Risk-taking in Sexual Health Communication and Applied Theatre Practice: What Can Happen?

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Abstract:

This article argues that risk-taking can be an essential part of applied theatre practice as when it is coupled with a dialogical approach, it can result in a situation where people "encounter risks on their own terms" and engage with discussions around sensitive and controversial subjects such as non-consensual sex. With reference to Beck's notion of a risk-sharing community, it suggests that in the process of partaking in discussions on such issues, such a community can be established, whereby people take risks by challenging different views as well as taking action by discussing the subject outside of the performance space.

1 Examining the social risk associated with HIV infection, Green and Sobo note that little attention has been paid to considering the impact of the illness on a person's social relations (2002:3). Additionally, they remark how a person's social relations may be at risk because of the stigma surrounding the syndrome, which indicates that illness or perceptions of danger can lead to social risks whereby the ill or dangerous person is excluded from the community. This is similar to Douglas' description of how communities can be insular and oppressive in their desire to protect themselves from the risk of attack or infection (1979; 1992). Undoubtedly risks and concerns over the outcomes of particular activities are both powerful forces that influence people's daily encounters. For example, Beck argues that 'risks are related directly and indirectly to cultural definitions and standards of a tolerable or intolerable life' (1999:135), i.e. that risk can be a perception influenced by a person's particular living conditions and cultural practices. Yet risk itself is not necessarily bad: Douglas questions the idea that risk can only result in negative outcomes, arguing that this perception is due to the 'language of *risk* [being] reserved as a specialized lexical register for political talk about the undesirable outcomes' (1992:24, original emphasis).

2 Risk is also treated differently by different fields. For example, sexual health education is mainly concerned with preventing risks, providing avenues for people to learn and discuss the potential outcomes of risks in order to avoid taking them. Sexual health communication is thus predominantly focused on risk avoidance, such as how to prevent HIV infection or avoid teenage pregnancy. Yet, within applied theatre, participants are encouraged to take creative risks if they desire to do so and if they feel comfortable doing so. Moreover, theatre practitioners encourage participants to own and lead the content of the practice (Jackson 2007:183), aiming to reduce the power imbalance and create a more dialogic

exploration (Mlama 1991; Bury *et al*. 1998; Lihamba 2004). This is done in order to avoid the dual risk that the facilitator dictates the story and the participants do not discuss what they are interested in. So when these two opposing approaches meet is the risk-taking dangerous or does it lead to positive outcomes?

3   I will respond to this question using as an illustration a particular moment from my PhD practice, where a scene devised by the participants about non-consensual sex caused considerable debate between themselves and their audience and, in some instances was used as a moral narrative to scare young women into staying at home at night. Following a description of the scene, the impact of the participants' creative risk-taking is then considered, where questions surrounding the dialogical approach taken in this practice are examined. Subsequently, the possibility that a risk-sharing community began to be developed through the debates is explored and is proposed as a possible positive outcome from the practice. Nonetheless, it remains that the nature of some of the discussions and the use of the story also appeared to be limiting or controlling of young women's behaviour. Accordingly, the rest of the article will consider how these events put at risk the dialogical focus of this practice, beginning with a description of the context of transactional sex in South Africa. Theories of contagion will be employed to analyse the participants' responses to the scene before considering the suggestion that such reactions were a form of protection.

The scene

4   The moment of practice in question arose during one of the Our Place, Our Stage (OPOS) projects, based at Etafeni, an HIV/Aids organisation located in Nyanga, a South African township infamous for its high rates of violent crime and rape. Part of my doctoral research, the OPOS projects employed participatory theatre and performance techniques to engender conversations and better understandings of particular sexual and reproductive health topics the participants had chosen.

5   Having decided to examine teenagers' sexual behaviour and teenage pregnancy, the participants' improvised scene where Javas, a young gangster in Nyanga, approaches a group of girls in a shebeen (a local bar) and buys them all drinks. Eventually Javas singles out sixteen-year-old Brenda and suggests that she comes to his house. In the next scene, they find themselves in Javas' room and Javas wants to have sex with Brenda, which she agrees to, providing a condom is used. Javas does not have a condom and in any case wants sex with 'no wrapper'. Brenda eventually succumbs to Javas' pressure, particularly when he reminds her of all the drinks he bought her, and they have unprotected sex.

6   In the next workshop, after having explored different positions of power, we returned to this scene. This time we approached the story with the aim of Brenda succeeding in negotiating safe sex. Accordingly, we played through this scene a number of times with participants taking on the different roles, changing Brenda's position, moving her from the bed to the chair, with her standing up and Javas sitting down, and so forth. Yet, it was apparent that in most of the attempts it was difficult for Brenda to negotiate safe sex, despite the changes in positions. Concurrently, I also observed how challenging it was for some of the women to move when they were in role as Brenda, even when they were in a position of power. Over the next two workshops we continued to investigate this scene, examining the different power relations present in the story, attempting to negotiate safe sex, and debating whether or not this was an example of rape.

