

## Workshop report

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| <b>Topic</b>      | <b>: Gendered understandings of sexual consent and coercion among youth</b> |
| <b>Date</b>       | <b>: Saturday, 14 March 2009</b>  |
| <b>Venue</b>      | <b>: Diakonia Centre</b>  |
| <b>Time</b>       | <b>: 08:30 - 12:30</b>  |
| <b>Attendance</b> | <b>: 35 participants</b>  |

### **1. Introduction**

The Democracy Development Programme (DDP) and Agenda co-hosted a workshop aimed at gauging the perceptions / views of youth in the greater Durban area on gender-and-sexual relationships and the different ways in which they communicate sexual consent and coercion.

The workshop provided a platform for young people to openly express perceptions / views about sex and sexuality, gender and relationship dynamics. The discussions generated cross-generational inputs, as participants comprised both school-going and working youth.

Specifically, the workshop intended to inquire:

1. How they (men and women) understand / construct their gender-and-sexual identities?
2. How do they understand, define and differentiate between sexual coercion and consent?
3. How do they negotiate (communicate) consent and refusal of sexual intercourse in relationships and how do they understand and interpret such communication?
4. What factors inform their understandings of rape, sexual coercion and consent?

This workshop was the first in a planned series of three that will be held in different parts of greater Durban. The purpose of the workshop series is to:

1. raise awareness of the issues around sexual consent and coercion among the participating youth; and
2. document the experiences and views of the youth on the issues/challenges that face them, and develop a proposal for possible interventions (research and development) to address them

Participants were divided into three focus groups to soliciting their responses / views on a set of perceptions about men's expectations of women drawn from Nyameka Mankayi's case study of young men in the South African military<sup>1</sup>- see appendix A.

The following section presents a summary of the main propositions that emanated from the group discussions and the corresponding responses from participants.

## **2. Main propositions and responses**

### **2.1 Society essentialises gender identities. Men and women are made to think of gender as a natural / biological construct.**

*"As a man I can say I feel oppressed sometimes. Yes, sometimes I do take advantage of the privileges that "culture" and society. Sometimes its nice coz it allows us men to do certain things without feeling bad. But sometimes I feel oppressed because I' expected to conform to someone else's vision of what I should be..."*

*"There are biological differences between men and women". Physically some of our body parts are different and they do different things".*

*"Women can get pregnant, men not. But beyond that the rest is the making of socialization".*

*"Men and women think and behave differently. Most people believe it's a natural thing and so it can't be changed".*

### **2.2 This kind of essentialism negates the fact that sexual identity does not end with male and female and treats everything outside the innate male/female categories as gender/sexual anomalies - that need to be corrected.**

*"What about people who have both body parts? What does that say about this man/woman thing?"*

*"For me the fact that there are people who have both male and female sexual organs means that society is wrong to just focus on men or woman...If God didn't want it, there wouldn't be people like that"*

*"For society you are either a man or woman and that must go with your sexual preferences"*

*"Yes, society does not accept of gay men. We have heard some of our political leaders say it's against culture. But I feel that society is even harsher on lesbian women. Look at all the killings that have happened"*

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<sup>1</sup> Mankayi N. (2005) Masculinities, militarization and unsafe sex practices: a case study of a young man in the South African military, Agenda, No.63, pp. 66-78.

### **2.3. Communication between men and women in relationships is difficult.**

*"Men are stronger than women. They are upfront and vocal about what they want...It's easier for them to say and enforce what they want in relationships. Women are afraid to say what they want. That's why there are all these problems".*

### **2.4 Different factors shape communication between men and women, including gender-power.**

*"But women are sometimes confusing, sometimes you think they are saying no and then they contradict themselves". Sometimes they are just silent and as men we are expected to just know what they want"*

*"As women we have to find better and stronger ways to communicate. We can believe that by being silent we are trying to communicate. But who will understand us. Look now, no one understands our sometimes passive or silent resistance"*

### **2.5 Culture expects women to behave / act in a "socially desirable" way.**

*"Culture is also used to deny us women our freedom"*

*"Like in Umlazi women are not supposed to wear pants. There is still a pending case of a woman who got beaten up and stripped for wearing pants. Women also can't wear miniskirts. Whose body is it? How does it violate men if women wear what they want?"*

