

Understanding and addressing homophobia in schools: a view from teachers

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South African schools have been found to be homophobic. Teachers can play an important role in offering a critique of homophobia grounded in South Africa's legal claim to equality on the basis of sexual orientation. Currently there is a dearth of educational research about how teachers understand and address homophobia. By drawing upon focus-group interviews with teachers based at five schools, this paper shows dominant teaching views which contribute to homophobia, although this is not the only view. Informed by theoretical framings that seek to uncover heterosexual domination, the analysis shows three interrelated discursive constructions through which homophobia is both produced and resisted by teachers. Silencing homosexuality, denying its existence in the curriculum, and religious prohibitions were found to be dominant. It must be understood however that teachers are working in a context without any intervention and support. Their views also show potential for working against the climate of homophobia. Recommendations for such work are indicated in the conclusion of the paper.

Keywords: curriculum; homophobia; interventions; religion; secondary schools; sexual silences; teachers

In February 2012 four men were convicted and sentenced to 18 years in prison for murdering a Cape Town lesbian. Homophobic crimes stain South Africa's progressive democracy. In response, the Human Rights Watch (2011) has called upon the South African state to condemn homophobic violence and increase educational awareness of the principle of equality on the basis of sexual orientation, as guaranteed by the South African Constitution. In October 2011 the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development set up a national task team to develop strategic interventions to deal with homophobic crimes.

Legislative and educational interventions are needed to understand and address the gravity of the problem. This article argues that schools and teachers in particular play an important role in facilitating an alternative discourse grounded in a critique of homophobia. The heinous attacks against gays and lesbians provide teachers with a crucial opportunity to open dialogue and critique about the meaning of sexual equality, the ways in which violence is engendered, and the connection between schooling and the responsibilities of learners to the development of South Africa's democracy.

In this paper the term homophobia is used to illustrate how oppressive relations are constituted in relation to gays and lesbians at school. There is no uniform definition of what constitutes homophobia but it includes a dislike, fear, avoidance and denial of homosexuality (Herek, 2004). There is much debate about how best to capture the persistence of sexual prejudice and oppression to explain marginalization. Beyond the use of the word homophobia,

Herek suggests that terms like sexual prejudice, sexual stigma, homo-negativity, heterosexism may offer a more nuanced understanding of homophobia. Although there is merit in using these terms, in the emerging school-based research in South Africa homophobia continues to be invaluable in understanding the ways in which gays and lesbians are constructed and remains an important tool in raising awareness of sexual inequalities.

As evidence is beginning to show, South African schools are homophobic (Msibi, 2012; Butler, Alpaslan, Strümpher & Astbury, 2003; Richardson, 2004), with the experiences of gays and lesbians fraught with prejudice and oppression. In Msibi's (2012:12) study of African township schools one gay learner stated that the teacher:

... dragged me by neck ... He always says that he doesn't like 'izitabane' [derogatory word for gay in isiZulu]. Other teachers just laugh and do nothing ...

Butler et al.'s (2003:21) study also points to teachers' prejudice:

... there is one teacher ... he is so against gay people and he is always criticizing gay people openly in class ... And everyone would laugh ... and I just burst into tears ...

The Department of Education (2002) identifies social transformation, human rights and equality as important principles in educational transformation. The identification of homophobia in schools and teachers' complicity poses several challenges to these principles, disfiguring the progressive claims of equality, and staining the potential of teachers in their work towards sexual equality and social justice. The repudiation of homosexuality and constitution of heterosexuality as the norm during lessons, through jokes and outright discrimination by teachers, require attention. Where gays and lesbians are made to feel excluded at school and lesser than normal, this is a betrayal of South Africa's democracy, making work with teachers in understanding and addressing homophobia all the more important.

To date there have been limited studies that focus on homosexuality and South African teachers with testimonies about teachers reported by gay and lesbian learners (Msibi, 2012) and children in gay and lesbian families (Lubbe, 2007). It must be understood that teachers are social agents bearing the mark of culture, religion, sexuality and gender (Schoeman, 2006; Francis & Le Roux, 2011). Their meanings of homosexuality are located within complex social systems of meanings which include gender, religion and culture (Msibi, 2012).

