and youth are active agents in forming them, in part by drawing on alternative media and consumer goods like music, magazines and fashion. In both cases, though, they are in dialogue with more mainstream conceptions of femininity or masculinity too, conceptions they reject but cannot ignore.

Activity

Write a paragraph outlining how dominant conceptions of masculinity and femininity affect and shape the subcultures created by the skater girls and the emo gay boys, and addressing how the development of these subcultures demonstrates both the potential for, and limitations on, youth autonomy in relation to media messages.

Chapter 7 Gender and Sexuality in Children's Peer Cultures

Example of research: Primary school 'studs'

Renold's (2007) observations and interviews in UK primary schools began with the assumption that children's peer cultures are a pivotal site for social analysis. As she puts it, children are 'active constructors and mediators of their social worlds and realities and worthy of study in their own right' (280). Renold explores how boys relate to the status of 'boyfriend', a status that was fraught during the late primary school years. It had the potential to mark the boys positively as heterosexual but also negatively as linked to girls and romance: 'boys were confronted with the paradox that being a boyfriend could be both masculinity confirming and masculinity denying' (293). Following three pre-teen boys as case studies, she documents three approaches to refining the position of boyfriend:

- *Narcissistic*: little emotional intimacy, dismissive treatment of girls, focus on sexual relationships with girls
- *Romantic*: emotionally intimate, focus on love and romance with girls, but combined with frequent assertion of masculine interests like sports
- *Platonic*: sensitive and easy-going friendships with girls, heterosexualized through minor physical activities like holding hands, which allowed friendships with girls to confirm rather than deny masculinity

All three approaches required careful negotiations during daily interactions within their male peer cultures to ensure the desired masculinity-confirming outcome. Though all three boys 'established themselves as the "studs" of the school . . . they drew upon the discourses of heterosexuality and invested in and capitalized on their dominant status and position of privilege as the stud of their class in very different ways, each producing different versions of a heterosexual masculinity' (285).

Reflections on the research

This study documents both a general pattern of emphasizing heterosexuality as well as variations among the boys in how they creatively negotiated multiple variations on heterosexual masculinity. Depending on the level of focus one applies, children's peer cultures usually include both some general patterns and some variations.

Activity

Thinking back to your own earlier school experiences or school-aged children you know, identify an example of a general pattern related to sexuality within a local peer culture and an example of sub-types or variations within that broader pattern.

Example of research: Public space, public policy and children's interactions

Studying playgrounds in multicultural neighbourhoods in Amsterdam, Karsten (2003) focuses on children's agency. Like Evaldsson, though, she also attends to the role of adults and public policy in shaping the context in which children develop their peer cultures. Her article begins with a series of questions: 'what can be said about gendered ways of playing, of using space and spending time? How does gender interact with other structuring principles such as ethnicity and class? How do children themselves confirm and contest gender divides? How do the design and equipment of particular playgrounds enter into the gender dynamics of play?' (458). The broader pattern documented by this research project was one of gender-segregated play in which boys' peer groups were larger and tended to dominate and control the physical space. But Karsten also reveals variations, with some girls challenging traditional gender divides, especially when their female peer groups were relatively large. Given that boys were more likely to engage in ball games and girls to use playground equipment like swings, slides and climbing structures, playgrounds with greater space allocated to that kind of equipment tended to attract a larger number of girls and allow them the larger peer groups that facilitated more challenges to traditional divides. That pattern leads Karsten to assert that the design of public playgrounds should include consideration of how they 'can serve both boys and girls equally' such that 'play opportunities may help children to cross rigid gender divides as and when they want' (471).

Reflections on the research

Activity

Walk through a public playground or park where children are present, or think back to any playground or park you are familiar with from your past or work you currently do with children. Do you notice any patterns in terms of how boys and girls interact in both gender-segregated and gender-integrated groupings? Do you notice any variations by age or ethnicity? And how, if at all, do you think the physical layout of the space and equipment might shape the opportunities for gendered peer interactions? (If you walk through a public playground or park, do so just briefly and casually, as any formal observation of children at play may require explicit permission in order to be acceptable within the ethical guidelines of your college/university.)

Examples of Research

Example of research: Policing and transgressing gender boundaries at camp

Researchers McGuffey and Rich (1999) analysed how 5- to 12 year-old boys and girls interact at a summer day camp in the United States.

