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To cite this article: Joanne Cassar (2019) Ethical implications in teaching and learning about intimate partner violence and femicide prevention, *Education Inquiry*, 10:1, 76-93, DOI: 10.1080/20004508.2018.1476001

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/20004508.2018.1476001>



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Published online: 25 May 2018.



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Ethical implications in teaching and learning about intimate partner violence and femicide prevention

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ABSTRACT

This article explores a number of ethical implications that could arise in classroom situations when tackling the topic of intimate partner violence and femicide prevention with adolescent students. Due to their disturbing nature these topics might cause distress to students. The elimination of these topics from school curricula aimed at avoiding potential emotional risks also raises a number of ethical issues. These concern the reproduction of silences that shroud the topics of intimate partner violence and femicide in some cultures. The song “Love The Way You Lie” by Eminem and Rihanna is presented as a teaching tool that could be used to navigate the exposure of material that could be ethically sensitive. The song revolves around the theme of intimate partner abuse and could be considered an example of how violence is made acceptable and normalised through cultures that permit and perpetuate it. Insights from a diffractive methodology are employed to suggest that the use of the song for educational purposes is regarded as potentially helpful for students to think diffractively about the lived realities surrounding interpersonal violence and femicide. The article discusses a number of implications this has for educational curricula.

KEYWORDS

Ethics; intimate partner violence; femicide; education; adolescent romantic relationships; diffractive methodology; Barad; posthumanism

Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) poses a global hazard of “epidemic proportions”, which requires “urgent action” (World Health Organization, 2013, p. 3). Dating violence among teenagers has been reported to occur even with girls aged 11 years old (Black et al., 2011, p. 49). The representation of violence against women has taken diverse cultural forms. Music cultures revolving around the genre of rap and hip hop are one example. The theme of IPV is a common one and it frequently comes across through misogynist and sexist lyrics, which accentuate sexual objectification and degradation of women (Adams & Fuller, 2006; Conrad, Dixon, & Zhang, 2009; Enck & McDaniel, 2012; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009). Misogynistic themes first became prominent in hip hop/rap songs in the late 1980s and they still pervade the current music scene through widespread dissemination via television, radio and the Internet. The theme of misogyny is intertwined with portrayals of sexualised women dominated by men (Conrad et al.,

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2009). Content analyses of popular music lyrics have shown that close to 40% contained sexual references and the majority transmitted messages that were sexually degrading and often accompanied mentions of other risk behaviours such as violence and substance use (Primack, Gold, Schwarz, & Dalton, 2008). Hip hop/rap music shapes attitudes towards domestic violence and “may contribute to the creation of a social climate in which violence is viewed as acceptable” (Adams & Fuller, 2006, p. 953). Additionally, men have been found to be more accepting of rape myths if they watched music videos with sexual undertones (Kistler & Lee, 2010). Distorted conceptualisations of women’s sexuality have produced a dominant discourse in music videos (Oware, 2009). Misogynous thinking and rap/hip-hop consumption among adolescents are positively correlated (Cundiff, 2013).

This article draws on the popularity of rap and hip hop music among teenagers, in order to explore the potential use of Eminem’s and Rihanna’s song “Love The Way You Lie” (LTWYL) in classroom learning situations aimed at engaging adolescent students with the topic of intimate partner homicide (IPH) and IPV. Additionally, it focuses on a number of ethical implications that could arise in classroom situations when students and teachers discuss the text of this song, in order to make sense of the challenges that IPV and femicide prevention entail, especially in cultures where interpersonal violence results from systemic and structural social injustice. The ethical implications revolve around aspects in teaching and learning that could potentially create a sense of uneasiness when tackling sensitive issues around IPV. The teaching of decision-making skills to avoid risky sexual encounters with intimate partners requires that ethical standards are met during learning interactions. This article foregrounds a number of ethical issues that could arise in classroom situations when making connections between the lyrics of LTWYL and references to real-life situations, in which students could be immersed. These constitute points of inquiry aimed at informing educators. The article inquires into the possible consequences and benefits of IPV prevention in school settings amongst young people and demonstrates an acknowledgement of “the intertwining of ethics, knowing, and being” (Barad, 2007, p. 185). The study positions students as learners and creators of knowledge through their engagement in discussions about the song’s lyrics.

This article is based on theoretical perspectives on femicide and IPV prevention and lacks empirical evidence on tested pedagogical methods that adequately respond to particular needs of adolescent students as they venture out in the dating world. The article does not suggest a particular teaching strategy and does not outline detailed pedagogical methods that tackle IPV prevention in curricula, in order to allow spaces for culturally specific learning situations. It suggests, however, diffractive thinking (Barad, 2007, 2014) as a perspective that could be adopted by students. In so doing, the article is intended to make a contribution to knowledge about IPV and femicide prevention among adolescent students through their engagement with this topic in classroom settings.¹

Although not all young people like to listen to rap/hip hop, adolescents are more likely to consume these types of music than other generations. The global popularity of rap/hip hop music shows that it transcends race, gender and class (Rose, 2008). For a number of young people, LTWYL and similar songs might not be part of their music cultures, but the themes they convey could be an indicator of their social world.