*"Women can also be promiscuous, but culture expects them to be responsible." Women know men sleep around its normal, but not right".*

### **2.6 Culture conflates gender and sexual identities and codifies social roles.**

*"According to my culture. Zulu culture. Men and women do different things. Women must take care of the household and men must provide the means for the woman to maintain the household. Women can be consulted in the process of decision-making but the man is ultimately the head and has final say".*

*"We see at home how the parents raise us differently. At home the girl will be told to be at home early and if you are late you will be punished. As a girl you have to come and help the mother cook. But the boy can come late and the mother will say hi my boy your food is in the kitchen.*

### **2.7 If gender is a social construct, gender identities should be fluid.**

*"If I want to assume qualities associated with being a man, why should I not be allowed to do that? It should be my choice"*

## **2.8 Men use sex to prove / legitimate their manhood and dominance over women.**

*"Some of us guys, we consider sex with a woman as conquering her". You can watch her walking by and can say to your friends, Ja, I got her".*

*"Some of us will have sex with many women because that makes us feel powerful".*

*"Then, some girls will fall for the guy who they know has the most girlfriends. It's like we win a prize if we get to be with the one who many other girls are attracted to"*

*"It's not because men are strong that they say what they want. They just want to be seen as not amagwala. Because society teaches men that a man who is afraid is not a real man".*

*"When men feel they want something, like if I want to do sex with a woman, I won't think about ukuphoxeka, and be afraid. But women will be afraid to say, even if they want it too".*

*"But it's important to point out that there are differences between men and men as much as there are differences between women and women".*

*"The problem is that society pushes men to all look, sound and behave the same. Like, there is a script to be followed for being a man and women or something"*

## **2.9 For women relationships are generally about more than sex**

*"Sex should be the last thing in a relationship, there is a lot of other things, there is trust..."*

## **2.10 Women have to reward men with sex for satisfying their material needs**

*"To get the benefits they have to give sex". "Men want sex because they provide".*

## **2.11 Meanings of rape/coercion/consent are not fixed**

*"The issue of rape/ coercion is a problem. There is the language of the law on the one side and the language of the bedroom on the other. In bedroom language, if as a guy I invite you to my room and you agree. Or if I buy you things and you accept them then it means you accept to be my girlfriend and accept to sleep with me. That's just how it is"*

*"It's hard to know what is coercion versus outright rape. If I "talk" you into having sex with me or buy you things, does it mean I have coerced you?"*

## **2.12 Socialisation is very complex, sometimes we don't know where it starts and ends.**

*"It's everywhere, at school, church, home, in the media, with our friends - we are always trying to fit in. There is so much pressure from all sides. As a young person, sometimes I feel like I don't know my own thoughts anymore".*

### **2.13 Manhood (or masculinity) is equated with power and strength and womanhood (or femininity) is associated with weakness.**

*"We are told that a man is a forceful person, then some of us men think force will always get you what you want".*

*"It presents problems in relationships. I mean, if I know that I can get my way, why should I try to negotiate my way? It's a real problem for relationships".*

*"As women we expect a man to hit us if we don't give in to what he wants. So some of us won't fight hard enough to say we don't agree"*

*"Men are stronger than women...men given power over women as a child". "Men are the leaders of the house".*

### **2.14 Society applies double standards when it comes to women and sexuality.**

*"For men it's fine to have many partners"*

*"But when we have many sexual partners as women we are whores"*

*"Women are not supposed to be sexual. As women we must not show that we enjoy sex...because the man will say oh! You have been around"*

*"This thing is very dangerous...It means that as women we have to hide our desires. But we can't hide our desires from ourselves, so we hide them from society because we know we will be judged. Some of us have multiple partners but we will hide it"*

### **2.15 To say that women know how men think and vice versa is to legitimize the script that society has developed for men and women.**

*"Each man or woman is an individual. For example, I'm not the same as my brother here. So how can a woman say that they know all of us who happen to be men, or how can men say they know all about women?"*

### **2.16 Culture is a powerful tool to enforce conformity.**

*"I am a very strong believer in culture. There are many things about culture that I respect...but I don't respect the way it gets used. Sometimes it's not helpful. Now we don't even know what culture is and what is people's interpretations anymore..."*

