Parental views of morality and sexuality and the implications for South African moral education

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Parental views of morality and sexuality and the implications for South African moral education

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Discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation is prohibited in South Africa. Against legal gains, however, are marked increases in homophobic violence. Schools are deeply implicated in the development of a moral education premised on democracy and sexual equality. This paper sought to examine the ways in which parents situated within diverse social contexts define, regulate and entrench the right to sexual equality, analyzing their implications for moral education in schools. The data were derived through an interview-based study of 17 parents of learners across five secondary schools in two provinces in the country. Hetero-morality was found to be particularly powerful limiting the rights of gays and lesbians. The social and cultural processes through which hetero-morality is upheld reproduce negative outcomes for gays and lesbians. Despite this, the paper finds that parents are capable of engendering support for sexual justice and building alliances with schools to promote a new version of morality. The paper presents further warrant for working with parents in the development of moral education premised upon sexual rights.

Introduction

The South African Constitution prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. Remarkable progress has been made in securing the rights of gays and lesbians in the country. Rejecting the heinous policies of apartheid, which criminalized sodomy, exclusive heterosexuality has been unsettled and sexual inclusivity has become a key indicator of citizenship. Against the legal gains, however, are heightening contestations in the country, witnessed in the form of cultural, religious and moral crusades against gays and lesbians. Of acute concern is the way in which the homophobic turn has become a violent masculine backlash: 'Curative rape', identified by the Human Rights Watch (2011) as a serious violation of the

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country's democracy, is a growing concern and operates not only to 'cure' lesbians of homosexuality but is situated within the broader gender dynamic propelled by a reinforcement of masculine heterosexual power and privilege. Under such conditions, the moral integrity of South African society has been questioned and a renewed focus on morality, moral education and human rights is necessary. Swartz (2010), in this journal, has noted how morality and citizenship have been brought together, albeit tenuously, in the efforts to rebuild the fractures in South African society emerging out of colonialism and apartheid and still located in the crucible of persistent social and economic inequalities. In response to the crisis around sexuality, Human Rights Watch (2011) has called on the South African state to reject homophobic violence and to institute public education initiatives to increase awareness of the principles of justice, equality and respect, as entrenched in the Equality Clause of the Constitution. Moral education has a place, as Swartz (2010) recognizes, and is situated in the nexus of hope, promised by the discourse of rights, and the pervasiveness and the pain of structural fractures. In bringing attention to moral education in Africa, Swartz adds:

> To be clear, moral education in Africa, and elsewhere, ought to be concerned with both private and public morality; with what it means to be a good person and to lead a good life. … It should be concerned with violence and crime … inequality … as well as the moral implications of … gender equality … fairness, racism, homophobia, human rights and justice in all its forms. These are all moral issues and of importance for moral education in sub-Saharan Africa. (p. 268)

Of importance to this paper is the moral implication of homophobia. It is concerned with the South African parents of young school-going learners and asks questions about their views and their capability to support the endeavour to develop a sexually just society. In South African schools, the *Manifesto on values, education and democracy* (Department of Education, 2001) supports the principles of democracy and has a moral and ethical direction towards social transformation. Schools are indispensable in fostering an environment of critical thinking and debate towards the development of a moral order premised upon democratic value. As the document states 'values and morality give meaning to our individual and social relationships' (pp. 9–10). The encouragement of moral growth and moral values is aligned to South African democratic education and key to citizenship. Parents have been identified as key to enhancing schools efforts towards social justice (South African Schools Act (SASA), 1996; Department of Education, 2002).

