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Health, violence and sexuality in the accounts of sexually and gender non-normative users of public health services in South Africa

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Abstract

The constitutional protection afforded to the LGBT/queer community in South Africa has not effectively eradicated discrimination. Queerness continues to be violently "othered" in important public spaces and institutions. One such critical space, is the over-burdened and under-resourced public health care system, which remains particularly unresponsive to the needs of sexually and gendered non-normative persons. Research in this area tends to focus on queer identity as a risk-factor for wellbeing without appreciating the complex constitution of queer subjectivity produced through the very interaction with the public health system in South Africa. Through the use of a narrative-discursive design, this research aims to explore the subjectivity of queer consumers of public health and their interface with social, structural and symbolic violence/s. Using stories of experiencing healthcare as an entry point, this study troubles the notion of queerness as merely a category at the receiving end of prejudice in the public health system. Rather, the study focuses on how this very health system produces queerness as an instrument and effect of biopower. The data collected via semi-structured interviews with 10 volunteer LGBT participants who make regular use of public health services was wed to discourse analysis to explore the nexus between being queer and being a public health consumer in South Africa. This study is of particular relevance for stakeholders within the sector, providing experiential accounts of how violence centres the use of healthcare for LGBT consumers which may provide a response that could inform future health services policy.

Keywords: Biopolitics, Disciplinary Power, LGBT, Microaggression, Public Health, Sexuality, South Africa, Violence.