Chapter 11

Sexuality, sexual norms and schooling: Choice-coercion dilemmas

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Much literature around the globe has discussed public control over female sexuality (Moller Okin 1999; Phillips 2007). This chapter reports on a longitudinal study undertaken with girls involved in a project addressing gender violence in schools in Ghana, Kenya and Mozambique. We explore and question the concepts of consent, coercion and choice in relation to girls, sex and schooling, and examine the role of the project in shifting discourses around gender, sex and sexual coercion.

An important strand of the international literature focuses on adolescent girls' sexuality and the contradictory expectations placed on girls. On the one hand, representations in the media and the fashion and beauty market are geared towards sexualisation of female bodies (McRobbie 2009). At the same time, ideals of virginity and innocence are still alive and well and girls' sexuality is regulated accordingly with girls seen as the bearers of sexual morality (Ringrose and Renold 2013). Girls' dress is seen as a signifier of female sexuality and is regulated accordingly, whether this is through European moral panics over child sexualisation as evidenced by 'porno-chic' dressing, or at the other end of the spectrum the debates on whether the Islamic headscarf should be banned in school as a marker of women's oppression (Duits and van Zoonen 2005). Meanwhile boys' or men's clothing are not subject to such scrutiny or regulation, nor is their

sexuality which is frequently assumed to be natural if not uncontrollable in the face of the temptation of female bodies (Gavey 2005).

In the field of international development, sexuality tends to be either ignored or framed as a problem and related to violence, disease and population control (Jolly 2007) and risk behaviours (Boyce et al. 2006), despite its centrality to development goals (Jolly 2010a; Jolly, Cornwall and Hawkins 2013). Women are seen as lacking sexual agency whilst men are stereotyped as sexual predators, and this 'bad sex' discourse closes down spaces to talk about pleasure and sexuality in relation to empowerment. Susie Jolly criticises the failure to link sexuality to other aspects of life, particularly to poverty, leading to assumptions that decisions about sexual practices are made at an individual level, rather than influenced by wider societal features (Jolly 2010b).

The 'bad sex' discourse is further overdetermined in work on adolescent sexuality in relation to girls' schooling in the Global South. Sex has been associated with pregnancy and school dropout, with HIV and with sexual violence (Wilkie 2012). With sexuality often viewed in clinical health terms, education is tasked with providing information about the mechanics of sex (Humphreys, Undie and Dunne 2008). In Sub-Saharan Africa, however, even the mechanics of sex are often omitted from the curriculum, under pressure from religious authorities and the abstinence lobby – both locally (Taleb 2007) and donor led (Campbell and Gibbs 2010). Chilisa (2006) examines how sex education teaching in Botswana has been influenced by colonisation and its Western and Christian values with its emphasis on abstinence, married heterosexuality and suppression of desire. She contrasts this with 'traditional' sex education, in which she claims that desires and pleasures were acknowledged and celebrated at puberty in some African countries, although often female sexuality was still ultimately controlled by men particularly in relation to early

marriage. Vavrus too, in an ethnographic study of sex education in rural Tanzania, traces the disconnection between sex education messages from an international NGO, school staff, families and in peer group discussions (Vavrus 2003a). For both Chilisa and Vavrus, the 'intended' curriculum is lost in a palimpsest of confusion and clashing values, and girls continue to be denied knowledge and choice.

A dominant discourse in development literature is that educating girls acts as a 'vaccine' against HIV, early marriage and pregnancy and high fertility rates. Whilst some research finds that where sex for schoolgirls is taboo contraceptive use is low (Gordon and Mwale 2006; Jemmott, Jemmott and Fong 1998), others find that being at school or doing well in school links to safer sexual practices (Grant and Hallman 2006; Marteleto, Lam and Ranchhod 2008). Surveying 282 former students of a school in Northern Tanzania, Vavrus (2003b) found that these young people tended to associate hard work with avoiding sexual temptations, whilst 'idleness' upon leaving school (usually due to lack of employment opportunities) was linked to sexual desire and sexual risk taking. Contraceptive use was very low amongst the sexually active young people surveyed. This starts to point to a relationship between sex and schooling that is far from straightforward.