Despite the negative framing of teachers' work towards social equality, there is also recognition that they can help to improve the experiences of gays and lesbians through appropriate intervention programmes (Butler et al., 2003). However, we first need to know how teachers construct the rights of gays and lesbians in schools, and how religion, sexuality and teaching coalesce to produce constraints and opportunities for interventions. To develop interventions that are meaningful, we need to know and understand the discursive positioning of teachers in relation to homophobia. So far we know too little on this matter.

Recognising the pivotal importance of teachers in ending oppressive forms of relations (Schoeman, 2006), international and local research shows that teachers are strong allies in developing learners' capacities to question and interrupt inequalities based on social difference (Lingard & Mills, 2007). As Delpit (2006:166) states:

When teachers are committed to teaching all students, and when they understand that through their teaching change can occur, then the chance for transformation is great.

This article aims to question teachers' understandings of homophobia and assess how they might address the problem. This could serve the interest of securing a safe environment for gays and learners at school and engendering a new understanding amongst all learners to raise awareness of sexual discrimination. Development of a school culture where homophobia is

challenged depends a great deal, amongst other constituencies, on the capacity of teachers to engender such an environment.

Beginning work with teachers to address homophobia is especially significant in South Africa at a time when strategies and interventions need to be put in place in various institutions in the country, as determined by the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development task team. The Human Rights Watch (2011) accused South Africa of not doing enough to stop the epidemic of violence against gays and lesbians in the country. School-based intervention programmes can do much to build a culture of respect and dignity. Schools are places where learners and teachers can engage in dialogue about critical social matters (Department of Education, 2002). Learners who are not inducted into the principles enshrined in the Constitution may be ill-prepared to engage with the rights of gays and lesbians. Working with teachers to develop a transformative approach to challenge and readjust narrow constructions of sexuality remains vital. This article contributes towards this emerging work in educational research in South Africa.

Literature review

Article 9(3) of South Africa's Constitution (1996) states:

No person shall be unfairly discriminated against on the grounds of race, gender, sex, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, birth, or marital status.

Putting homosexuality on schools' agenda is no longer a violation under the Equality Clause. Against this legal backdrop Wolpe, Martinez and Quinlan (1997), in reporting on the state of gender and education, were first to formally recognise the missing evidence of sexuality in South African schools, noting only that schools are critical sites for enforcement of heterosexuality. Beyond this, there was not much detail in the report about the prevalence, form and shape of homophobia in South African schools — and in the absence of research, this is not surprising. Deacon, Morrell and Prinsloo (1999) provide the first research evidence, arguing that teachers' views about democracy and transformation are in conflict with the progressive policy in the country, with teachers holding onto familiar patriarchal constructions of gender and sexuality in/through which homophobia is constructed.

Continuing with a negative construction of teachers' views, Butler et al. (2003), Richardson (2004), Butler and Astbury (2008) and Msibi (2012), drawing from the testimonies of gay and lesbian learners, point to ways in which South African teachers invest in heterosexuality and repudiate alternate forms of sexuality as they contribute to a homophobic environment. Francis and Msibi (2011) focus on pre-service student teachers at a university institution, and argue like Deacon et al. (2009) that longstanding tropes associate heterosexuality with domination, interlocking with patriarchy and religion, and whilst potential exists for student teachers to rethink these familiar understandings, homophobia cannot simply be addressed exclusively by stand-alone teaching modules.

Msibi (2012) focuses on 14 young people between the ages of 14 and 20 years, both in and out of school, providing testimony of a culture of fear, harassment and the intersecting ways in which religion, gender and culture limit sexual freedoms in African township schools. Msibi's study includes the views of two teachers. So far the literature in South Africa points to a grim view, with teachers constructed as "guilty" (Butler et al., 2003) in the negative framing of gays and lesbians. Teachers are accused of colluding and contributing to homophobia, disregarding everyday instances of homophobic harassment and brushing off violent

reports of homophobia.

Despite this negative sentiment, the research also highlights the potential for teachers to work against discrimination (Msibi, 2012). There is recognition in the literature that teachers operate in a vacuum with no support from the Department of Education. This means that without any corrective steps to ensure that the rights of all learners are protected, gays and lesbians remain at risk of negative experiences (Butler et al., 2003). The majority of learners who are not gay are also at risk of creating meanings based on discrimination and familiar understandings of sexuality. This has negative consequences for schools and the prospect of a safe and secure environment in South Africa.