7   These debates were important as they illustrated the difficulties of discussing non-consensual sex and the diverse views within the group on young women's behaviour. For example, following the initial improvised scene, I asked the group if they thought Brenda had been raped. The group was practically unanimous in saying 'no', explaining (participants' names in brackets):

> *No, they were in love at the time and she was attracted by the money* (Nwabi).
> *No, she didn't cry – if she cried [Javas'] grandmother would have come out and helped her. She was enjoying it* (Nomvulo).

Following unsuccessful attempts to get Javas to agree to safe sex, the group then set out definitions of what rape meant for them, using words like 'force', 'powerless', 'hurt', and 'attacking'. Yet, when asked the question again, the majority of the group stated that Brenda had not been raped. In response to this, the youngest participant, Wandisile, an eighteen year-old man, asked the group:

> *What is the conclusion? You say no, she wasn't raped, but you use the same words to describe rape and to explain why she wasn't able to negotiate safe sex.*

Although this comment reignited the debate, the group's answers barely shifted: twelve participants thought she had not been raped, two people disagreed, believing she had been raped, and one person could not decide. A week later, this scene was performed for a larger audience predominantly comprised of elder women who, in response to the same question, gave similarly diverse responses.

8   Reflecting on these debates, it was clear that further analysis of the situation was required. Of particular interest was why so few women viewed Brenda's story as rape, how my viewpoint had influenced the proceedings, and whether this creative risk-taking was

dangerous for the participants? Accordingly, I now turn to an analysis of the situation beginning by considering the danger behind the participants' risk-taking, before examining the possibility that this creative risk-taking had a desirable outcome: a series of in-depth debates on the sensitive subject of teenage pregnancy.

Creative risk-taking

9   Within applied theatre practice, particular attention is given to creating a dialogical environment 'in which people feel safe enough to take risks and to allow themselves and others to experience vulnerability' (Nicholson 2005a:129). Of utmost importance is that the participants are not placed in danger or are hurt by being part of the creative process. Part of avoiding this potential problem is through the establishment of open dialogue between the facilitator and the participants, so that each party is able to communicate their views. In the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Freire argues that there are six prerequisites for dialogue to exist: love, humility, faith in humankind, trust, hope, and critical thinking (1970:71–3). Considering applied theatre practice, in particular the creative risk-taking element, I believe that Freire's consideration of humility and trust are two important ways of 'creat[ing] a genuine climate of dialogue and reciprocity' (Preston 2009:68). Humility on the part of the practitioner, an acknowledgement that they do not know the 'right' answer for the group, and an emphasis on establishing trust with the participants are vital aspects of applied theatre practice, particularly if the facilitator desires to develop a strong working relationship. Nicholson notes the importance of ensuring 'that the research process neither betrays the participants' trust nor inhibits their creative contributions to the drama' while also trying to 'maintain the rich inter-personal relationships' being built in the workshop space (2005b:119). Additionally, such a dialogic approach can heighten the group's creative exploration. Discussing interventionist theatre, Jackson refers to Bakhtin's concepts of the 'dialogic', where each utterance we make 'is made within an interpersonal and chronological context', and of '"heteroglossia" (or multi-languaged discourse)', to illustrate how the different 'voices, ideas, cultural forces embodied in human actions and feelings' located within an artistic frame, form the dynamism which is at the centre of 'resonant and aesthetically pleasing theatre' (2007:183-4, drawing from Bakhtin 1994:85-113). Here Jackson's focus is on the dynamism produced when different concepts, voices, and cultural narratives engage in genuine dialogue within an artistic framework. It is this dynamism, he argues, that produces the 'conflict, tension, debate and intellectual stimulus' that challenge the spectator to reflect on the different voices and experience uncertainty (and not 'neat, easily decipherable meanings').

Although Jackson is referring to the relationship between the performance and the audience, I believe that a similar intent can be aimed for within the workshop space. In these spaces, the facilitator works towards this dynamism and generates opportunities for genuine dialogue between the participant and herself in order to explore ideas by engaging in debate and not searching for a 'correct' answer. Nonetheless, a common risk is the possibility that one party's words (e.g. the facilitator's) do not match those of the others, resulting in a circumstance where the dialogue becomes one-sided as one party overemphasises their viewpoint (i.e. a loss of humility). Therefore, by not working towards an environment of humility and trust, dialogue will be one-sided and limit the creative output. But how feasible is it to work in a dialogical manner when the practice develops into an outcome that appears (in the facilitator's opinion) to be limiting for the participants and what risks do the participants face as they embody characterisations that are powerless?