These discourses within education suppress discussion about girls' experiences of sex, and so may increase the potential for coercion in girls' sexual encounters. Coercion takes many forms in relation to girls, sex and violence. Whilst sexual assault and rape are often based on the use of physical force, less tangible but also of critical importance is the role of sexual coercion through the imposition of a power differential, whether by age, gender, position of authority, economic disparity or other forms of inequity that enable a person to wield control over another. Exchange sex for goods or grades combines a number of these differential power relations. Whilst many studies in sub-Saharan Africa highlight asymmetry common in sexual relationships and

associated risks such as more difficulty negotiating condom use (Luke 2005), they have not tended to examine the concepts of coercion and consent closely, and particularly not in relation to schooling (though see Moore 2007, and Heslop 2013 for exceptions). Likewise, whilst sexual violence is an increasing focus of policies and interventions internationally (Parkes 2014) what it really means is rarely questioned.

Our view of sexuality is that it is socially constructed, with taken for granted aspects of sexuality including desires, practices and identities shaped by normative discourse and social practices. These discourses are multiple and sometimes contradictory, contextual not universal, shared not individual, and reproduced through social institutions (Foucault 2002; Weedon 1987). What we understand as coercive, consensual or forced sex is shaped by dominant discourses around us, including those conveyed in popular media and legal definitions. However, sexual violence continues to be under-acknowledged (Gavey 2005). Whether experiences are considered violations or just normal sex will influence how these experiences are performed, resisted or responded to. These subjective dimensions have led researchers in northern contexts to discuss sexual violence as a continuum with some sexual experience sitting in the grey area between mutually desired sex and rape (Burt 1980; Berger and Searles 1985; Kelly 1988). Gavey (2005) argues that the discourses of aggressive desiring males and passive undesiring females within normative heterosexwork act as the cultural scaffolding of rape. As she says: "Violence can be thought of as a technique to enforce one person's will only when other, more subtle forms of persuasion (coercion) are not successful" (Gavey 2005, p.10).

Coercion is closely related to notions of *structural violence* – including the institutional practices in families, schools, communities and legal, political and economic processes that reproduce dominant discourses and prohibit forms of agency and choice around gender and sexuality in poverty contexts. This constraint on agency and choice is a form of *symbolic violence* (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004). Symbolic violence takes place when coercive and violent practices that perpetuate unequal social relations may be (mis)recognised by their protagonists as normal or acceptable, and can help us understand why, for example, in some contexts women may view intimate partner violence as a sign of love (Jewkes et al. 2001). Whilst the dictionary definition of coercion ('persuade (an unwilling person) to do something by using force or threats' (Oxford University Press 2013)) incorporates persuasion of an unwilling person, we question the notion of 'free will' for girls negotiating sex. In a context of poverty, for example, girls may actively 'choose' because they cannot envisage another option, or because other options may be closed to them. For example, exchange sex may be chosen to ward off hunger or to purchase resources for school (Hallam 1994). However, we also acknowledge that girls in these contexts sometimes do recognise, criticise and actively challenge some of these norms and institutions that can produce forms of violence.

From this perspective coercion is multi-dimensional, extending beyond individual acts of force to encompass the multiple intersecting inequalities that constrain choice. At times, paradoxically, the inequitable norms and institutions can also be protective. Prohibiting girls' movements outside the home may for example reduce the likelihood of their being exposed to danger. We will explore these tensions in this chapter. In our work with a project addressing violence against girls in schools, the links between coercion and intersecting inequalities have become

increasingly central to our concerns, often proving particularly resistant to interventions. Below we describe this project, before investigating these coercive processes, the ways in which girls negotiate them, and the potential of an NGO to expand the sexual choices girls have and make.

The project

Our research was part of a multi-partnered project led by ActionAid in Kenya, Ghana and Mozambique. The project – funded by a Big Lottery Fund strategic grant – ran from 2008 to 2013. Its overall aim was to enable girls to enjoy rights to education in a violence free environment, through working towards four outcomes concerned with improved legislation, more girls in school, reduced levels of violence, and girls more confident to speak out on violence. It was conceived as combining three arms which would be mutually reinforcing and enable systemic change at multiple levels: advocacy and campaigning; community-level initiatives; and research[i]. The project worked with 45 primary schools and their local communities across the three countries, each within a district locality. These were: Wenje division, Tana River District in the northern part of Coastal Province of Kenya; Nanumba North and South in the Northern Region, Ghana; and Manhiça district in Maputo Province in Southern Mozambique. The project areas in Kenya and Ghana are both remote and rural. The communities practise Islam and Christianity and combine different ethnic groups, some of whom have a history of conflict, which is often resource related. One of the groups in the Kenyan site is nomadic pastoralist, and farming is the other main source of livelihood. The project area in Mozambique is on the main road traversing the country, near the capital and therefore with better communication, including more access to mobile phones and electronic media, higher

levels of mobility and migration for work (including South African mines), more diverse employment opportunities in industry and farming and higher levels of HIV/AIDS. However, all sites experience high levels of poverty, illiteracy and gender inequalities and poor access to basic services such as electricity and running water.