So far the perspectives of teachers in a wide variety of South African schools remain largely absent (see exceptions Deacon et al., 1999; Msibi, 2012). Addressing this dearth of information, this article brings into focus the views of teachers located in South African secondary schools. It shows how their views are caught up in normalising discourses through which they make meaning of homophobia at school. This has serious implications for school-based intervention programmes, which are raised in the conclusion of this article.

A theoretical note

This article draws on theoretical framings that work to rupture heterosexual discourses in schools. Theorists working in the field of sexuality and education predominate in the west (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Allen, 2010; Mac an Ghaill, 1995). There is now a developing body of South African work that tries to explain the organising patterns of thinking and ideologies through which heterosexuality becomes dominant (Msibi, 2012; Francis & Msibi, 2011; Butler et al., 2003). It must be noted here that schools are often seen as places for learning and teaching, not sexual spaces, and therefore discussion about sexuality in general — even though supported by policy — remains silenced even as it is present.

Schools are sexualised institutions despite the denial, through which heterosexual domination becomes an organising principle. Theorists working in this field of sexuality and education attempt to uncover these dominant discourses (Msibi, 2012; Francis & Msibi, 2012; Mac an Ghaill, 1995; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Allen, 2010). Heterosexuality is based on power, and its privilege is marked in schools. The power and privilege occurs through a sex/gender binary which states that sexual desire occurs only between women and men, and other forms of sexuality are seen to be 'deviant'. Social structures and practices are informed by this privileging and perhaps best captured by Allen's (2010:159) study of New Zealand schools, where she states that heterosexuality is the "social air we breathe". In South Africa using queer theory Msibi (2012) emphasises how identities are made on the exclusion of an 'other'.

Whilst importing theories without understanding the structural and social circumstances of South African teachers can be problematic, what is useful for this study is the ways in which the theorising above can help with uncovering heterosexual domination and also provide scope for the potential for intervention and transformation. Queer theory is based on instability of meaning, so while heterosexuality might be dominant there is always instability of meaning (Msibi, 2012). When heterosexuality is seen as something fixed, it is difficult to shift meanings. Contradictions and the instabilities of meaning provide the scope needed to begin work towards engendering a new understanding of sexuality.

The question here is: How can teachers resist discourses that make heterosexuality the norm? It must also be noted here that the power of heterosexuality is very pervasive, and even if there are instabilities there are also attempts to reinscribe its power. These theoretical expla-

nations offer a useful way of understanding teachers' views about sexuality, although it is important to note the circumstances under which teachers give meaning to homophobia. For example, South Africa schools do not often deal with sexual matters, despite the Department of Education's 2002 injunction to do so. Matters about sexuality are also caught up on religious doctrines, and South Africa has been identified as promulgating Christian ethics that sit in tension with the rights of gays and lesbians.

To begin to develop appropriate interventions, we need to focus on teachers' understandings of homophobia and the scope that exists in reworking narrow and restrictive accounts that limit the freedoms of gays and lesbians. The argument that teachers are important in mediating knowledge about sexuality is compelling. Fundamental questions remain about how teachers construct the imperative to disrupt education for heterosexuality. In view of the lapse in research, this article addresses this caveat.

Research method

Data were produced through focus group interviews conducted with 25 teachers located in five diverse school contexts in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng province. The main aim is not to understand individual teachers but the discursive constructs and dominant positions through which teachers give meaning to gays and lesbians at school, and the potential to work with teachers in the interests of respect and dignity for sexual equality.

Five schools were selected from the two provinces based on accessibility, feasibility and availability of researchers in the two provinces. The schools included an African rural school (ARS), African township school (ATS), a former Indian school (FIS) and a former white school (FWS). In Gauteng province access was obtained for research in a former coloured school (FCS) located in Johannesburg. In total 10 African teachers (five females at an ARS, three females and two males at an ATS), five white teachers (one male and four females at an FWS), five Indian teachers (three females and two males at an FIS) and five coloured teachers (three females and two males at an FCS) participated in the study.

One two-hour focus group interviews were conducted in each school, with each focus group comprising five teachers. The teachers were aged between 35 and 58 years, with teaching experience varying from 12 to 28 years. Their participation was dependent upon their willingness to join the interviews, their availability during school hours and the suitability of their non-teaching times at school. The study is thus limited in relation to the specific views presented by 25 teachers who agreed to participate in the study. Therefore the study cannot be generalised but is limited by the specific views presented by teachers in diverse schools who were willing and available to participate in the study. The study therefore cannot claim to represent the views of teachers in diverse South African school settings.