10   Engaging in discussions of power and rape can be emotionally risky for participants, especially when working with different genders and age groups – a young man may feel intimidated performing in front of an older woman, while the same woman may feel uncomfortable portraying a sexual relationship with a young man. Additionally, there exists the risk that having developed 'rich inter-personal relationships', the participant feels obliged to share more than she means to, or does so unwittingly. For example, reflecting back to the moment when this scene was initially improvised, I observed that Nontombi, an older woman, was uncomfortable portraying Brenda having sex with Javas. Clearly this was in part because simulating sexual activity in front of other people can be embarrassing, but it also remains risky as it exposes the participant to potential ridicule. However, it is also possible that Nontombi felt uncomfortable by the action she was unable to prevent – in that moment, Brenda was trying to negotiate safe sex with Javas. Moreover, Nontombi was not alone in appearing uncomfortable in the role of Brenda, other women also seemed to find it difficult to move out of their particular positions: Nomvulo appeared trapped by Javas' (Thobela's) hand holding her, and Pamella, despite being seated higher than Refilwe's kneeling portrayal of Javas, seemed glued to her chair. The women's stances appeared to suggest a physical discomfort with being so close to the character of Brenda, an idea which resonates with something Thompson has noted in his work. Describing a mural exercise in which participants volunteer stories over what the mural depicts, he observes that the 'act of reading twisted bodies in a particular way had affected the participants bodily because many felt physically connected to the story told' (2005:30). This concept of the body being physically

connected to the narrative indicates that the participants may risk embodying a role that they are not comfortable with or which is perhaps too similar to their lives.

11   These actions created a concern about the safety of the participants involved, particularly in the repeated portrayal of powerless women. Having witnessed a few scenes in which the woman portraying Brenda appeared frozen, I stopped the action and repeated the instruction that Brenda could move if she needed to (to follow the impulse the participant felt), at which point Nomvulo appeared able to move. This situation seems to suggest there was something holding the women back and it was only once they were reminded that they could move or when a third character entered the stage (e.g. Javas' grandmother) that they were able to begin attempting to negotiate safe sex. Nonetheless, I remained concerned by the powerlessness being performed and what this meant for the participants. Although it was worrying to see so many powerless performances, attempting to understand why the women portraying Brenda were so frozen resulted in a discussion about how men and women negotiate sex and the position of young women in the participants' community. Moreover, despite legitimate concerns that the participants were being placed at risk by embodying powerless women, when considering the space and the inter-personal relationships established within it, it seemed that one of the outcomes of the risk-taking was a spirited discussion on the topic of non-consensual sex. Creative risk-taking forms part of applied theatre practice and if the space is open and trusting, Hunter argues that it can be a site where 'individuals in a collective environment can be empowered to encounter risk on their own terms' (2008:18-19). Similarly, if the space is open to genuine dialogue and reciprocity, then, as practitioners, we can be less concerned about the participants' risk-taking. Concerns are further reduced by the involvement of the facilitator, who can prevent excessive risk-taking. A certain involvement is justifiable: Salverson warns against facilitators indulging in 'constipated self-examination' because 'sometimes the fear of appropriation can become an excuse not to act, not to risk engagement' (2008:250). Therefore, while some concern and self-examination is necessary on the part of the practitioner, it needs to be conducted in moderation and in a linear relationship with trusting the creative space.

A "risk-sharing" community?

12   Considering Douglas' argument that 'now *risk* refers only to negative outcomes' (1992:24, original emphasis), I propose instead that the risk-taking illustrated above actually resulted in a positive outcome: many open-ended debates over a sensitive subject. The perceived powerlessness of Brenda, portrayed by many different women, thus became a way

of initiating discussions regarding understandings of non-consensual sex, young women's needs, and how others perceive young women's behaviour. These debates happened both within the workshop space but also following the group's performance to a larger audience at Etafeni. Indeed one audience member described the group's show as:

> *A very good start of opening a debate to empower other youth within our community, because this is the true reflection of what is happening. You know if we can get to this [we can] fight it together.*

Accordingly, the risks taken in performing the role of a powerless woman appear to illustrate the potential dialogical environment of the theatre practice: the participants were engaging with a subject of their choice and, despite numerous debates about the scene, no victors emerged, only further ideas for consideration. The young men and women and the older women all took risks and shared their views on teenage sexual behaviour with each other and an external audience. These risks (of sharing too much or being ridiculed for having different views) had a positive outcome in that they created a 'dialogical performance' which Conquergood describes as 'a way of having intimate conversation with other people and cultures. Instead of speaking about them, one speaks to and with them' (2003:143, cited in Loudon 2005:235). Indeed, these dialogical performances are linked with Beck's theory of a 'risk-sharing community' which in turn opens up another possible gain from risk-taking.