Although the complexities surrounding interpersonal violence and femicide cannot be grasped through one song, the lyrics of LTWYL could potentially be used to present a number of issues related to IPV, which can serve as a learning tool for students to engage critically with these topics. LTWYL is therefore regarded as a teaching resource to facilitate classroom discussions aimed at generating more awareness about the nature of IPV and its prevention.

IPV could lead to multiple risks, such as mental health problems and self-harm. Education targeted at young people before they start dating might be useful in preventing teen dating violence and subsequent adult IPV (Noonan & Charles, 2009). Although the story presented in LTWYL is located in a heterosexual context, it is also relevant to situations concerning gay, lesbian, transgendered, bisexual, queer and intersex people. Scholarly research on hip hop and how it relates to social activism emerged a number of decades ago, emphasising also how it could be employed as an educational resource (Söderman, 2013) and voice for marginalised young people (Sernhede & Söderman, 2012). The use of music as a pedagogical instrument has been documented earlier by Ahlkvist (2001), who demonstrated how rock and heavy metal can be employed in the teaching of complex sociological concepts, such as class struggle, alienation and racial inequality. Stovall (2006) explored the use of hip hop in the teaching on social inequities. Hip hop cultures mediate shared meanings amongst refugees and young people of the host country as they strive to make sense of political turmoil and shared histories by engaging in memory work that constructs new identities (Lindholm, 2017). Sánchez (2007) examined the power of music to develop empathy in students and help them overcome feelings of personal guilt and powerlessness. Hip hop has also been successfully used in an HIV prevention programme aimed at adolescents at risk (Wallace, Thompson, & Rhodes, 2011).

Conceptual approach

The article draws insights from a posthuman, new materialist approach, with an emphasis on “diffraction” (Barad, 2007, 2014) to explore teaching and learning about the prevention of IPV and femicide in school settings. Posthumanism focuses on the material embodiment of phenomena (Barad, 2007). A posthuman new materialist methodology employs concepts of the physical world to articulate psychic, cultural and social spaces (Barad, 2007). Through this perspective the dissemination of LTWYL and the engagement of its listeners/viewers with it are understood as constituting the very phenomena that it represents. Within this conceptual framework the lyrics are not considered as being merely comprised of words. They also enable agency through the ways they shape interpersonal dynamics within romantic relationships. The analysis of the study highlights the materialities connected with the lyrics. In classical physics, diffraction occurs when waves interfere and overlap each other when a wave encounters a slit or an obstacle. A diffractive methodology in research examines the mutual involvement of social practices and discourses, how these “overlap” and influence each other. A diffractive analysis involves a process of examining situations through other situations. This is done by focusing on entanglements that ensue. Diffractive methodologies are useful in exploring, discovering and creating new ways of thinking and behaving as a result of the “dynamic relationality to the other” (Barad, 2007, p. 93).

This method uncovers realities that already exist and those that are in the making. This perspective brings me to understand the links between pedagogy, ontology and ethics and how they operate to produce new knowledge and realities through mutual constitutions of entangled entities. Teaching and learning about IPV and femicide prevention are dynamically intertwined in various ways with each other. Teachers' and students' subjectivities are embedded in material circumstances and social norms that could be in conflict with each other. Working through a diffractive process entails working with differences even as they emerge from the coming together of perpetrators and victims of gender violence. Barad argues that the production of knowledge is not simply about producing facts but about "making worlds" (2007, p. 91) and it is also about taking ethical responsibility for this "worlding" and for knowledge production. Ethical responsibility is crucial and inevitable:

Crucially, there is no getting away from ethics on this account of mattering. Ethics is an integral part of the diffraction (ongoing differentiating) patterns of worlding, not a superimposing of human values onto the ontology of the world (as if fact and value were radically other). (Barad, 2010, p. 265)

I employ this thinking to construct IPV as an obstacle to a meaningful life and to happiness. I argue that teaching students to face and deal with this "obstacle" could possibly save lives. A diffractive reading of LTWYL provides insights through "attending to and responding to the details and specificities of relations of difference and how they matter" (Barad, 2007, p. 71). Diffraction is metaphorically employed to show that differences in the messages conveyed through the lyrics sung by Rihanna and Eminem could make a difference as to how students might come to understand interpersonal violence and femicide prevention. This perspective holds that gendered power relations as described in LTWYL cannot be grasped and analysed only through the meanings and interpretation of the lyrics, but also through actual relations embedded in human interactions affected by IPV. A posthumanist framework does not present a uniform approach to data analysis. This explorative feel allows me to work diffractively with the meaning of the song's lyrics in ways that take into consideration my own subjectivities. Working diffractively with and through difference means recognising the "materializing potential" (Barad, 2007, 210) of the lyrics that could possibly transform its oppressive, subversive messages into insights on the liberating power that freeing oneself from IPV holds.