*"Take virginity testing. The argument is that it helps girls feel proud about their girlhood and encourages them to keep themselves "pure". But then what happens to the boys. They're not expected to keep themselves "clean" until they marry like it's expected of the girls. And the girls must just accept these boys or men who have been having sex with other people, even though they have kept themselves clean. What is this practice really about? Who's interest is it serving"*

### **2.17 The meaning of culture and society should be contested.**

*"I worry sometimes that we treat culture like religion. Like, God said it must be so, so we can't change this or that. Even if it kills us, we must stick to it because its culture". "We keep talking about society? Who and what is this faceless thing called society?"*

### **2.18 Relationships between men and women do not always have to be about sex.**

*"There can be alternative kinds of relationships. But some of us don't understand that".*

## **3. Main themes**

Arising from the above repertoire of issues, there were at least five main themes that overarched the group discussions, including

- Communication,
- Relationships
- Power and agency
- Culture
- Gender and sexual identities

## **4. General observations**

The workshop was a resounding success. It inspired the participants, especially the school-going ones, to be open and honest about their views of sex and sexuality.

This was evidenced by the general observations made by some of the participants at the end of the workshop: *"It was my first time to be in a space like this where I can speak frankly, among people older than me, about things like sex. We don't get to talk like this to our parents and our teachers". "More spaces like these should be created". "We would like discussions like these in our schools". "I work with peer educators; we would like to work with you to train our peer educators".*

## **5. Way-forward**

Moving ahead, the DDP will replicate the workshop in two more areas and thereafter convene a reflective meeting with all those who participated in the workshop series with a view to developing a programme for a sustained

discourse on gender and sexual relations amongst youth and to identifying concrete interventions to address their challenge.

## **Appendix A**

### **SOME PERCEPTIONS OF MALE AND FEMALE SEXUALITY**

- Interviewer : **Are men and women different?**  
Daniel : *Yes!*
- Interviewer : **Why are they different?**  
Daniel : *For, if we weren't so different, we wouldn't be together.  
...At the end of the day, we (men) want to see female sexuality because it's opposite. That's what attracts us...  
it's important that we (men) see female sexuality to be turned on by us (male sexuality)*
- Interviewer : **How do men sexually relate to women?**  
Daniel : *(women) are objects that make us feel good...*  
Thulani : *We go to girls having this in mind and we tell our minds, if she can arrive here..., I will kiss her, have sex with her.*
- Mtombeli : *You see a woman...you start having feelings for a woman. Even if you know that you have your own partner...I think it's something natural.*
- Ricky : *And, then, no, as to promiscuity, it's a no-no, see. You can't go on and be promiscuous, while saying you have a thing with me as a girl. But at the same time, me, I do accept that you must understand, if you do catch me, that I'm promiscuous, say no, it's a man's thing...*
- Interviewer : **Does the feelings of women matter in men's sexual fantasies?**  
Daniel : *...sex with women is very much centred on the male's needs...  
...the man has had her. He's conquered her...because you want an end result. The end result is that you want to have sex with this woman. So, if you go take her out, and you're courting her, make her feel special, there is a possibility that you'll have sex with her. So, that's why you do it.*
- Interviewer : **What do women want out of a relationship?**  
Daniel : *Women look at different things*

Interviewer : **What different things?**  
Daniel : *While men think sex, sex, and more sex, what's going through the mind of a woman is somebody that made her feel good, that was nice, that seemed trustworthy.*

Interviewer : **How do women relate to men?**  
Daniel : *Women know that men want...  
...that sex, generally, is going to be the thing that's going to attract the men to them. Knowing this, sex (as in sexual intercourse and sexual intimacy in general) is often used as a tool to get the man...  
...women realise a lot of our (men's) self-esteem is tied up with sex and sexual performance, that's why they fake it more. That's why they fake the extreme pleasure.*

Interviewer : **Do you mean women do not have wild sexual fantasies?**  
Daniel : *(Don't) want to have a woman who is comfortable watching pornographic movies with me. I don't want a woman like that. Women who like pornography are not confident about (their) own sexuality... (that's) men's stuff...*

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