How would parents respond to the goal of sexual transformation? Schools cannot do the work of transformation alone. Putting a selected group of South African parents of high school learners into the focus, this paper seeks to demonstrate how parents produce hetero-morality and their capacities to transform the conditions that produce these morals. The article shows how morality is embedded within heterosexual privilege, which Rahmin (2004) calls hetero-morality, and enforced through Christianity, repeated through homophobia and connected to culture, race and cultural inequalities, simultaneously illustrating the potential (and the hope) to

develop a new order of sexual morality, premised upon rights. Given the virulent crusading against homosexuality in the country (Msibi, 2012), this paper argues that schools' efforts to build alliances with parents must include emphasis on the moral foundation of sexual equality, which might have positive effects in addressing homophobia and building a culture of respect for all learners at schools.

Contesting morality and homosexuality in South Africa

Morality in South Africa is embedded within social, economic, cultural, religious, political and ideological contexts and its definition is dependent upon the particular optic through which it is viewed. Swartz (2010) makes clear that morality has variegated meanings to different people and 'in Africa it is an especially problematic term, not least when, as is currently the case in Uganda, Malawi and Zimbabwe, sexual orientation is cause for moral censure and legal conviction' (p. 267). Unlike other African contexts, the optic of sexual rights in South Africa has been advanced. It has moral underpinnings, working towards respect, dignity and rights and fuelled by social and educational transformation. Homosexuality in South Africa, on the one hand, is increasingly portrayed as ordinary and unthreatening, as Posel (2005) notes. Lesbian and gay relationships are becoming a part of everyday life and evident in the media, television channels and encompassed by some religious groups. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in South Africa, has been an important protagonist condemning certain Christian principles that reject homosexuality (de Gruchy, 2007).

Terrible acts of male violence and homophobia, on the other hand, draw from longstanding notions of moral traditions premised upon heteropatriachy, religion and culture and are steeped within South Africa's historical trajectories. Apartheid South Africa defined morality in relation to racial inequality and criminalization of sodomy and was profoundly Calvinistic, through which homosexuality was repudiated (van Zyl & Steyn, 2005). Amongst African traditions, there is strong overlap with Christian principles and homosexuality is regarded as morally reprehensible by some churches (de Gruchy, 2007). South African Social Attitudes Survey (Pillay & Roberts, 2008) noted a strong association between prejudice against homosexuality and regular church attendance, although the same report notes that this has not shifted the vote away from the African National Congress, the ruling party of the country that supports sexual equality.

Cultural arguments have often been used to position homosexuality as something alien in Africa, conflicting with traditional values. The view that homosexuality is alien in Africa has been rejected. Epprecht (2012) notes that homosexuality in Africa predates colonialism, although as a strategy it was often hidden but not absent. However, there are continuities in the debates about African traditions and homosexuality. Understanding homosexuality and morality in South Africa is thus embedded within these complex debates involving culture and history setting the limits of sexual citizenship. Whereas the Constitution and allied policies in education are formalized foundations premised on sexual equality, the context through

which morality is defined circumscribes these possibilities. Religion, tradition, culture and gender norms are important informal mechanisms of social and moral regulation (Green, 2005). Such mechanisms are central to negotiating the moral tensions that exist between claims to religious, cultural and traditional values and the legal aspiration towards sexual equality. Focusing on the relationship between sexual rights and social regulations highlights the ways in which hetero-morality is being dismantled, transformed and entrenched within the context of moral rebuilding after apartheid.

There are thus multivalent forces in understanding morality and homosexuality and, despite the context of sexual inclusivity and the broadening of morality to include respect and dignity for gays and lesbians, hetero-morality has remained steadfastly impervious to the context of human rights (Msibi, 2012). Morality is contested. It bears the mark of material, symbolic and discursive forces effectively restricting opportunities for the development of a moral education premised on sexual rights.

Parents: hetero-morality and schooling

In South Africa, as elsewhere, parents play an important role in moral education (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). Not only are schools and teachers obliged to advance democratic subjects and citizens, but education policy in South Africa (SASA, 1996) stipulates that parents are critical to this agenda. Parents' role in this agenda are formalized through the school governing body (SGB). Questions about South African parents' capacities to work with schools to promote moral education based on sexual equality remain absent in research and debate. Emerging work on democratic education and parents roles' does exist (Mncube, 2010), although the focus is on democracy more generally, with no mention of sexual equality and homosexuality in particular as areas worthy of the attention of parents and SGB.