This study is not about individual teachers but is an investigation of teachers' discursive positioning in relation to gays and lesbians at schools. The questions were facilitated by a semi-structured interview schedule which focused on issues regarding the understanding of homosexuality, the laws in the country, and how schools deal with homosexuality. The interviews took a conversational form with teachers discussing and raising issues which they thought were important to discuss.

All names used are pseudonyms. Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. In all schools English was used, although in the rural school there was switching from isiZulu to English and some parts of these interviews have been translated. The study was approved by both the KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng provincial Departments of Education. Ethical clearance

was provided by the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Working with Braun and Clarke's (2006) model of thematic analysis, the data were analysed through a step-by-step procedure which began by searching through the interviews conducted with all teachers for repeated patterns of meaning in describing and understanding homophobia in schools. In the second part of the analysis codes were produced which highlighted potential patterns. First each focus group interview in each of the schools was coded, and these codes were matched across the five focus group interviews across the schools. The next step involved production of a thematic map where themes were further refined in relation to the data from all schools.

It must be noted here that this article focuses on the dominant themes across all five interviews. Other work in this study has focused on variations and contradictions with particular emphasis on the social contexts of the school. Here the focus is on three major interrelated themes which deal with regulating homosexuality through silencing, religious discourses and silencing in teaching sexuality. The major aim is to provide these dominating views across the five schools. To ensure readability the names of teachers are indicated by M1 ATS, for example, which is male teacher participant one (M1) at the African township school (ATS). Themes that arose are now discussed.

Silencing (Homo)sexuality

One way in which teachers dealt with sexuality was through the mechanism of silencing. Schools are often considered to be places that have an academic purpose, and sexuality is regarded as inappropriate there:

- F1 (ARS) *I do not think we can be really concerned about such behaviour ... our main purpose is to set the person right so that one gets an education ... They can then do their thing outside the school.*
- M1 (ATS) *People coming out or not ... We just don't talk about that.*
- F3 (ATS) *... that's private.*
- M1 (FCS) *... What your sexuality is all about has got nothing to do with me, I don't need to know it, I don't need to see it ...*

Sexuality and coming out as homosexual was not regarded as appropriate in schools and relegated to the realm of the private and something that had to do with 'outside the school'. In denying the existence of sexuality in schools, the teachers found it possible then not to deal with such matters. An inconsistent relationship is created between sexuality and the academic value of education, the former being derided as an illegitimate concern in school.

Homosexuality was also silenced through regulatory practices which castigated learners who wore their "sexuality on their sleeve". Bringing attention to non-conforming behaviour, the performance of gay people were derided as being alien to the school culture. Showing off, putting oneself in the limelight, exaggerated talk, walk, skinny and tight jeans were seen as a violation of normative heterosexual conduct:

- F1 (ARS) *...they need to be taught how to behave. ... Why can't they behave normally on the outside ... They exaggerate even when they talk, they shout ... They do things that will make you notice them ... they must just live their lives and stop seeking other people's attention...*

Gay masculinities are given content and repudiated. The teacher above states that they should behave 'normally', with normally meaning acceptable heterosexual conduct, dress and behaviour. In this way the sexualities of others are silenced and excluded.

- M1 (FWS) *... my big concern is don't come into the class and broadcast it to try and disrupt my lesson. If you want to be gay or lesbian, that's your own choice, I'm not going to deny you learning opportunities.*
- F2 (FWS) *And it's personal.*
- M1 (FWS) *It is personal, um, but also don't come in here and try and turn my class into a showroom or exhibition or anything like that because I'm here to teach you and I'm here to teach everyone who comes into my class ...*

Some teachers have a particular understanding of gays, underpinned by claims of exhibitionist behaviour, regarded as non-normative and denounced. The homogenous portrayals of gay learners functions to reinvent a negative stereotype based on behaviour. The visibility of homosexuality in the classroom through behaviour and style produces discomfort for teachers, who assume that appropriate behaviour is heterosexually acceptable and thus attempt to regulate and deny it from mainstream behaviour. In so doing it appears that some teachers are complicit in inciting feelings of 'abnormality' of conduct in relation to gay learners.