13   In *World Risk Society*, Beck views risk in an optimistic light, describing it as being 'intrinsically connected' with responsibility, trust, and security (1999:6), a view which resonates with Freire's conception of dialogue. Beck proposes that: '*risk-sharing* […] can, in my view, become a powerful basis for community' (1999:16, original emphasis). He explains the notion of a risk community further, suggesting that it can be seen as a sharing of 'the burden' of risks and a 'taking of responsibility' (16). In this light, the different debates (or dialogical performances) during the workshops and at the performance can be viewed as a step towards those people present becoming a risk-sharing community. The responses of some of the audience suggest that although these individuals were taking risks, they believed that this debate was important to participate in and that the community needed to discuss the subject. The arguments put forward by the audience and the discussion that followed can potentially be seen as an acknowledgement of the high risk of non-consensual sex in their community and a step towards taking responsibility as a community of that risk:

> *I don't think that I would call it rape, but she is not free to be herself and people don't take what she says seriously… and so it is a rape of a person's right to be heard.*
> *If someone buys you… whatevers, that doesn't give that person the right to whatevers. It is always your decision. So stick to whatever you decided.*

These views, combined with Hunter's notion of a 'collective environment', seem to indicate that these debates formed part of a dialogical performance, as there was a dialogical relationship between the participants, the audience, and myself as the practitioner, in that we all contributed to the debate.

14   Moreover, within this dialogical performance, participants and audience members alike took action by taking risks and sharing their ideas. In both the workshops and during the performances, the participants performed different roles in the scene and in doing so took the risk that they may have been reflected in the character they were portraying (White 2006). By taking these creative risks, they opened up the discussion, creating a debate around a topic which has no easy answers. Wandisile in particular took a significant number of risks: as the youngest member of the group, he repeatedly questioned the majority over the disparity between their views on the act of rape and their definition of rape. In challenging the group, predominantly comprised of women, Wandisile faced potential ridicule as well as possibly jeopardising his social position by supporting the 'wrong' behaviour. In their discussion of the social risk of HIV, Green and Sobo note the implications of taking a social risk:

> Social risk-taking, then, involves taking an action, engaging in a behaviour, or adopting an identity or an identity component that might alter one's social relations and so one's place in one's various social networks (e.g. familial, sexual, income related, etc.) and one's position in society as a whole. (2000:40-1).

In this situation, as a young man who stepped out of the mould of dismissing Brenda, Wandisile took a social risk. However, this act of challenging the group's definition helped to energise the debate within the workshop, whereby other participants began to consider different viewpoints. This energy and conflict over the story fed into the performance where the participants shared the risk of performing a problematic subject and generated a debate. These creative risks emboldened others to share their opinions and experiences. For example, in a group interview following the performance, Zukiswa, an audience member, spoke of how her daughter had been raped in similar circumstances the previous year. This kind of sharing can be considered as a step towards becoming a risk-sharing community as the participants and audience were sharing the burden of the risks by discussing the subject. In terms of sexual health communication, the debate following the performance was an important outcome, because the group engaged with a broad spectrum of the community (young children, teenagers, women of various ages, and a few men). This is an important occurrence as research on social communication approaches has proposed that increased social communication, within community groups, on specific health issues can have a positive

impact by encouraging openness and discussion (Low-Beer & Stoneburner 2004; Green 2003).

15   Another outcome of this debate was that some of the audience took action and spoke about the story with family and friends. Of the eight audience members interviewed a few days after the performance, three had discussed the play with other people. One man shared the story with friends and two women (Zukiswa and Sylvia)[1] discussed the dilemma with young women. However, the nature of some of these discussions were problematic in that Brenda's narrative was used as a means of warning young women about the dangers of going out. In their interviews, Sylvia and Zukiswa explained how they employed the story both as a warning in Sylvia's case (for the daughter of a friend), and as a reminder for Zukiswa's daughter of the risk of being raped if you go to shebeens. It is this use of the narrative which creates a challenge for applied theatre: how can a dialogical approach result in an outcome that may be limiting for the participants? Rather than engaging in a conversation that may have had some form of positive impact on opinions held about non-consensual sex, Sylvia and Zukiswa used the narrative as a means of controlling a behaviour they perceived as being dangerous. Beck warns 'many risk communities are potentially political communities in a new sense – because they have to live with the risks that others take' (1999:16). In this instance, the dangers associated with the risks (which have been discussed and shared) were being employed for a particular purpose: to control behaviour. It appeared that Sylvia and Zukiswa had employed Brenda's story as a means of protecting the community they live in, because 'they have to live with the risks that others take'. Yet, this was an outcome that appeared contrary to the dialogical aims of this practice.