The use of diffraction as a methodology to think about ethical implications for teaching and learning about femicide and IPV prevention appears to be relatively unexplored. There is an increasing number of studies that employ diffractive methodologies in educational research (e.g. Bozalek & Zembylas, 2016; Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2013; Palmer, 2011; Snaza & Weaver, 2015), even with regard to sexuality education (e.g. Cameron-Lewis, 2016; Renold & Ringrose, 2017) that is presenting important knowledge on the implications for curricula, policy development and pedagogical practices. Educational research that employs diffractive methodologies is based on refiguring traditional conceptualisations of subjectivity and agency in educational practices and on contesting conventional understandings of asymmetries of power and resources (Lynch, Rowlands, Gale, & Skourdumbis, 2016). Mitchell (2017) shows how diffraction in a Baradian sense could empower students to become agents of change by

going beyond reflective practices and tap into the transformative and productive potential that relationalities present. Mitchell argues that personal and ethical dilemmas arise regarding particular curricular outcomes. She queries whether students are asked to report unsettling incidents that can potentially reveal the extent of their vulnerability and sense of powerlessness or whether they are encouraged to react to imagined situations. She draws on a new materialist approach that centralises the importance of matter in establishing socially just pedagogical practices through the recognition of Barad's understanding that matter and meaning are not separate entities (2017, p. 169).

Since this article is restricted to theoretical perspectives on femicide and IPV prevention I acknowledge its limited capacity to empirically demonstrate how pedagogical practices can actually benefit from adopting a diffractive approach. The lack of direct engagement with the subject matter of this article "in the real world" could have created a sense of estrangement between myself and the issues explored. In order to bridge the "ontological gap" between word and matter (Barad, 2003), I have brought my own experiences of IPV to the study as witnessed amongst people I know. My positionality is also shaped by my own years of schooling which were devoid of any discussions and curricular material on issues about gender violence and marked by silences that were damaging. In my analysis of ethical implications surrounding learning about IPV I also draw on my years of teaching experiences that address gender issues in intimate relationships. In spite of the limitations of this study, theoretical suggestions on working diffractively could be potentially effective in addressing ethical issues in teaching and learning about gender violence prevention, since they are "suggestive, creative and visionary" (Barad cited in Dolphijn & Van Der Tuin, 2012, p. 50). Cameron-Lewis describes diffraction as an "affirmative reading method" (2016, p. 491) which she employs to examine oppositional thinking in the teaching of pleasure and danger in sexuality education. Barad holds that "diffractive readings bring inventive provocations; they are good to think with. They are respectful, detailed, ethical engagements (Barad cited in Dolphijn & Van Der Tuin, 2012, p. 50).

Eminem the Superman and a Burning Rihanna

Eminem has sold over 70 million albums worldwide. The lyrics of his songs expose an array of social problems related to domestic and intimate violence, which are intertwined with parental abuse, gang violence, abandonment, social exclusion, drug addiction, poverty and even fantasised murder and rape. A number of his songs are considered homophobic and misogynist and others promote violence against women (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009). Through his lyrics, Eminem depicts "a deeply personal and detailed portrait of *alienation experience*, a chaotic expression of pain, suffering and retribution" (Halnon, 2005, pp. 442–443; italics in the original). The popularity and appeal of his rap songs could imply widespread acceptance of racism and violence against women. Eminem has nevertheless received constant criticism for the dark references of his lyrics since the late 1990s when he became known (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009). He has been described as a "genderphobe" because of his strong accusations rooted in homophobia and critique of gender behaviour (Stephens, 2005). Negative criticism and backlash, however, tend to fuel more popularity and repeatedly

demonstrate that Eminem is “not afraid of self-ridicule” (Dawkins, 2010, p. 466). Misogynistic lyrics in rap music are not unique to Eminem (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009).