Another way in which some teachers silenced sexuality was to place emphasis on other social inequalities:

- M2 (FIS) *...this matter is something not so important as the other matters regarding say racism you know ... so sexuality you know is not really on the table at the moment ... it's being swept under the carpet, so to speak.*

Hierarchies of social inequalities are created above, and despite the evidence of violence, murder and death with regard to homophobic crimes, a strategy is put in place where sexuality is not regarded as a serious social issue in comparison to race. Relegating sexuality to an inconsequential matter and to the domain of the private is an attempt to silence it. As a teacher states, "*I don't need to know it, I don't need to see it*". Denial is a strategic means to cast sexuality outside of the domain of teachers' responsibilities.

Religion and Homosexuality

In South Africa religion plays a major role in everyday life, with Richardson (2004) noting a strong Calvinistic tradition impacting on gays and lesbian learners. Colonialism and missionary activity produced a strong Christian ethos amongst the majority of Africans, with traditional beliefs merging with Christian values (Epprecht, 2004). Religion was a dominant means through which homosexuality was subordinated and denounced as "sinful". A teacher at the ARS referred to homosexuality as '*Sodom and Gomorrah*', used as metaphors for vice (Dreyer, 2008). As Adamczyk and Pitt (2009) show, religious beliefs are typically seen as powerful predictors of sexual prejudice, with homosexuality often associated with unnatural acts:

- M1 (FTS) *...our country is very much driven by religion ... in different churches they don't accept it just like the Roman Catholic Church ... it is not acceptable...*
- F2 (ATS) *With me I will be praying for that person, reading the Bible for them, hoping they see the reality that it is really, really, really ungodly.*

Research has shown how religious convictions increase the likelihood of intolerance towards gays and lesbians (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009). Choice, sexual agency and desires for same-sex appear unnatural and forbidden in relation to the rules of God. Heterosexuality is naturalised. At ATS many of the teachers declared their religious affiliation as Christian or Christian with links with African traditions which has some strong overlaps with Christianity, and together they create mutually reinforcing anxieties which equate sex with divine retribution.

F1 (ATS) *...like the issue of abortion, it is legal but it leaves us with our emotions that are driven by culture and religion.*

Most teachers here strongly disapproved of homosexuality on the grounds of the Christian religion. The strong emphasis on religion and the incompatibility with homosexuality led to schools' disaffection:

F1 (FWS) *...very fundamentalist, Christian predominantly, girls, who were very loud... all the Hindu children in school were going to hell, um, and that these, this particular couple were targeted by them ... we had a young man who ... was openly gay ... and there was quite a bit of pressure from parents that he be removed from the school. We've got a very conservative parent community.*

The strong religious beliefs amongst learners linking to parental conservatism led to pressure being placed on the school to remove the openly gay learner. Being gay at school amidst a fundamental religious backdrop provokes strong reactions — as does being of another religion, as the example of Hindu children above illustrates.

If and when confronted with homosexuality amongst learners, some teachers state that they will use religious teachings to cure and get rid of the sin as indicated at FCS:

... you know this is what the Bible says, or in Islam this is what the Quran says, ... I give them all the knowledge, orientation, this however what the Bible says ... and then it is your decision that you have to make ... when you go to church there's definitely gonna be that judgement ...

Instead of acceptance, religion is used to offer rehabilitation and instill fear as there would be 'judgement'.

Despite the overwhelming ways in which religion was deployed to reject homosexuality, religion was also used as a strategy for building unity and respect. This is evident in South Africa's churches, many of which include gays and lesbians. Religion, as some teachers noted, is not fixed and is not impervious to change:

M1 (FCS) *...most of our churches in the area they were very intolerant ... whether it's Christian or Muslim ... they became outcasts, outcasts. Now, because of the change in our democracy that the churches even realise that those are people, they're first people before they ... homosexuals ... to bring love and 'ubuntu', you know, over to those people, and uh, in our church I've seen that we, we've changed because from being very strict ... we accepting now your orientation...*

Negative reactions coexist with the language of the law. Religion thus is not some transcendental power limiting the rights of gays and lesbians. Religion does play a significant role in regulating the experiences and rights of learners at school, but there are changing possibilities and links directly to the culture of rights in the country and the flexibility that religion offers in meanings and interpretation. The African concept of ubuntu, widely used in the country to promote transformation, refers to communality, humanness and equality. A core value of ubuntu is the rights of the individual, but also the responsibilities and duties towards other people (Schoeman, 2006). This is not to deny the high levels of homophobia reported here amongst most teachers, but at the same time meanings are not stable and the country's democratic trajectory and African philosophies of ubuntu are important in understanding changing positions in the church and amongst teachers. Religion can both reduce, through a philosophy of love and care for humanity as in 'ubuntu', and exacerbate prejudice through denouncing homosexuality.