16   Additionally, while reconsidering the views shared in the workshops, it was apparent that the majority of the participants did not believe Brenda was raped and held, in my view, dismissive attitudes toward Brenda. Correspondingly, a proportion of the audience shared also these attitudes, with one woman arguing 'it is not rape, she also invited what happened to her'. At the time I noted my confusion with these viewpoints and, during the workshops, I repeatedly asked the group whether or not what had happened to Brenda was rape, despite rarely hearing the affirmative answer I was hoping for. Reflecting on my approach now, it is possible that I disrupted the dialogical communication between the participants and myself by not trusting their responses. In repeating my question on three different occasions, did I lack humility by not accepting their answers and through my response, did I establish a 'dominant

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[1] Their names have been changed because of the private nature of these discussions.

discourse' (Loudon 2005:134)?[2] Herein lies the challenge for applied theatre – how to facilitate a process which, in my view (based on a Western understanding of liberation for women and what constitutes rape) appears to have a limiting outcome without crossing over from facilitating into activism. More specifically, how to avoid putting the dialogic process of the practice at risk because the outcomes of the creative risk-taking do not tally with your assumptions of what positive social change would look like.

17   At this juncture it is clear that there is a need to investigate these debates further and what their outcomes were. That this applied theatre process did result in a dialogical performance is not in question – this was a key outcome – but, as I have begun to illustrate, there is more to this story. The larger narrative in South Africa

18   Discussing storytelling and community-based theatre, Salverson questions how much facilitators understand what occurs 'in the act of listening to and telling "risky stories"', pointing to the importance of considering the contexts in which these stories are recounted, and to query the origin of the frameworks surrounding the telling (Simon & Armitage-Simon 1995, cited in Salverson 1996:181). Indeed, clearly there is a need to situate the social narrative of Brenda's story within the larger narrative surrounding sexual relations in South Africa and to consider the frameworks surrounding the telling of Brenda's story.

19   Sexual relations in South Africa are complex and there are multiple definitions of sexual relations that are not necessarily desired by all parties involved, including transactional sex, non-consensual sex, rape, prostitution, and coerced sexual intercourse. The South African Law Commission have proposed a redefinition of rape to include a sexual penetration committed 'in any coercive circumstance, under false pretences or by fraudulent means, or in respect of a person who is incapable in law to appreciate the nature of an act of sexual penetration' (2002:117). However, defining what rape or non-consensual sex is remains difficult. Studies of sexual relations in South African townships have concluded that the sexual relationships of adolescent girls 'are often contractual in nature' (Wood & Jewkes 1997:42) and that 'gifts play a 'vital role… in fuelling everyday sexual relations between men and women' (Hunter 2002:100). Moreover, poverty also plays an important part in both non-consensual and transactional sex; daily activities such as fetching water, collecting firewood alone, and walking home from work alone at night, as well as limited recreational pastimes, put women at risk of rape (Jewkes & Abrahams 2002:1239; Krug 2002:158; Ramphele

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[2] Discussing the challenge of working in post-colonial environments, trying to located 'oppressed voices', Loudon questions how a researcher can 'encourag[e] an open debate without further imposing or creating a dominant discourse?' (2005:134).

1991:10-11). In the informal settlements, sex is linked with subsistence, as women exchange sex for food, rent, and clothes, while in the more established townships, sex is more notably related to consumption, where consumer goods, fashion, and cellphones play an important role in establishing a person's social standing (Hunter 2002). Furthermore, because prostitution is illegal in South Africa, many women have little or no protection against rape and have little recourse to justice (Pauw & Brener 2003).

20   Indeed, it has been suggested 'that the experience of non-consensual or coerced sexual intercourse at some stage in a South African woman's life is certainly the norm and may be little short of universal' (Jewkes & Abrahams 2002:1240). However, this is not unique to South Africa: Doyal argues that for many women in Africa sex is a survival strategy, with both women and schoolgirls rely on the money and the 'gifts' they receive in return for having relations with men (1994:14-17). In Tanzania, for example, Bujra has observed that protection and safer sex has become for many women 'a matter of hope/aspiration, that is, trust, rather than a goal consciously planned and achieved through negotiation between equals' (2000:69). It is clear that gender relations play a key role in sexual relationships and there is an agreement in the literature that there is a pressing need to consider gender roles and gender power with regard to sexual and reproductive health (Wood & Jewkes 1997:43; Ramphele 2008:106).

21   Returning to this project, by connecting the scene between Brenda and Javas with this larger narrative, it could be argued that this is a story about transactional sex, as Javas bought Brenda drinks in the shebeen. Alternatively, considering the events which unfolded during the scene – Brenda could not leave as it was impossible for her to return home safely, which coupled with Javas' 'persuasion' and his status as a local gangster – it could also be contended that this was a story about sexual coercion or non-consensual sex. Yet, most of the participants were unsympathetic towards Brenda's situation, believing that Brenda had made her decision about whether or not to have sex with Javas earlier on in the evening, when she chose to go home with him, thereby leaving the 'protection' of her friends. As Refilwe commented:

> *From my point of view, I think that Brenda was not raped. She was at a nightclub without her parents knowing. She sneaked out, yebo [yes]? She could have avoided the situation by sticking with her friends and go back home. And not going with strangers, strange guy to his place, yebo? And at the end of the night, she did agree to having sex, unprotected sex with Javas.*