Eminem’s personal history of alleged spousal abuse, and Rihanna’s own experiences of IPV (Enck & McDaniel, 2012) made publicly known, suggest a link with the lyrics of *LTWYL*. In 2009, hip hop singer Christopher Brown was arrested in connection with allegations that he had beaten his girlfriend Rihanna and for making felony criminal threats. Following this highly publicised episode of dating violence and ensuing conflicts, the couple has reunited many times, even while Brown was under probation for allegedly banging Rihanna’s head against the passenger window of the car in which they were riding, punching her in the eye, biting her and ultimately putting her in a headlock until she lost consciousness (Stephens & Eaton, 2017). The couple continued communicating flirtatiously on social media and they reportedly attempted to make each other jealous with new lovers (Benjenstorf, 2012; Bull, 2012). After Chris Brown’s probation period ended, it was claimed that the couple began to go on public dates again (Bull, 2012). Four years after the initial incident Rihanna released an upbeat duet with Chris Brown, suggesting a confirmation of their ongoing intimate bond (Eells, 2013).

Accounts about the lives of celebrities, as they come across the media, are an indication of social values (Gorin & Dubied, 2011). The private lives of Rihanna and Eminem are intertwined with their public persona, which transmits, performs and enacts cultural configurations of domestic abuse. *LTWYL* was released in 2010 and achieved international acclaim. During the writing of this paper, the song had 1,107,626,045 views on YouTube. The following excerpts from the lyrics show the contrast between Rihanna’s lamentation, imbued with a sense of submissiveness and complacency, and Eminem’s messages indicating a plethora of contradictory feelings and thoughts associated with remorse, shame, vengeance, anger, revenge and threats:

Rihanna (Chorus): Just gonna stand there and watch me burn
But that’s alright because I like the way it hurts
Just gonna stand there and hear me cry
But that’s alright because I love the way you lie

Eminem: ... I’m Superman with the wind at his back, she’s Lois Lane
But when it’s bad it’s awful, I feel so ashamed I snapped
Who’s that dude? I don’t even know his name.
I laid hands on her, I’ll never stoop so low again
I guess I don’t know my own strength

Rihanna (Chorus)

Eminem: ... You swore you’d never hit ’em; never do nothing to hurt ’em
Now you’re in each other’s face spewing venom in your words when you spit them
You push, pull each other’s hair, scratch, claw, bit ’em
Throw ’em down, pin ’em
So lost in the moments when you’re in them
It’s the rage that took over, it controls you both
So they say you’re best to go your separate ways ...

Rihanna (Chorus)

Eminem: Sound like broken records playing over but you promised her
 Next time you show restraint
 You don't get another chance
 Life is no Nintendo game
 But you lied again ...

Rihanna (Chorus)

Eminem: Now I know we said things, did things that we didn't mean
 And we fall back into the same patterns, same routine
 But your temper's just as bad as mine is
 You're the same as me
 When it comes to love you're just as blinded
 Baby, please come back
 It wasn't you, baby it was me
 Maybe our relationship isn't as crazy as it seems
 Maybe that's what happens when a tornado meets a volcano
 All I know is I love you too much to walk away though
 Come inside, pick up your bags off the sidewalk
 Don't you hear sincerity in my voice when I talk
 Told you this is my fault. Look me in the eyeball
 Next time I'm pissed, I'll aim my fist at the drywall
 Next time? There won't be no next time!
 I apologise even though I know its lies
 I'm tired of the games I just want her back
 I know I'm a liar
 If she ever tries to fucking leave again
 Im'a tie her to the bed and set this house on fire

Ethical issues

Learning about femicide and IPV prevention touches on personal issues related to identity, self-image, self-awareness, self-care and self-esteem. Ethical responsibilities on the part of educators to speak about the causes and consequences of IPV and IPH are entangled with concerns about how to deal with these sensitive domains of the human personality. Pertinent ethical issues primarily revolve around the possibility that the lyrics could be harmful to students and that the negative messages they convey might further reinforce and accentuate female subjugation. Questions arise as to whether it is appropriate to present this song for discussion with students, bearing in mind that interpersonal violence is a sensitive issue. There might be over identification with victimised girls as portrayed in the song. Students who see themselves at risk of similar life events could experience physical and emotional responses that parallel those of victims/survivors. Experiences of break ups, even for young adolescent girls have been associated with emotional turmoil (Cassar, 2018a). Ethical concerns arise about the possibility of students feeling disgusted, sad or overwhelmed when engaging with the

topic of IPV, as a result of strong emotions that could trigger sorrow, fear, anger and bitterness. For example, the chilling ending of the song “If she ever tries to fucking leave again / I’m a tie her to the bed and set this house on fire” could evoke disturbing thoughts and feelings. There is an ethical obligation on the part of teachers to deal with these emotions if they arise; in ways that do not cause harm to students. Any lingering negative emotions need to be brought forward without triggering panic. The age of students needs to be taken into consideration when planning how to teach about interpersonal abuse. Students passing through early, middle and late adolescence might be in different stages of development. In some cases, showing the music video of LTWYL at school might be inappropriate, because of the violence it portrays.