The baseline study, undertaken in 2009, provided a snapshot of how gender, violence and education were understood and manifested in these project communities and helped inform the design of the intervention. It found that a quarter of girls overall had experienced sexual violence in the past year, mainly in the forms of touching intimate body parts, sexual comments or peeping, but that only a very small minority took any action to challenge the violence. It led to the design of a longitudinal study to help us to better understand the complexity of girls' lives in relation to gender, violence, poverty and education. The longitudinal study was aimed to examine how girls' capacities to challenge violence and inequality changed over the course of the project, and the role of family, school and community and formal protection systems in supporting this change. A conceptual framework was developed to guide the research which, as outlined in our discussion of sexual coercion above, emphasised not just acts of physical or psychological violence, but also the interactions and institutions (or symbolic and structural violence) surrounding these acts (Parkes et al. 2013).

Thirty-six girls, aged 8-17 years, from four primary schools participated in the study in each country. Data was collected over 4 waves (Oct 2011, April 2012, Nov 2012 and March 2013). The final wave was combined with an endline study, which repeated the mixed methodology of the baseline (Parkes and Heslop 2013). For the longitudinal study, ethnographic approaches were adopted as much as possible within the timescale and resources available: for example the same researchers undertook repeated visits to build familiarity and trust with the girls and others

in each community. We made conscious efforts to avoid singling out the nine girls in each school, for example including their friends in some of the activities. These included home-schools walks to elicit girls' perception of risk in their communities, and drawing 'rivers of life' as a way to discuss family backgrounds and change over time. We also interviewed the girls' teachers and headteachers at each wave and spoke to their parents, boys in their class, girls out of school, and various stakeholders[ii] in certain waves.

We paid special attention to conducting child friendly research and following high ethical standards through developing a research protocol[iii] . All researchers interviewing girls were female and they combined a set of qualities for undertaking this kind of sensitive research with an understanding of the local area. All teams were trained in ActionAid's child protection policy, which sets out appropriate conduct for working with children and procedures for dealing with abuse reported by children. One particularly challenging area was the relationship between the researchers and girls. While building a good rapport was critical to enable girls to speak openly about their lives, and particularly about sexuality and sexual violence, there was a risk of generating emotional dependency. On the whole we found that girls talked more openly about sexual matters in group situations, although usually in relation to 'other' people rather than themselves. Whilst this creates challenges for us, we recognise the importance of paying attention to the silences as an important part of local discourses on sexuality.

Below we describe the sexual norms experienced and articulated by girls in the project communities and the role institutions played in producing, amplifying and maintaining these discourses.

Gender and sexual norms

Repeatedly, pupils, teachers, parents and community leaders involved in the research articulated a discourse of school girls as non-sexual. Teenage sexual activity was therefore not spoken, and instead excluded from the discourse of the (good) school girl. Sex and schooling were seen as incompatible, as explained by these girls:

> When a man calls you, you can tell the man you are a student and run away. (Sherifa, 10 years, Ghana)

> My teachers especially our female teachers advise us about issues concerning sex. That sex is meant for the married people not school children. (Mwanahamisi, 14 years, Kenya)

Chastity was emphasised in children's own comments on ideal femininities. Girls talked of the importance of being obedient, respectful, attractive and intelligent, doing duties, dressing decently and most importantly not going out with boys at night, having boyfriends or getting pregnant. In contrast, popular boys were expected to be tough, handsome, confident, in control, able to defend oneself, able to provide/have money, and do well at school. Whilst these stereotypical femininities and masculinities were evident in all three project contexts, in the Mozambique project area, where global, modernising forces are more evident, there were also allusions to alternative, 'risky' femininities and masculinities such as boys drinking and fighting and girls having boyfriends.