During the workshops, the group defined rape as having sexual relations in a situation where you have no physical or emotional power to prevent it but, despite Wandisile's evident

frustration, for most of the participants this definition was not applicable to Brenda's situation. In this scenario, for a sixteen year-old girl to be in a gangster's bedroom at two o'clock in the morning, there was no room to turn back. Using a forum theatre approach, the group attempted a few different ways to get her out of the situation, such as walking out with attitude or calling her brother to come and fetch her. Yet these were not deemed realistic by the rest of the participants in that she could not walk home by herself at night (she would get raped) and she could not call her brother (she had no phone credit and he would not risk angering a gangster).[3] Ultimately it appeared that as Brenda had willingly accepted alcoholic drinks from Javas, danced with him and then accompanied him home, she knew what she was letting herself in for. As one of the participants stated: 'she was drunk and she went home with a drunken man to his house, she understood what she was doing, she could have avoided the situation'. For the majority then, Brenda and Javas had engaged in transactional sex.

22   In many of the improvisations and discussions which followed, there appeared to be very little empathy for Brenda and I was confused by the almost dismissive attitudes the participants held about Brenda's behaviour and situation. This was particularly so because I assumed that as the group was predominantly comprised of women, there would be more support for Brenda's right to say 'no' at any point in the proceedings. Rather, the women were particularly vocal in stating that Brenda knew what she was doing and had made her own decision. A conflict developed between what I was expecting in terms of 'positive' responses and the actual views held by the participants, which challenged my view of what the outcome of the practice was and what I thought it should achieve. Thus, with reference to Douglas' theory of contagion, this article will now explore the frameworks surrounding the larger narrative of transactional sex and the tellers' (the participants') attitudes.

Contagion and discipline = a means of protection?

23   The somewhat ambivalent attitude towards the protagonist in what is potentially a rape situation is not just confined to a South African audience. Gesser-Edelsburg describes a similar response in her article about an Israeli educational play about gang rape, but in this case it is the playwright (Edna Mazya) herself who is dismissive of the rape victim, explaining she 'was expecting games' (2005:142). Gesser-Edelsburg's analysis of the

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[3] This scenario can be viewed as a firing squad situation as Brenda had no room to escape. Indeed, following a Boalian approach, the story would not have reached this point and would have focused on the earlier scene in the shebeen where Brenda could have still left safely. For Boal, the purpose of forum is that 'the rehearsal stimulates the practice of the act in reality' (2000:142), i.e. that the theatre is a form through which change can be rehearsed. However, this was not the case with this practice, rather the theatre's purpose was to stimulate discussion, which it did, and to respond to the participants' desires to examine such a subject.

production's aesthetic and the feedback from the audience concluded that the play portrayed girls as 'provocative victims' and reinforced the view that teenage boys are 'sexual beings who need relief in any possible way' (139, 151). Similarly in Uganda, Mbowa recounts how, following a drama-based training programme on HIV/Aids, a group of young men requested that girls stop wearing mini-skirts as it excited them and made them desire sex. Although the community leaders acknowledged that freedom of choice existed, in response to this request, the leaders warned 'that young girls should … not jump on any fashion that comes, they should know the risks they are taking in putting on things like that' (Mbowa 1997:45). In this instance I am not attempting to generalise that Israeli, Ugandan, and South African attitudes towards rape are the same, only to illustrate that in these examples, the woman is portrayed as being in the wrong, alongside a suggestion that she 'knew' what was going to happen.

24   This notion of 'expectance' suggests that there may be an unspoken agreement that occurs when a woman accepts a man's drink or when a young girl plays a game with a group of boys, because by agreeing, the woman has consented to some form of transaction. Within my practice, I think that the crux of the issue was that the participants perceived Brenda's story to be an example of transactional sex and not survival sex, which is viewed differently in South Africa. Stadler's ethnographic research into the secrecy and suspicion surrounding Aids-related deaths in the Limpopo Province, explains this point further (2003). His findings demonstrate that there is a difference in how community members perceive young women who have sex for survival and those who have sex for pleasure. In one example, he notes how a young woman was described as 'hitting the jackpot' because through her sexual relations with different men, she was able to contribute to the household's finances and maintain its survival (133). Yet another young girl, who died of Aids, was labelled a prostitute by the community because 'she is the kind of girl who goes to shebeens and… hangs out with the guys who have cell phones or maybe cars' (134). This label is similar to the one that was assigned to Brenda: a young woman happy to take the risks associated with drinking and spending time with men. Here, through an understanding of the larger narrative, the frameworks surrounding the story begin to appear, but the attitudes of the participants and the ways in which Brenda's story was employed need to be examined further.