- Drawing on the concept of hegemonic masculinity (introduced in previous chapters), they attend to 'how hegemonic masculinity is manifest in middle childhood play and used to re-create a gender order among children wherein the larger social relations of men's dominance are learned, employed, reinforced, and potentially changed' (609).
- 'Since boys and girls tend to organize themselves into gender-homogeneous groups, they are generally aware that their sphere of 'gender-appropriate' activities has boundaries. When they transgress these bounds, they enter a contested area that we refer to as the 'gender transgression zone' . . . it is in the GTZ that we should expect to find continuities, as well as changes, in the construction of 'gendered' activities and thus the definition of what is hegemonically masculine' (610).
- The authors conclude that it is only the highest status boys (defined primarily by athletic ability and successful enactment of hegemonic masculinity) who were able to redefine gender boundaries when they wish to do so, because their masculinity is not in question. These boys could, for example, engage in hand-clapping games normally associated only with girls while still being viewed as appropriately masculine. If lower-status boys entered the GTZ, their masculinity was questioned and their behaviour negatively sanctioned by peers. Thus, even when gender boundaries were crossed, the authors argue that they were ultimately maintained and even reinforced.

Reflections on the research

Activity

Identify a peer who attended camp as a child, or who has worked as a camp counselor, in a setting that included boys. Describe McGuffey and Rich's basic findings to them; ask if they think similar patterns were evident in their own camp experiences, and if not, why they think their particular camp context may have been different from what the authors documented.

Example of research: Intersectionality and bullying

Daley, Solomon, Newman and Mishna (2007) document peer bullying of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth in Canada, with a particular focus on intersectionality. A series of quotes from their work capture some of its key conclusions:

- 'The perspectives of professionals and peer youth advocates working in LGBT communities suggest the importance of an intersectional approach in conceptualizing and addressing bullying among LGBT youth. Simultaneous and interacting experiences of oppression – based on gender, race/ethnicity and newcomer/citizenship status – may result in differences in the forms and experiences of bullying, as well as differences in the availability of appropriate and effective support and intervention' (23).
- 'The importance of the intersection of sexual orientation and gender in experiences of peer victimization is evoked in key informants' identification of gay youth whose gender expression is more stereotypically feminine and transgender females (male-to-female) as more likely to be bullied compared to those youth whose gender presentations ostensibly conform to their sex or who are transgender males (female-to-male). This dynamic may be accounted for through a consideration of the role of homophobia in regulating masculinity' (23).
- 'Strategies which are narrow in focus may require LGBT youth to prioritize which experience (e.g., sexism, racism, homophobia or xenophobia) they put forward. This, in itself, is a form of violence in its negation of youth's lived experience' (24).
- 'Programs or interventions that, in effect, require LGBT youth to leave part of their experience and other aspects of their social identity at the door seem unlikely to provide effective responses to bullying' (26).

Reflections on the research

This research offers an important reminder that not only can bullying be based on a complex set of intersecting inequalities, with children and youth targeted on the basis of multiple identities, but also that victims' willingness to access services may depend upon how sensitive service providers are to intersectionality. Understanding these young people's experiences, and designing interventions to support them, cannot be accomplished well without an intersectional perspective.

Activity

Search the web for an anti-bullying program or initiative in your area that focuses on sexual orientation. Review its mission or overview to see if it includes any attention to intersecting forms of inequality, and consider what you find in relation to Daley and colleagues' argument that narrow strategies can 'negate youth's lived experience'.

Examples of Research

Example of research: Queer youth activism in urban schools

In a critical review of scholarly literature on the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth in urban schools in the United States, Blackburn and McCready (2009) stress youth agency by identifying student activism as an important theme. Like many scholars, activists and advocates working on LGBTQ issues, they refer to members of this community as queer, an inclusive term that makes room for many varieties of gender and sexuality-based expression. The authors detail three types of queer student activism most evident across the research literature: students initiating and leading professional development trainings for their schools' administrators and teachers; students introducing new materials into their schools' curricula by providing them to teachers or directly to peers in class; and GSAs. In terms of GSAs, the authors note both successes and the need for continued refinement of the model. 'GSAs hold tremendous promise as organizations that support the development of queer youth in schools . . . However, there is a growing number of studies of GSAs that suggest that queer youth who attend urban schools in non-White, multi-racial, poor, and working class communities experience difficulty starting and/or accessing their schools' GSAs' (226). Like Daley and colleagues' Canadian study of anti-bullying programmes, noted in a previous research example, this study concludes with a call for adult advocates to attend to intersectionality. 'Urban educators working with queer youth need to understand and be prepared to address multiple social and cultural issues that intersect with sexual and gender identities. This necessitates an intersectional analysis' (229).

Reflections on the research

Even in this brief summary, you can find language that suggests youth agency and autonomy as well as language that suggests adults (teachers and administrators) or schools as organizations are responsible for shaping the experiences of youth.

Activity

Re-read the summary, and take note of phrases that you think highlight youth agency versus adult responsibility. How do you think adult and child/youth involvement can best be balanced in creating more inclusive climates within schools? What tensions do you think are likely to arise between adults and children/youth in schools as that balance is established?