Both Christian and Muslim religious teaching tended to reinforce normative gender codes, with compliance, chastity and modest dressing emphasised for girls. Although the need for boys to refrain from chasing girls and abstain from sex was mentioned there was more emphasis on girls staying away from boys, with an underlying inference of a natural predatory wildness of boys:

At the mosque and makaranta (madrasa) they have been preaching that girls should not play with boys because when you are going to school they might impregnate you and when they impregnate you and you go to the house and they won't provide your needs and will not give you money. (Nura, 9 years, Ghana)

Children tended to comply with this, often speaking positively about what they gain from their religious community, but some girls questioned the double standards given to girls and boys about sexual behaviour:

Religion is supposed to influence children to behave positively but I don't know what happens to the same society, as the same boys that are taught how to behave well. I hear stories of the same boys raping girls or even making some girls pregnant, this is a contradiction to the Muslim teachings. I think that they don't take their religion seriously, if religion was taken seriously most problems facing society could not be there, it is as if religion allows men to behave badly. (Hana, 15 years, Kenya)

Schools were also key sites for reinforcing these dominant discourses of female chastity. Whilst there is a mandate in all three countries for schools to deliver a curriculum on sex and relationships, how this translates into practice is highly variable. Many girls, particularly younger girls, said they did not get any education on sex and relationships, whilst others were taught about sex in science, social studies, citizenship or 'life skills' lessons. These lessons tended to focus on information on puberty and hygiene or on girls staying away from boys, reinforcing discourses circulating about sex and gender stereotyped norms:

We have been taught about relationships with boys, that we will get pregnant when we have been seen with boys. We were taught these in the first term. We have been also

taught on our dressing. We shouldn't wear revealing clothes because it can entice the boys. We are also taught these things since we were in class. (Mary, 14 years, Kenya)

Many girls talked about the disgrace, particularly of pregnancy, where the evidence of sexual interaction can no longer remain hidden, and of shame on families and social ostracism from friends:

> They make fun of girls who get pregnant so that they will know what they did is not good. (Laila, 14-17 year old out of school girls focus group, Ghana).

> This has happened in my community several times to some of my friends and relatives, when my friend became pregnant last year, people did not want to associate with her, I also had to distance myself from her company because people might think that I was also involved in the same acts. (Meresha, 15 years, Kenya)

Such stigma is reinforced by discriminatory laws and policies, such as the policy in Mozambique of sending girls who are pregnant or mothers to night school (Wilkie 2012)**.**

Similar messages were also reiterated in the home. Many girls spoke of family members warning of the dangers of interacting with boys:

> We haven't spoken about that [sex, relationships or marriage] but my grandmother tells me that I have to run away and not to provoke people in the street. (Natasha, 10 years, Mozambique).

> My parents don't talk about sex, relationship or marriage. They only tell me to keep off from the boys because they will make me pregnant. (Mwanahamisi, 14 years, Kenya)

The silences around sex education meant that many girls lacked knowledge about contraception, and pernicious myths circulated, such as tying a charm around your waist to ward off pregnancy, or grinding glass to induce an abortion. A few girls did speak about learning about safe sex, including condom usage, more commonly in the Mozambique project area. But what is clearly in evidence here is how the way girls talked and thought about sex and gender was shaped by the institutions around them. Girls, in particular, were seen as the upholders of sexual morality and responsibility was placed on them for keeping boys' untamed sexuality at bay, denying the possibility of female desire.

In the next section we see how these norms help produce coercion in girls' sexual encounters, and examine different forms of coercion girls' experience.

Sexual coercion in the project communities

Given the myriad of arguments against sex, it is not surprising that most girls in the study were reluctant to admit to having sexual relationships. Yet some girls did admit having boyfriends. They agreed that there were a range of reasons for girls having sexual relationships including love and desire, pressure from boys and men, and most commonly material reasons:

> It's true girls may love or desire sex but most girls go for sexual practices to access needs as to acquire sanitary towels when parents cannot provide them with that so boyfriends do. (Selina, 13 years, Kenya)

> I know of a friend who got herself pregnant because her mother could not afford and her father was no more and a boy promised her he will help her and the day they had sex for

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the first time she got pregnant. This my friend was attending primary school and that brought her education to a stop but the boy continued his education. (Salima, 14-17 year old girls focus group, Ghana)