Putting sexuality and children together remains, despite all policy efforts to change this, morally troubling. Underlying this trouble are familiar ideologies that associate school-going learners with sexual innocence (Renold, 2005). Sexual innocence is morally defended and those, for example, who transgress sexual morals are seen to be morally impoverished as Morrell, Bhana and Shefer (2012) find for pregnant South African teenagers at school, making morality highly gendered. Renold (2005) notes that sexual innocence creates the myth of an asexual child who must be protected from corrupting sexual information, producing a regulatory mechanism through which morality, sexuality and young people at school are framed. Both parents and teachers are discomforted by the acknowledgment of children's rights to sexuality. In other words, whilst parents and teachers, like other social agents, are strategically positioned to mediate knowledge about sexuality, they are powerful agents, producing silences around sexuality but simultaneously involved in creating hetero-morality.

Rahmin (2004) refers to heterosexual privilege as a hetero-moral order. The hetero-moral order is a naturalized, taken-for-granted view that presumes that

people heterosexual and gender is normalized. Under the hetero-moral order, heterosexuality is normalized and heterosexual relationships between men and women are presumed. In other words, biological sex is assumed to produce heterosexual desires. Hetero-morality occupies a hegemonic position and regulates how people are expected to desire, feel and interpret the sexual world. Homosexuality is relegated to the domain of the immoral (Butler, 2004). Hetero-morality is pervasive and powerful in shaping and regulating the boundaries of acceptable sexual conduct. In South Africa, sexual equality manifests strongly in jurisdiction. Yet the power of hetero-morality produces tensions between the law and the ways in which people are policed and boundaries are drawn between acceptable and immoral sexual conduct.

South Africa's democracy, however, carries heavy moral weight. Sexual equality has been loudly advanced by Nelson Mandela. The hetero-moral order is thus not inevitable, as all politics and institutions are refracted through the Equality Clause in the South African Constitution. Morals are not fixed and they are embedded, for the purposes of this paper, within hetero-moral power. They are challenged and struggled over. The rights context, the coming out of gays and lesbians and the challenges to the power of traditions and culture show that morals are unstable and contingent. South African parents have to engage with the political project to rethink the morals that have led to homophobic violence and murder. In light of growing accounts of homophobia in schools (Msibi, 2012)——antithetical to moral education in the country——how parents understand hetero-morality and their capacities to transform the conditions that produce these morals are important to consider. This is the complex focus of the rest of the paper, but first a discussion of the research design follows.

Research design

Taking a cue from Swartz (2010), noting the moral implications of homophobia in Africa, this paper asks a selected group of South African parents of young school-going learners questions about their views and their ability to support the educational agenda of sexual equality. The study draws from a qualitative project investigating homosexuality and homophobia in South African secondary schools. The broader project included teachers, learners, school managers and parents. This paper focuses specifically on interviews conducted with 17 parents whose children are spread across five socially differentiated school contexts in two South African provinces, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province and Gauteng (GT). The main aim of the paper is to understand the discursive constructs of hetero-morality and to investigate how parents invest it, challenge it and transform it. The focus is not on individual parents, but the shared meanings and the context specific responses to homosexuality.

Parents of learners from grade 8 to grade 12 in the five schools who were willing and available to participate in this study were selected. The majority of parents were mothers, with the exception of two fathers in GT, reflecting the gendered

environment in South Africa. Men still hold economic power and, in some contexts, fathers are absent, are migrant workers or not part of the fragile family structures, particularly in African townships and African rural school contexts. In this study, schools were purposefully selected on the basis of race and class contexts, aiming to highlight not only the effects of hetero-morality but also the social and cultural processes through which hetero-morality is upheld. The effect of apartheid continues to mark the experience of schooling, and parents were selected in ways that reflected this social landscape. In KZN, one African mother was selected from an African rural school (ARS), three African parents from African township school (ATS), five mothers from a former Indian school (FIS), three mothers from the former white school (FWS) and five parents (including two fathers) in GT were drawn from a former coloured school (FCS) located in Johannesburg. All names have been changed. Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. In all schools, English was used, although in the rural school there was switching from isiZulu and English and some parts of this interview have been translated.