25   In *Purity and Danger*, Douglas presents the concept of 'danger-beliefs' as being constructions that humanity has developed in order to maintain and protect the 'ideal order of society' from potential transgressions. She suggests that 'danger-beliefs are as much threats which one man uses to coerce another as dangers which he himself fears to incur by his own lapses from righteousness' (1979:3). In her later collection of essays, *Risk and Blame*,

Douglas furthers this by suggesting that '[a] common danger gives [members of the community] a handle to manipulate, the threat of a community-wide pollution is a weapon for mutual coercion' (1992:6). Thus, according to Douglas, danger-beliefs are employed to keep people in check and behave according to the social mores. This proposition of Douglas' may start to explain the indifferent responses of some of the group, in that the 'danger-beliefs' associated with Brenda's story were being used both as a way of controlling social order and as a means of protection, specifically using fear to force other people to conform and behave appropriately. More explicitly, within the South African context, it could be viewed thus: if young women go to shebeens and drink, they are putting themselves at risk of being raped, an occurrence which would be a repercussion of their socially inappropriate behaviour and one which would put the community at risk of infection.

26   Douglas' argument that 'danger is defined to protect the public good' (1992:6) is important to recall here when considering the existing context of the location of the project, where Aids, non-consensual and transactional sex, and crime are common. In Nyanga and the surrounding townships, people may fear for their safety and therefore need to find ways of protecting themselves and their families. This fear could arise from a person's proximity to a 'polluting person', whom Douglas describes as 'always in the wrong', having transgressed a line and thereby 'unleashes danger for someone' (1966:113). For example in this story, since Javas was a local gangster, people would be wary of helping Brenda for fear of angering Javas, therefore here Brenda has transgressed as association with him is risky and hence also makes her a risk.[4] The main concern of the community is to prevent danger and therefore fear becomes one way of controlling people. This is an idea which fits into the broader narrative of contagion in South Africa, which can be regarded as a legacy of apartheid, where 'Tuberculosis and syphilis provided a foundation on which to construct theories of black inferiority and African sexual promiscuity', thereby allowing the government to rationalize the implementation of its racist segregation ideology (Fassin 2007:xviii-xix).

27   Like Douglas, Fassin is concerned with the impact of contagion (or the apartheid regime) on the individual's body and how the body and its story are used for different purposes. Both place a great deal of importance on the influence of culture on ideas of contagion, the cultural theory of which Douglas scrutinizes in relation to Aids:

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[4] A real example of this was Refilwe's account of how no one helped while she was being mugged on a busy street in the afternoon. Although Refilwe was not in the 'wrong', at that moment she was a polluting person as she had attracted the attention of tsotsis (gangsters) and people would have been wary of assisting her for fear of unleashing danger on themselves.

> Try to see the fragile cultural project from the community's point of view. Their idea of the body includes a weak immunity conferred by the double envelope, the body's own skin, and the community's skin. The theory of infection is miasmic. Within the community a person can be safe, so long as entry to the body and entry to the community is controlled. (1992:115).

Contagion encourages fear and anxiety which leads to avoidance of the 'polluting person', which may be a reason why few people believed that Brenda was raped. Additionally, significant emphasis was placed on the fact that Brenda should have known what could happen and thus should have expected it. Some of the participants' responses indicated that when she made her decision to accompany Javas home, she would have known what the outcome would be. As Refilwe described it: 'If a girl accepts the money, there is a "must" feeling to sleep with him. And she is also hoping for another time', that is to say that he will come back to her again, buy her drinks and be with her. Shared openly, this viewpoint echoes the one described in Mbowa's (1997) example and can be seen as a form of control or a step towards outlining appropriate behaviour: in order to protect the community, its parameters (its 'skin') are guarded. Controlling entry helps to protect the community from infection and viewed in this light, Brenda invited danger in by stepping away from the community's protective skin. She put herself at risk by leaving the protection of her friends and therefore she and, by implication, the community were no longer able to control entry to her body. It is this act that places her, and, by extension, the community, at risk of contracting HIV. In witnessing the performance of this story, the majority of the community (in this case made up of other group members and, later on, the audience) responded to Brenda's behaviour with indifference: they criticised her behaviour and they were not sympathetic to her fate, perhaps because her actions were deemed inappropriate and therefore threatening to the moral views the community employed for protection.

28   As mentioned above, two audience members employed the story and retold it to young women of a similar age to Brenda, and it was in these moments that the storyline was employed as a tool. In an interview following the performance, Sylvia explained how she had changed Brenda's story into a 'real' story as she told it to a friend's fifteen-year old daughter, Molly (2008). According to Molly's mother, this 'true' story had a great impact on Molly – that weekend she stayed at home and did not venture out. Sixteen months later, Sylvia mentioned how Molly's mother was glad Sylvia had shared the story as Molly 'needed to hear it' and be shown how she could 'end up the same way' as Brenda (2009). Similarly, Zukiswa spoke of how she discussed the play with her daughter, reminding her that she 'had the same problem from that play'. Zukiswa repeated the moral that if she had not gone out

drinking with her friends, she would not have been raped (2008). Now, Zukiswa reports her daughter 'don't have friends now' and stays at home to study (2009). In this instance, the theatre practice became another means of controlling the community. In the name of protection, a story was used to scare young women so that they do not become polluting persons and unleash danger for someone else. In his book, *Stigma*, Goffman notes that 'The stigmatization of those with a bad moral record clearly can function as a means of formal social control' (1990:165). Thus, perhaps Brenda was being used as a danger-belief as her story was put forward as a moral for others to be aware of.