There were both traces of blame and sympathy in these girls' voices, with some acknowledgement of the wider structural constraints of poverty on girls' choices. Some girls made active, conscious decisions to use their relationships to help them meet goals in life, such as continuing with their education, or to gain status. Some discussions suggested that girls may have a reasonable amount of negotiating power in getting the material things they wanted, or in decisions to continue or end the relationship:

When I date somebody who does not help me I leave him, since he doesn't help me in anything. He doesn't give me soap, doesn't dress me, should I add on my parents' expenses with a boyfriend? (Marlene, 14-17 year old out of school girls focus group, Mozambique)

However, girls also spoke about the use of force if girls refused to engage in sex, echoing Gavey's assertion about rape being used to enforce will over someone when more subtle coercive approaches fail (Gavey 2005). This suggests that girls who may be 'choosing' to have sex for material gain may actually have little choice at all:

Yes there are intergenerational relationships. I don't know why,...some girls only want the money that men give in exchange of sex. When some refuse, there are men who beat them up. (Carmen, 14-17 year old girls focus group, Mozambique)

Girls also 'chose' to have sex in the hope of marriage. Marriage was highly valued in the project communities and there were strong expectations from families for girls to marry whilst they were

still young. A desirable potential husband would be able to provide financially (including paying a dowry), which can be seen as an extension of a sex exchange relationship. Girls may be 'choosing' for love, domestic or financial security, or to meet societal expectations:

> He told me that he wanted to marry me and he got me pregnant while I was still studying and lived with my parents, at that time he was 24 years old. (Florência, 14-17 year old girls focus group, Mozambique)

A few girls distinguished between girls who have relationships for love (with the hope of marriage) and those who have them for material gain. The latter, in their view:

> are not serious persons because they don't really love and the day the money finishes she will no longer remain with that person. My advice is for people to stay with boyfriends or husbands that your heart fancies and not your pocket. (Stélia, 14-17 year old out of school girls focus group, Mozambique).

However, more often our data indicated that girls' expectations of love and marriage were inextricably linked to expectations of financial security and the two were not easily separated.

Some girls explained that age differentials influenced the level of control that girls had in relationships. Although larger age gaps could place more limits on girls' agency within the relationship, they could also entail higher levels of material gain for girls, which may encourage girls into these relationships despite the disadvantages:

> If you involve yourself with someone of your father's age is because you feel you can handle it, no one is forced to. That is why I think people should not fool themselves and should find someone of their own age cohort. I am 18 years old and my husband 23, that's why I am in a position of negotiating some of the things. Even the issue of having a

son just because you're in the household does not make any sense; we have to grow up a little bit. He could reach 25 years of age and myself 22, that would be appropriate because I still want to study. (Alcinda, 14-17 year old girls out of school focus group, Mozambique)

Occasionally, girls talked about sexual relationships with teachers. Again, they debated the amount of 'choice' girls had in entering into these relationships, though often they viewed these as coerced, as in the case of a Ghanaian teacher enticing girls to help in his home, or the teacher in Mozambique who 'grabs the small ones, he says 'if you want to pass, give me what's yours' (Maria, 14-17 year old girls focus group, Mozambique). Girls could agree to sex with their teachers because they were aware that there could be favourable consequences such as improved grades, material rewards, or to gain status (a teacher being seen as having good credentials for marriage). More often, girls found it difficult to say no or were worried about the consequences, such as being failed in their exams or other punishments that the teacher was able to enact. Teacher-pupil relationships illustrate a combination of power differentials based on age, authority, status and economic resources.

Some girls in Ghana talked about coercive supernatural forces in them engaging in sex.

There are some boys in the class and when they befriend you and you refuse they will lock you in a padlock. You fall in love with them and when they don't need you they will unlock you. (Asibi, 14 years, Ghana)

The taboos around schoolgirls having sex made it almost impossible for girls to acknowledge sexual desire. As a result it is difficult to know whether reasons such as fear of witchcraft were

sometimes used as a smokescreen for mutually desired sex. And in a context of poverty and where exchanging sex for goods or money is a norm, defining the boundary between consenting and coercive sex, and how much agency girls have in these relationships, is extremely difficult. However, clearly evident in this murky grey area that falls between forced and consenting sex are forces of structural violence (such as poverty) and symbolic violence (such as expectations of men as providers or lack of acknowledgement of girls' sexual desires).