Defending Christianity, defending hetero-morality

Christian religious morals based on the sanctity of heterosexuality dominated parents' responses to the rights of gays and lesbians at school and served to maintain collective understandings of homosexually as morally reprehensible. As Msibi (2012) notes, religion denies and questions the morality and existence of homosexuality, with God, he argues being the perfect tool to extricate it. At ATS, the following was noted as an outright rejection of homosexuality:

> The school is built around Christianity so we cannot allow it in our school. (Pretty)

At the FIS, parents noted that homosexuals were 'people. Everyone has rights … '. At the ARS, the following was recognized:

> … they live in a democratic country, they can get married, they can do whatever … (Nomsa)

Discussions around rights were regulated by moral castigation. At the FCS, the following was noted:

> laws are made to be respected … but … it's not that easy … (Keel)

> … if my daughter is maybe a lesbian … I will be very angry … guiding her all these years … (Lenny)

The idea of children being different from the heterosexual norm was unfathomable and denounced. The translation of laws to actual practice is 'not that easy' as the power of heter-morality seeps through the interpretation of law, as the following conversations at FCS show:

> … my daughter … she says to me … this girl likes me … so I said to her, 'no you can't have this' … I said, 'no, no, no … what does the Bible say about this' … I understand

> that the law says this … .We give them their freedom and whatever and then I said … 'to be a friend to this person is fine, be a friend to her and, and teach her the right ways … but do not, you don't get into a relationship with a gay person … (Bron)

> … I have a sister in law who turned lesbian … and I always say to my children … 'it's in your blood, you know, it's in your bloodline … I'm gonna pray for this, it's not gonna happen to you'. … This is very difficult as, as a parent, really, really. (Lorna)

Heterosexuality might be deployed as the moral norm, however there is evidence that homosexuality, both in the family (sister-in-law) and in school (lesbian friend), is not absent but censured and tied to Christian morals. Lorna invokes prayer to rehabilitate homosexuals. The Christian proscription of homosexuality is embedded within the notion of sin (de Gruchy, 2007). Importantly, as the discussion so far shows, religion sits uneasily with sexual rights, although the possibility that human sexuality has other forms is clearly evident. There is nothing fixed about heterosexuality. Stone (2008) takes this further and argues that instead of seeing the Bible based solely on fixed meanings, there is much that can be generated in the multiplicity of meanings and resources through in interpreting Bibles.

The hegemony of hetero-morality is powerful in the discussion above, and justifies the existence of heterosexual power on the basis of exclusion and rejection. 'In your bloodline', as Lorna indicates above, refers to that which defiles, contaminates and is closely aligned to the belief about the morally unclean person and the contagious effect of homosexuality, which requires an antidote—prayer. As Green (2005) notes, a person who is seen to be homosexual is marked as morally polluted, like a transmissible disease. In a religious domain, as Green adds, the person who is impure because of an alien sexuality cannot approach God. Lorna thus notes that prayer and religion could remove the contagious bloodline and, in doing so, protect her children from defilement. This notion of prayer against the homosexual sinner was pervasive, as illustrated here in the discussion at FWS:

> … people do make that choice … I would teach my children that they … under some deception and … and to … reach out to them and try and help them … not to, like, be scared of it and shun them … I do believe that God didn't create us to have same sex relationships and … their behaviour is actually destructive and making them sick and it is influencing society as a whole and it has it's destructive effect on society … at the same time it's human being who's been hurt along the way … believing lies about themselves … (Liz)