Presenting LTWYL in classroom discussions also carries the risk that female students might feel incited to construct the majority of men and boys as mean and cruel others. Male students might feel “attacked” and in need of defending themselves during classroom interactions that might create a male–female divide as a result of listening to the song. At the same time, students need to know that perpetrators are afraid, disempowered and are victims themselves, who very often deny, minimise and excuse their abuse by blaming the victim. The widespread dominant discourse that perpetrators of domestic violence are male stems from the actual prevalence of violence committed by men. In the US, “men commit at least 90% of documented acts of physical intimate partner violence” (Wood, 2012, p. 301). Another thorny ethical issue is related to the possibility that students disclose that they are living in situations of domestic violence or that they have been victimised by their dating partner or parent. These situations call for immediate action by teachers to help these students seek professional help from the school and access other appropriate services. Issues related to confidentiality are pertinent when students choose to share personal narratives about their direct or indirect involvement with abuse. Some adolescent girls are capable of seeing a link between their fear towards their abusive parent and their fear in establishing healthy intimate relationships with a lover, due to lack of trust (Cassar, 2014, p. 201). Female peers at school give support to each other regarding situations of parental abuse and share their advice that learning is “the key to challenging destructive but familiar attachment styles and to bring change” (Cassar, 2014, p. 201). Student cultures inside schools function as a support system for female students, who seek and give advice to each other about doubts, fears and hopes related to sexual desires, dating and sexual encounters (Cassar, 2007, 2013).

The option of not presenting the song for discussion (or similar material), due to ethical concerns, could enable a sense of alienation from the realities surrounding IPV and from the music cultures in which young people are immersed. Students might still be exposed to similar songs outside the school. Time spent watching music videos has been linked to adolescents’ “traditional attitudes that men dominate sexual relationships and that women are sex objects” (Beentjes & Konig, 2013, pp. 1857 – 7881). A lack of critical thinking skills might lead adolescents to become desensitised to the derogatory lyrics condoning IPV and sexual aggression. Refraining from using LTWYL at school might reproduce the silences that surround the topics of IPV and femicide in some cultures. Silence perpetuates abuse (Gracia, 2004). Students might hold vague and ambiguous ideas about what constitutes sexual assault or IPV and therefore tackling this topic could dispel misperceptions. Knowing about the very existence and causes of

domestic abuse, IPV and femicide could be empowering for students. The elimination of topics about sexual violence from educational curricula discredits the importance of young people's experiences and denies them the necessary spaces to learn about the possibilities opened up by overcoming IPV. Students can learn that although human beings "stray from all calculable paths" (Barad, 2012, pp. 207–208), as the story in *LTWYL* shows, it is possible to develop agency to protect oneself from abuse. In this regard, the lyrics merit discussion in secondary schools, because students could potentially benefit from insights about violent intimate relationships by critically exploring alternatives, which counteract systems of victimisation and aggression they might encounter in their lives. Students have a right to be informed, as "access to sexual knowledge and to open honest discussions around sexuality are critical to their health and well-being throughout their lives" (Robinson, 2012, p. 259). Failure to inform young people about indicators of dangers of sexual exploitation and their right for establishing consent may create and sustain vulnerability to sexual coercion. A number of school curricula in different parts of the world reflect a denial to recognise student bodies as sexual (Allred & David, 2007; Allen, 2011) and do not address students' personal concerns in relation to sexuality (Cassar, 2015). The prioritisation of academic content might render topics related to femicide and IPV less important. Effective sexuality education is linked to a decrease in violence and abuse in intimate relationships (McCracken, Márquez, Priest, FitzSimons, & Torchia, 2016, p. 12). Comprehensive sexuality and relationship education that adopts a rights-based approach safeguards young people against the risk of sexual exploitation, abuse and domestic violence (Kohler, Manhart, & Lafferty, 2008). Out of 28 European Union (E.U.) Member States, sexuality and relationship education in schools is mandatory in 20 countries. Gender-based violence as a topic in the national curriculum is tackled in 14 out of these 20 Member States (McCracken et al., 2016, p. 20). Earlier, in 2006, amongst 16 countries of the World Health Organization (W.H.O.) European region, Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Netherlands, Turkey, Uzbekistan and the Russian Federation had included the topic on sexual violence at school whilst in most of the other countries it was tackled by health services (Helfferich & Heidtke, 2006). Standards for sexuality education in Europe set up by the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe and the Federal Centre for Health Education (B.Z.g.A.), a government organisation based in Germany, specify that adolescent students need to know what sexual and gender-based violence entails, learn how to speak out against it and recognise their sexual rights (WHO Regional Office for Europe and BZgA, 2010, p. 50). For a comprehensive overview of the degree of gender-based violence that victimises women and girls in the European Union, see Fundamental Rights Agency (2017, 2013).