29   In my view, by deciding to use Brenda's story in such a manner, Sylvia and Zukiswa's actions helped to reinforce existing attitudes about gender relations and sexual stereotypes, which in turn served to increase the stigma surrounding rape and non-consensual sex. The use of the character of Brenda both as a 'danger-belief' and as a means of control is a worrying outcome for applied theatre practice. Not only is the theatre providing the space for such an act, the manner in which the story is recounted limits potential dialogical possibilities. One of the purposes of this practice was to facilitate dialogue, however, when an older woman lectures a younger woman in such a manner, dialogue is not possible. Here the protective skin of the community is being closed: in order to keep the young women safe, the older women employed the narrative in a disciplinary manner rather than as a communication tool to discuss non-consensual sex, which may have been a more 'positive' outcome for the practice. In one view then, the creative risks taken in the performance of a controversial subject led to a restrictive and potentially dangerous outcome, where in the retelling of Brenda's story, the theatre became another means of controlling young women. In the name of protection, a story was used to scare a young woman and prevent her becoming a polluting person. Thus, it could be argued that the debate was an opportunity for the women to verbally condemn Brenda's behaviour in an attempt to 'force one another into good citizenship' (Douglas 1979:3). This outcome, in terms of a sexual health communication framework, was a means of demonstrating how to limit risk-taking by staying at home. Yet, it seems to me that the theatre practice resulted in a reinforcement of a moral discourse on the behaviour of young women. This outcome is one that challenges the dialogical ideal desired for in this project, as it does not provide an opportunity for all parties to share their words. Therefore, as a facilitator, how does one respond to such a situation without setting up a dominant discourse or assuming ownership of knowledge? Perhaps the answer lies in the reason behind the disciplinarian approach (why did the older women retell Brenda's story?), whereby the outcome may be viewed in another light.

30   In a review of violence against women, Krug noted that for many young Southern African women, their first sexual encounter 'is often unwanted and forced', with one study reporting that over 70% of the teenage respondents (at an antenatal clinic in Cape Town) 'feared being beaten if they refused sex'. It was also observed worldwide that the more educated (and therefore more 'empowered') a woman was, the higher the risk of sexual violence (2002:152-7). Moreover, if we consider the context in which the women live, there are not many means of protection available to the young women's mothers: the streets are notoriously unsafe, there are few safe locations (other than their homes) for young women to be in, and there are limited 'safe' recreational activities. Consequently, it is perhaps understandable that the older women, as mothers, were indifferent to Brenda's plight, as one of their sole means of protecting their children is to keep them at home and therefore they could not afford the risk of being seen to condone Brenda's right to go to a bar and accept a drink from a man with no other agreed-upon transaction. Accordingly, in a public arena (the performance and outside of Etafeni), women had an opportunity to protect their community and they chose to use Brenda's story as an example – setting out a moral stance which was used as a means of discouraging young women from leaving their homes in order to keep them safe. In the moment of retelling the story, Sylvia and Zukiswa were being tactical – they were aiming to keep the young women they cared about safe.

Conclusion

31   This article has argued that risk-taking can be an essential part of applied theatre practice as when it is coupled with a dialogical approach, it can result in a situation where people 'encounter risks on their own terms' and engage with discussions around sensitive and controversial subjects such as non-consensual sex. With reference to Beck's notion of a risk-sharing community, it was suggested that in the process of partaking in these discussions, such a community was established, whereby people took risks by challenging different views as well as taking action by discussing the subject outside of the performance space. However, it also emerged that the narrative was being employed as a moral discourse to control young women's behaviour. This outcome, coupled with the seemingly dismissive attitudes held towards Brenda's situation prompted a questioning over the challenge of maintaining dialogical relations when the end-product of the creative risk-taking did not tally with the facilitator's expectations for the project. Yet, considering the larger context of transactional sex in South Africa and, Douglas' theories of contagion and danger-beliefs, the participants' attitudes and Sylvia and Zukiswa's use of Brenda's story can be understood as a protective

response (guarding the community's mores). Indeed, while the use of Brenda's story as a moral discourse challenged the dialogical ideal of the project (as it did not allow all parties to voice an opinion), considering the limited means of protection and young women's difficulty in negotiating sexual relations, this seemingly repressive outcome was actually a tactical means of protection and possibly the most appropriate response for this situation. Although it goes against how I would wish women in this community to live, as an outsider I cannot – and do not wish to – create a dominant discourse about how they should live.

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