Teaching Sexuality: It's different from Homosexuality

When asked whether homosexuality was addressed in the schools, some teachers said they would teach tolerance not homosexuality, others were unhappy about teaching it, stating that it was not in the syllabus, whereas others stated that the Department of Education did not prepare them for it:

- F1 (ARS) *It is not on the curriculum.*
 F3 (ATS) *We don't ever get to that subject.*
 M1 (ATS) *... that's not in our syllabus.*
 F3 (ATS) *It's not in our field. Way out of our field. It's got nothing to do with us.*
 Researcher *Do you talk about sexuality in schools?*
 F3 (ATS) *There's LO [Life Orientation].*
 M1 (ATS) *Yes. But sexuality is different from homosexuality.*
 M1 (ATS) *But homo is specific ...*

Most teachers claimed that teaching about gays and lesbians was not in the curriculum. The reluctance must be seen against the broader context of sexual silencing and where discussions about sexuality are difficult and exacerbated by the deviance seen in alternate forms of sexuality; as the teacher M1 (ATS) states, '*homo is specific*'.

- M1 (FCS) *I think we're not prepared for this, none of us are really prepared for this.*

Teachers are not prepared for dealing with homosexuality, and many stated that they did not see it in the Life Orientation (LO) guidelines. Indeed, the LO guidelines (Department of Education, 2002) do not mention homosexuality at all, although there are several references to sexuality and by implication heterosexuality.

The difficulty in thinking about putting homosexuality on the school agenda and teaching it was also caused by the anxiety created by the power of the parent and the religious convictions:

- F4 (FWS) *It's gonna come from home, it's gonna come from home, parents are more problematic than the children.*
 F1 (FWS) *...well don't forget the, the, the GB [governing body] is run by the parents.*
 F4 (FWS) *And that has control over how the school is run and that is a very strong ethos, particularly in our present governing body.*
 F2 (FCS) *I think there's still a stigma attached to it and maybe the community ... is not supportive of... like that ... the learners at school are part of that community.*
 F3 (FCS) *But the workshops must start with the parents ... they don't wanna hear about it so the workshops must start with the parent and the child ...*

It is clear that parents play a pivotal role in regulating matters around sexuality through the power, for example, that they wield through the school governing body. All forms of sexuality stirred discomfort, as some teachers noted, and they stated that the parents will be opposed to teaching about homosexuality.

Importantly, there was no fixity in relation to parental regulation, as a few teachers pointed to the possibilities engendering a climate of transformation:

- F2 (FCS) *... there's no specific LO for homosexuality in any of the syllabus ... We only deal with sexuality, male, female ... and that to me is, is frightening, especially with the fact that these, these people are being victimised, they're being murdered, there's suicide. I think it's important that the young people should learn about it, and at the moment they're not*

learning anything ... I think there's definitely a need.

Recognising the frightening reality in South Africa where gays and lesbians are 'victimised', 'murdered' and facing suicidal risks, the teacher above noted the need to put intervention strategies in place at schools.

F3 (FTS) *...the government must come up and protect and be able to deal with the problems the country ... they can't ignore the situation ... and how we are going to go about having strategies to deal with it ... Let me just say I don't like it ... but you still have to accommodate the person ... you should try as much as possible not to discriminate ...*

Moving beyond the personal views of teachers, the problem in South Africa demands attention and 'strategies', as some teachers noted:

F3 (FCS) *... it's something that needs to be discussed wherever ... the opportunity comes, so each of us must be open-minded or broadminded ... we don't, because it's against our principles, our value systems, our religion, but ... it's important that we educate our learners irrespective of how we feel personally about something, you know ... I think training for all teachers is important, even if it's just the basic how to deal with, how to approach ... how to talk about such issues. If only that can be covered I think we, we would have achieved a lot because we are battling, many of our teachers are battling, you know.*