The different arguments about the potential risks and benefits revolving around the provision of topics related to IPV and IPH in school curricula position these topics as controversial. Conflicting explanations based on alternative beliefs or values and/or competing interests could arise when deciding on whether to include the topics of IPV and femicide in educational curricula. Literature advocating the teaching of controversial issues in schools (e.g. Claire & Holden, 2007; Cowan & Maitles, 2012; Hess, 2009) highlights the considerable challenges teachers encounter when tackling these topics in the classroom. These concern disagreements in terms of values and political views.

Consequently there could be purposeful avoidance of controversial topics. Teachers might feel that they are in a vulnerable and precarious position when teaching about them. They might feel uneasy or unprepared to debate points of view, which are sensitive.

Implications for educational curricula

The exploration of Eminem and Rihanna's lyrics by students could contribute to an understanding of the causes of gender-based violence targeting mainly women and girls and the prevention of femicide and violence in intimate relationships. The lyrics of LTWYL could be integrated in classroom discussions that deal with personal safety and emotional well-being. The song could also prompt discussions on factors that counteract societal forces that permit and perpetuate abuse and violence. Even if a number of hip hop/rap songs advocate violence and self-destruction, they could be utilised as a teaching aid to raise consciousness and give voice to young people when addressing complex issues related to personal identity and interpersonal relatedness. Teaching about domestic and dating abuse prevention could be more effective when tackled through different subjects in the curriculum, such as sexuality and relationships education, citizenship education, social studies, personal and social development, human rights education and literature classes. In numerous European countries, voluntary organisations contribute to the teaching of sexuality education in schools by conducting sexual health seminars as well as offering counselling services and provide peer-led education (Parker, Wellings, & Lazarus, 2009). Learning about prevention in schools should also form part of a co-ordinated community approach to IPV, which involves the response of the criminal justice system, support services and programmes aimed for victims, survivors and perpetrators. Emerging studies on interventions with all family members experiencing domestic violence and abuse show some degree of success in identifying potential for recovery and positive change for all family members (Stanley & Humphreys, 2017). In some cultures, learning about the intersection of race and gender and racialised femicide and IPV is considered more pertinent. From a new materialist perspective, entities that in some way or other work towards IPV and femicide prevention are fused together and are inextricably linked with each other through a web of relationalities. Perspectives on diffraction help teachers and students see themselves part of a whole, not merely as individuals struggling alone in difficult circumstances. The various strengths that are unified through community action create resilient movements against gender violence.

The use of songs about IPV as an educational tool has a number of ethical implications for teaching and learning in school settings. These revolve around creating awareness among students about the multiple layers which constitute the causes of interpersonal violence. This entails becoming familiar with various aspects linked to emotion, gender, race, ability, culture, time and space that physical acts of IPV are embedded in. Other ethical implications on educational curricula are related to learning about the consequences of abuse and how these are directly linked with the violation of respect of personal boundaries. Critical awareness about IPV and femicide entails an evaluation of the ways that a number of societies operate through public cultures that are invested in portraying cycles of abuse through the replication and reinforcement of

attitudes that “work to resecure hegemonic masculinity at the expense of female victims of violence” (Enck & McDaniel, 2012, p. 620).

It is recommended that school curricula offer spaces for students to question the privileges of capitalist societies which sell commodities that represent violence and reproduce social dictates based on the acceptance of abuse, femicide and IPV. This places school curricula under an obligation to provide media literacy and direct students towards becoming critical consumers of commercial music, through an understanding of the ways that celebrity singers engage in the production of cultures and values via their hit songs and celebrity “gossip” that permeate the media. This requires that students learn how to disengage themselves from a “cultural complicity regarding domestic violence” (Enck & McDaniel, 2012, p. 620). The notion of diffraction (Barad, 2007) could be useful for students to understand how detachment from IPV by the victims entails disengagement from feelings and thoughts associated with blame, shame, embarrassment and guilt. The application of the notion of diffraction to recognise the “patterns of difference that make a difference” (Barad, 2007, p. 72) could lead to the disruption of patterns of thinking that justify IPV and femicide through victim blaming. A diffractive pedagogy entails “ethical agency” (Braidotti cited in Dolphijn & Van Der Tuin, 2012, p. 35) towards the self and others in recognising the causes and consequences of trauma related to IPV. The narrative of the song accentuates the feeling of being stuck in the same cycle: “And we fall back into the same patterns, same routine”. This perspective problematises Rihanna’s repeated chorus, which renders it an “obstacle” to self-respect and human dignity. Just as diffraction refers to “the apparent bending and spreading out of waves when they encounter an obstruction” (Barad, 2007, p. 28), the narrative of violence presented in the song could be “bent” and “twisted” to convey the opposite meaning. The following modification to Rihanna’s original chorus, aimed for classroom discussions, conveys defiance and resistance to the original message:

Rihanna (Chorus): I’m NOT just gonna stand there and watch me burn
 It’s NOT alright because I DON’T like the way it hurts
 I’m NOT just gonna stand there and
 YOU’RE NOT GONNA hear me cry
 It’s NOT alright because I DON’T love the way you lie

Diffraction as a concept in physics also refers to the way waves overlap. Students could be made aware of the different faces that the abuser uses to manipulate victims. The charming and charismatic tactics “overlap” horrific acts of violence in disturbing cycles that could lead to the victim’s death. The initial whirlwind of passion, affection and attention constitutes an obstacle. One of the most important lessons is learning about the power of detachment, in order not to be sucked into the abuse again. Rather than try to convince the abuser verbally that “It’s NOT alright because I DON’T like the way it hurts”, in many cases it would be better to move away from the manoeuvres (“obstacles”) aimed at trying to lure the victim back into the relationship through fake promises, as the song shows.

Another implication for education points towards the need for students to understand the gendered nature of girls’ relationships with boys and how these

are mediated through the characteristics of personal identities and subjectivities as well as through social and cultural influences, which are fuelled amongst other things by the music industry and more specifically by sensational portrayals of love, romance and sex through visually appealing images that portray IPV. Gender constitutes one of the most dominant discourses which affects students' lives and therefore the gendered nature of IPV and femicide merits to be highlighted by the curriculum in a specific and direct way through the exploration of the socially constructed nature of gender and consequent implications this might have on dating relationships. It is therefore not enough to recognise IPV and be knowledgeable about its effects, consequences and prevention. Ringrose and Renold (2016) observed teenage girls deliver a lesson on "unhealthy relationships", which included reference to the experiences of the celebrity singer Rihanna about her partner-based violence. Ringrose and Renold noted that despite the girls' theoretical knowledge about domestic violence, which they shared as peer mentors and as "sexperts", these same girls struggled "to manage the coercive everyday sexism and sexual harassment in their own peer cultures" (2016, p. 108). The acknowledgment of people as gendered beings does not necessarily imply awareness of the possible limitations and injustice caused by hegemonic masculinities and gender stereotypes. Consequently, pedagogical coursework, which challenges stereotyped notions of gender roles, norms of heterosexual femininity and socialisation processes that restrain adolescents' development is recommended. This implies enabling students to examine toxic gender scripts, which not only limit their opportunities for meaningful and positive intimate relationships, but which could lead to violence and threaten their life. Diffractive thinking is suggested for students to question the close links between IPV and cultural views of masculinity and femininity without portraying all men as bullies, monsters or murderers and all women as submissive and subservient. Barad explains that diffraction goes beyond critique and calls into question how polarised dualisms (such as male–female) come into being. Reading LTWYL diffractively implies

reading insights through one another, building new insights, and attentively and carefully reading for differences that matter in their fine details, together with the recognition that there intrinsic to this analysis is an ethics that is not predicated on externality but rather entanglement. (Barad cited in Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 50)

Thinking diffractively also implies that caring for the self does not mean avoidance of all intimate relationships or becoming estranged from people with whom healthy and meaningful relationships could be formed. The study suggests that curricular topics about the complexities surrounding IPV could provide students with different perspectives and allow them to learn more about intimacy and how to be more compassionate and loving towards themselves. This implies learning about how to develop an increasing sense of self-awareness through the realisation that acceptance of abuse in intimate relationships indicates a disconnection from their real self, where self-respect, self-love and self-worth reside. This links with learning how codependency works in the absence of self-esteem and how it leads to disabling cycles of self-destruction. Diffractive thinking is suggested for the recognition of obstacles such as fear of remaining single and complacency in the face of abuse that result from a weak sense of self, feelings of

emptiness and lack of a meaningful purpose in life. Diffraction creates change in the motion of waves and is therefore metaphorically adept at describing educational efforts aimed at making a possible difference in the ways students regard themselves. This refers to attempts at knowing oneself better by embracing uncertainties and even acknowledging a sense of estrangement from oneself:

When two hands touch, there is a sensuality of the flesh, an exchange of warmth, a feeling of pressure, of presence, a proximity of otherness that brings the other nearly as close as oneself. Perhaps closer. And if the two hands belong to one person, might this not enliven an uncanny sense of the otherness of the self, a literal holding oneself at a distance in the sensation of contact, the greeting of the stranger within? So much happens in a touch: an infinity of others – other beings, other spaces, other times – are aroused. (Barad, 2012, p. 206)