The murkiness of the boundaries around sexual coercion make intervention immensely challenging.

Disrupting discourses? The role of the intervention

The project worked at multiple levels to address issues related to gender, violence and sexuality, but with uneven success (Parkes and Heslop 2013). Working directly with girls and boys, the project instituted girls' clubs and boys' clubs in schools. Reflect circles[iv] and advocacy activities[v] encouraged community members to discuss and deliberate on gender, rights and violence. Workshops and training sessions involved teachers, community members and district officials, and the project promoted the development of school level policies on gender-friendly schooling. The project also worked at national level to strengthen clarity and consistency in national laws and policies, and at local level to support the enactment of laws and policies on gender, violence and education, through for example strengthening the ways formal and informal justice systems worked together on violence against girls.

This project work helped to strengthen girls' capacity to challenge violence, in for example heightening awareness of laws and response mechanisms. Girls' clubs were key sites where girls learned what actions to take in cases of violence:

> They told us that when something happens to us we can come to them so that they will report the case to the police. If a boy rapes you or he is disturbing you, you can come and report to CAT[vi] and when your house people are disturbing you, you can go and report to them. (Laminu, 15 years, Ghana).

> I learn things about domestic violence. I learn that when somebody meets you in the street saying 'I want to marry you', you should say NO and afterwards stop using that path. Now that I am in the club I learn to read and answer questions, make drawings of a person beating the other. The meaning of the drawing is that the one beating will go to jail. (Maira, 8 years, Mozambique).

As well as increasing girls' confidence to challenge violence, the girls' clubs seemed to have been instrumental in generating female solidarity and a discourse emphasising the importance of girls' education. Project work with parents too influenced family dynamics, with some girls talking about how their labour in the home reduced:

> These days I come to school every day, I don't absent myself from school on market days and my father told my mother not to let me sell things in the market during school hours. I have also learnt a lot from the girl's club and I was part of the advocacy team which went to the market to talk to parents who keep their girls in the market during school hours and so I am happy. (Issah, 12 years, Ghana)

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However, the emphasis on violence in the project tended to steer the discussions towards how to deal with sexual aggression and reinforced the emphasis on how to say no to sex, rather than how to make and communicate decisions about sex and ensure that any sex is safe and wanted. The risk is that the project, with its emphasis on child protection and challenging violence ends up reinforcing discourses of the chaste schoolgirl, who is responsible for maintaining her own chastity and keeping boys at bay. However, girls in Mozambique were sometimes taught about condoms, and in this more modernised context, with broader networks of information and communication, girls' clubs appeared to be more effective at enabling girls to break silences on taboos around sex and sexual violence, and to report violence with more confidence than in the more remote, rural areas of Kenya and Ghana (Parkes and Heslop 2013).

When asked how girls and boys can be helped to have safe, healthy relationships, some girls also acknowledged the importance of working with boys, which had been largely missing from discourses circulating in project communities. The project may have had some influence there, as activities with boys have increased towards the end of the project, with the development of boys' clubs possibly influencing ideas about male responsibility. Sometimes however, there was criticism of the project's tendency to protect girls through positioning boys and men as perpetrators.

> You people of ActionAid should stop making boys and girls enemies and thinking that having boyfriends is bad. I have boys and girls as my friends. (Dusila, 12 years, Kenya).

The focus on violence, punishment and on acts of violence involving (male) perpetrators and (female) victims can all too easily reinforce the criminalisation of teenage sex. It seems that girls

were helped with some very useful strategies to avoid unwanted sexual advances, but in doing this desire on the part of girls was denied.

Whilst the project had some success through national and district advocacy work, with data indicating increasing action to challenge violence against girls by government officials over the course of the project, a recent speech by an education official at an inauguration of girls' club executive suggest that there is still a long way to go:

> Basic school girls who get pregnant should be punished severely to serve as a deterrent to
> their peers. She said that the government was investing so much in education of the girl-child
> and that any girl who decided to waste such resources through loose morals should be made to
> re-pay such investment. (Deputy Director of Education and Head of the Inspectorate at the
> Ghana Education Service, World News.Com 2013).

At all levels, there is a clear need to challenge the blaming of girls as well as boys, and to consider the bigger picture of intersecting inequalities and structural violence.