M1 (FCS) *All types, all types of sexuality, bisexuality, heterosexuality, I mean we, we've got teenage pregnancy problems at school, we've got abusive relationships in terms of sexuality and sexual abuse of different types, so I think it's not just about homosexuality, it's all aspects of sexuality to be dealt with in deep ... so I think that is, that is, that is very, very important that it should be addressed as part of our training as educators.*

Opening up options in dealing with homosexuality in schools includes training for teachers, broadening philosophies of thinking and addressing sexuality more holistically which includes homosexuality. This suggests that despite the overwhelming context where homosexuality is rejected and ostracised, some teachers realise the need for intervention to deal with sexuality in comprehensive ways that address the current context of teenage pregnancy, sexual coercion and all aspects of sexuality — moving away from the hidden and silenced dimensions of sexuality, moving beyond religious values and working in the best interests of the learners.

Conclusion

The analysis offered in this paper is based on the accounts of 25 teachers who were willing to participate in the study. The findings and analysis are thus limited by the sample and restricted to the views expressed by the participants only. The statements and the conclusions drawn from this paper cannot be generalized to all teachers in diverse secondary schools in South Africa. While the conclusion that follows has wider application to South African schooling, further research is required to enhance the findings of this study.

Despite these limitations, in the context of homophobic violence and crimes in South Africa, teacher interventions are necessary. What is at risk is not only the safety and security of gays and lesbians both in and out of schools, but also the very promise of the Equality Clause. Informed by theoretical framings that seek to uncover heterosexual domination, this article has focused on three interrelated discursive constructions through which homophobia is both

produced, reproduced and resisted by teachers. Consistent with other research in South Africa (Butler et al., 2003; Msibi, 2012), teachers are guilty of working against the rights of gays and lesbians at school through denying its existence in the curriculum, through religious discourses and through sexual silencing working in the interests of heterosexuality. Teachers are part of the broader social context and the denial and restrictions to sexual freedoms noted here form part of the wider context where homosexuality is regulated and denied.

However, the scope in developing appropriate teaching interventions is remarkable given the climate of homophobia in the country and in schools. Meanings about heterosexual dominance are not intact and impervious to change, as teachers in this study demonstrated. Some teachers are open to change and recognise the need to do so. They provide important cues in opening up the possibilities for contesting heterosexual domination. Teachers need to set an example for creating the conditions for debate and dialogue by contesting the normative constructions of sexuality where homosexuality is regarded as deviant.

The Department of Education needs to develop intervention programmes with teachers focusing on the ways in which heterosexual dominance operates and to enable a recognition of the damaging ways in which gays and lesbians experience schooling (Msibi, 2012). Educational interventions must redress the little attention paid to sexuality and the ways in which sexuality is silenced. Teachers must address sexuality so that learners can engage with issues that include the rights of gays and lesbians and homophobic violence, and are equipped with the skills and knowledge to do so. Connecting classrooms with the sexual emergencies and sexual violence faced in South Africa is important, and teachers should provide a space within classrooms to transform into struggles for sexual equality. Whilst the Department of Education (2002) has ensured that sexuality is a critical part of educational development, there is need to monitor and evaluate what and how sexuality is taught. There is a need for the Department of Education to make specific reference to homosexuality as a key area for debate, knowledge and information. So far this remains a missing word in its guideline intervention programmes with teachers, which include a focus on heterosexual domination and the taken for granted assumptions of heterosexual behaviour and conduct, and the derision of behaviour associated with homosexuality. Working with teachers necessarily involves developing a more 'broad-minded' view of religion, one through which the humanity of people and the spirit of ubuntu are of foremost importance. Expanding and enabling a broad-minded approach must include the very force of culture not only as a regulatory tool but as changing and responding to South Africa's democracy.

Teachers cannot completely eliminate homophobia, but they can work against heterosexual hegemony. This requires, in part, that teachers question the discourses through which heterosexuality becomes the norm in the school, interrupt behaviour that is homophobic and persist with the democratic project. However, schools must also do the bridging work for renegotiating with parents and the community to address the homosexual 'problematic', to challenge orthodox parental views as described by teachers and challenge the relations of domination and subordination.

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