Conclusion

The study recommends that educational curricula offer insights on the benefits and positive outcomes that could possibly arise from adolescent romantic relations, without framing these as an aspect of life which has to be feared, resisted, antagonised and repressed. This puts an emphasis on the enjoyment and fulfilment which could be derived from meaningful, fulfilling and healthy relationships. A diffractive way of teaching and learning is advocated in IPV prevention without pathologising all sexual encounters. Ringrose and Renold highlight the contradictions and tensions that surround pedagogies that place girls “as ambassadors of a pedagogy around female oppression” while simultaneously holding them “hostage to a discourse of sexual risk and protection (of themselves and others)” (2012, p. 338). Although educators need to pay attention to the ethical responsibilities involved in teaching culturally sensitive topics related to dating violence, femicide and IPV, the perceived vulnerability of students should not be overestimated. Otherwise, educators might disengage students from tackling real-life situations. Questions arising from ethical issues concerning the teaching of IPV and IPH do not always have clear-cut answers. Diffractive thinking does not necessarily diminish the emotional pain that talking about IPV and femicide might cause in classroom situations. Teaching and learning about horrendous violent circumstances might create spaces of discomfort, which could potentially lead students to learn IPV prevention skills. It is also possible to define, assess and prevent risks associated with femicide and IPV and instil a sense of caution among adolescent students without making them feel perplexed, anxious or scared. Students have a right to know how to contend with tensions and confrontations that arise in relationships, how to protect themselves from emotional pain and set up healthy boundaries within relationships, how to direct themselves towards self-care, how to move away from abuse, how to deal with feelings caused by the rejection of lovers/partners, how to handle the ending of romantic relationships, how to communicate their feelings and thoughts with a past lover, how to deal with the lingering traces of emotional attachments, how to seek professional help and move on. Taken together, these issues might present a daunting task to teachers, that might be considered beyond their remit, even for those engaged in sexuality education or for teachers of personal, social, health and economic education. There is, however, increasing emphasis on the inclusion of topics on love, care and respect in sexuality education curricula in a number of European countries (Cassar, 2018b).

Education in a posthuman era decentres fixed educational roles and objectives and this frees teachers from fixated intentions. Teaching and learning about IPV and femicide prevention are rooted in and emerge from classroom relationalities that acknowledge various multidirectional entanglements that constitute gender violence. Additionally, teachers do not always have to start from scratch but build on what students already know. The female teenage informants of Ringrose and Renold's study were able to argue that domestic abuse was a sign of power and "not of love" when referring to reported aggressive incidents about Rihanna and her ex-boyfriend Chris Brown and they also recognised her "as an example of escaping from a violent domestic relationship" (2012, p. 337). The *subtle* forms of coercion are, however, more difficult to notice and take action against. There could be a disjuncture between what students know about IPV and their ability to protect themselves in real life.

The escape from violent situations involving verbal threats, intertwined with emotional, physical or sexual abuse, could be considered a "quantum leap". This signifies a shift from victim consciousness to owning and asserting one's own power and self-belief. It is about assuming responsibility for oneself and others, which is an ethical endeavour. Rather than being an obligation, ethical responsibility and accountability are rooted in "the intentionality of consciousness" (Barad, 2010, p. 265). It is more than providing a "right response to a radically exterior/ised other" (Barad, 2007, p. 393). Ethical behaviour requires being attentive and responding to spontaneous relationalities that arise. The very act of "being alive to the possibilities of becoming, is an ethical call" in itself (Barad, 2007, p. 396). Becoming aware and open to possibilities does not necessarily require a lengthy, complicated process. One can "leap forward" instantaneously out of victim consciousness. Barad explains that "the important point about a quantum leap is not its size but the fact that an object disappears from one place and winds up in another without being at any point in between" (2007, p. 432). The transformative power of education could produce "quantum leaps" in raising consciousness and inform thinking about IPV and femicide resistance and prevention. The provision of spaces in the curriculum to interrogate socially learned attitudes and behaviours that disempower adolescents, as they venture into romantic relationships, is intended to have relevance and usefulness for them that go beyond the years of schooling. The study calls for the cultivation of ongoing self-care and ethical responsibility towards others through the development of an ethics of compassion (Connolly, 1999). This commitment makes up the fabric of life and opens up possibilities for meaningful relations: "Questions of responsibility and accountability present themselves with every possibility; each moment is alive with different possibilities for the world's becoming and different reconfigurings of what may yet be possible" (Barad, 2007, p. 182).

Note

1. The article does not present a content analysis of the song or its video. For an analysis of the lyrics of LTWYL, see Enck and McDaniel (2012), and for other analyses of misogynistic rap songs see Weitzer and Kubrin (2009). For an analysis of rap music videos, see Conrad et al. (2009).

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