Conclusion

> If we don't provide a cultural context which clearly spells out that sexual relationships should
> be built around women's sexual desires just as much as men's, then heterosex is doomed to be
> a site conducive to coercion of women. (Gavey 2005, p12)

The 'cultural contexts' discussed in this paper are complex, variable and fluid, but although the project has shifted some attitudes, knowledge and practices on gender and violence, it has clearly

not provided a context for teenage sexual relationships built around women's sexual desires. Sexual coercion in these contexts is shaped by structural and symbolic violence, in particular poverty, expectations of marriage and males providing in relationships, and age and authority asymmetries in sexual relationships or encounters blur the boundaries around sexual consent. Discourses emphasising female chastity (particularly in relation to schoolgirls) feed into sexual coercion, and are articulated through schools, families and religious institutions. The denial of female desire and sexual agency in discourse makes discussion around (and identification of) consent, coercion and force particularly difficult. In promoting a discourse of girls' empowerment and education and in helping girls to recognise and challenge sexual violence, the project may have unwittingly exacerbated silences around sexual relationships and a pre-existing discourse of sex as automatically violent, closing down space to discuss the complexities of sexual coercion, agency, decision making, bodily integrity and safe sex.

Interventions need to find ways to open up discussions with girls and others about how institutions and taken-for-granted norms shape sexual coercion and how they can be disrupted. This is particularly challenging given the strength of taboos around teenage and particularly adolescent girls' sexuality. Success in increasing support for girls' empowerment could be built on by expanding this concept beyond education, economic success, and female solidarity to include bodily empowerment. Project staff needs to build specialist skills in these areas. There have been some successful interventions that are framed around adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights and closer working between education and health programmes could help to develop this area. At the same time, the variations between contexts in this project caution against one size fits all approaches, and show how projects need to be tailored for and

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responsive to specific contexts. Particularly in more remote and rural communities, there can be deeply entrenched taboos around openly discussing sexuality, particularly in relation to girls and young women. Faced with such challenging contexts, NGO staff can lack the skills and understanding of how to effectively create safe spaces where norms around gender and adolescent sexuality can be openly discussed and reflected on. Further, conservative attitudes among project staff themselves can create additional barriers to addressing these sensitive issues.

 Notions of structural and symbolic violence expand the ways research is able to conceptualise coercion, but there is a continuing need for research to explore the dynamics of coercion and mutuality in specific contexts, including the complex and active ways in which girls – as well as boys - resist and rework their positioning within constraining discourses around gender and sexuality. Disrupting discourses, we believe, is about reflecting in research and practice on our own attitudes, and creating discussions in schools, communities, government departments and the media, as well as listening to young people themselves, and working with them to analyse, question and reframe the discourses around sexuality and schooling.

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[i] Seven different partner organisations had responsibility for these areas of work in the three countries, working with ActionAid, who had management oversight of the project in country and internationally. The research was carried out by national research partners (Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique, Catholic University of East Africa in Kenya and Child Research and

Resource Centre (CRRECENT)/Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition (GNECC), and coordinated by the Institute of Education, University of London team.

ii These included school committee members, government community leaders, traditional leaders, religious leaders, women's group leaders, activists connected to the project such as Community Advocacy Team members (CATs - community members supported by the project to respond to cases of violence, in particular by linking communities with formal reporting and support systems, members of the police, and those with district level responsibility for education, health and children) at certain waves.

iii See Parkes and Heslop 2013 Appendix 1 for the Research Protocol, which discusses Research design, ethics and safety, and researcher selection, training and communiciation. The research was also awarded ethical approval by the Institute of Education's ethics committee and followed local protocols in the three countries.

iv Reflect is an adult literacy approach developed by ActionAid as a key element of their development programmes. It is based on Paulo Freire's thinking on political consciousness raising about inequalities and incorporates practical social action on issues concerning group members. In this particular project Reflect circles are run with parents and discussion centres around issues of gender, violence and education.

v Advocacy activities include members of girls' clubs talking and to other girls and community members in market places about violence in schools and girls' education, and parents committed to the issues becoming Parent Peer Educators and visiting other families' homes to discuss how parent's can help protect girls from violence and support their education.

[vi] Community Advocacy Team members (CATs) are community members supported by the

project to respond to cases of violence, in particular by linking communities with formal

reporting and support systems