Homosexuality is regarded as a deception, evil and a lie and the reason for sickness and destruction. The way out, however, is not rejection, but through Christian principles based on redemption. On the question of how parents would respond to their child becoming gay, the following responses at FWS were clear:

> I would pray for my child, silently pray for them, and still trust that, that, that they would have a revelation … (Liz)

> Ja, I'd be disappointed probably because I think as a mom you immediately say, 'What have I done wrong?' … I would also definitely continue praying for them, trusting in

God for them and, and believing that they would, would change another day and make another decision, definitely, ja. (Lydia)

It's hard, it's would actually, give me a while to, to answer that question, because to me it would be very hard because I'm just thinking of grandchildren … I would find it very hard, and of course, ja, God will be there next to me hopefully. (Gretha)

'What have I done wrong?' is poignant evidence of how parents situate homosexuality——on the side of sin. Christian religious investments are based on the heterosexual purpose of human life, the preservation of the heterosexual family——to have grandchildren as Gretha notes. A revelation, it is believed, will renew Christian moral principles in favour of heterosexuality:

You just remember we, we are Christians … you love the person … you make your children aware that there are homosexuals out there but it, it isn't what God has got for them. (Lydia, FWS)

Christian religious values are strongly aligned to hetero-morality. They define and regulate the limits of sexual citizenship and are championed by parents, underpinned by a moral repulsion against gays and lesbians. These morally restrictive understandings were interpreted as normalised and rooted in religious patterns of interpretation that work to malign homosexuality as inferior. Religious patterns of domination render homosexuality as negative, but with the possibility of redemption through prayer and love.

Reproducing gender, culture and hetero-morality

Hetero-morality overlaps with wider social and cultural tensions and is premised upon asymmetric relations of power. How parents understand hetero-morality is deeply immersed in wider social tensions that invoke gender and culture. It is argued in this section that gender and culture are deployed in ways to give a semblance of some logical heterosexual coherence and through which attempts are made to reproduce inequalities. At ARS, homosexuality was regarded as unnatural, linked to religious and gender regulations and a violation of cultural codes:

On earth, there are only two kinds of people. There is a man and a woman and even when God created the world, he created a man and from a man, he created a woman so that they can produce … mostly in our traditions, you know, a woman has to have a man as the head of the home, traditionally … (Nomsa)

Nomsa comes from deep rural KwaZulu-Natal, where cultural practices and gender constraints have been identified as quite tight, leading to the reproduction of women's subordinate position and sexual-health risks (Hunter, 2010). Appealing to Christian principles and traditional customs, where the father (*ubaba*) is regarded as the head of the household, Nomsa repudiates homosexuality and reproduces gender hierarchies and women's subordinate place in society:

… it's unnatural. … A man is a man, a woman is a woman and it is supposed to be like that. … Homosexual people, I really, really don't like it at all and it's against the law,

> especially I can say spiritually and traditionally … because you know even here in the farms, growing up in the rural areas. I know in a rondavel [hut], there is one side for men and one side for women …   (Nomsa)

Gender and sexuality are intimately intertwined. There is an assumed heterosexual association between men and women, with women's subordinate position natura-lised in this association. The understanding of hetero-morality, above, is situated within these unequal processes: homosexuality is relegated to unnaturalness and women's subordinate position naturalised. Gender is not fixed, though, even as Nomsa attempts to root it in tradition and within gender relations of domination and subordination. Hunter (2010) argues that gender is connected to changing social and material practices. There is nothing fixed about women's role and male power. This contrasts sharply with Nomsa's moral line of argument, which attempts to privilege a somewhat distinct and coherent system of African cultures and traditions. Morals cannot stand outside the material, cultural and social world——they are produced and contested through these processes. Nomsa attempts to deploy cultural and traditional logic to contest homosexuality and to reinstate the power of the chief as male head in the rural areas, support gender hierarchies and disparage homosexuality as alien to such traditions. Hunter shows through historical analysis how social regulations around gender and sexuality have changed and are changing in the face of social and material changes. There is nothing innately traditional about African hetero-morality, but it is constructed and located within historical practices:

> … I have never heard of a traditional leader who is a homosexual because a leader has to tell people what a man can do and what a woman can do … a homosexual person, he is a man but he is a man that is a woman. I do not think he can fit in that position because he is not a real man. … A real man is a man who is doing everything that a man can do, who whatever he is doing, he is a man. You know, when we talk of '*indoda*' [a man], *indoda*. … When we talk of a man, let us make an example at home when there is a father, they say a man needs to look after and protect his family. … For example, let's say those people are getting married and then ok, maybe they doing adoption or whatever, there are traditions where a man has to go and do something, like their son is going to the mountain for circumcision, they can't allow that woman who is a 'man' to go there because 'he' is still a woman. 'He' is not a man, they are calling her a man but 'he' is not. As a woman you have to respect '*uBaba*' [head of the household] …   (Nomsa)

Culture, gender, tradition and homosexuality cross with political efforts to develop a moral order premised on sexual rights. When parents speak of hetero-morality, they immerse it in gender and cultural practices maintaining gender hierarchies and, as Nomsa shows above, masculine power. Nomsa sees homosexuality as a violation of culture and women's assumed role within relations of domination and subordination. Traditional leaders in South Africa are often the custodians of many cultural practices and rituals. The majority of traditional leaders are men, although there are examples of women occupying these roles. Even as Nomsa states that she has not seen a traditional healer who is homosexual, Morgan and

Reid (2003) suggest that there is evidence that some traditional healers (*sangomas*) in South Africa have fluid sexualities without a coherent gender, shifting between masculine and feminine.

The salience of cultural values and practices has a historical context where men traditionally lead the household and each *umuzi* (homestead) is headed by *ndoda* or *umnumzana* (male head). Tracing the historical development of masculinity in KwaZulu-Natal, Hunter (2010) argues that in the early-twentieth century, men provided a homestead, headed the household and invested in the payment of bride wealth and marriage, through which male power was circulated and entrenched. Gender hierarchies are constructed and legitimated through multiple ways, including the reach to culture and sexuality. In Zulu society, the reference to *ubaba* is an investment in male privilege, an acknowledgement of the father's power not only over women but also over younger men. Nomsa also refers to customary traditions around circumcision. As noted, there are multiple ways in which gender and sexual hierarchies are being defended by cultural logic. Circumcision is often practiced, particularly by *amaXhosa*, as a rite admitting boys to manhood. Vincent (2008) notes how males who are initiated acquire knowledge, gain respect and are entitled to marry. Whilst this practice sits in tension with health regulations, Nomsa states that homosexuals cannot lead this ritual as she creates an exclusive male enclave around this practice, invalidating homosexuality as uncultural and alien to traditional practices and, in doing so, reproduces gender inequalities. This section has shown that parents' understandings of hetero-morality necessarily involve wider social tensions around gender, sexuality and culture through which heterosexuality is privileged and naturalised, male power asserted and women's subordinate role reproduced but, as the paper will show, the potential for disrupting such views exists.

Teaching for hetero-morality? Challenges and opportunities

So far, the paper has shown how parents uphold hetero-morality, delegitimizing homosexualiy and limiting the scope of sexual equality. How, then, do parents respond to the educational moral agenda, which makes teaching for social (and sexual) justice necessary? Given that schools, both in South Africa and elsewhere, have been regarded as actively supporting hetero-morality (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Msibi, 2012), putting this question to parents was 'disruptive' as it made them think about the power of heterosexuality, which was both entrenched and contested:

At FIC, Tyra noted:

> … when you're at school … you're a child, you do what you need to do at school, you dress like you're a girl if you're a girl, you dress like a boy if you're a boy … so if we give them [gays] the freedom and then it's going to be … havoc …

Schools are academic places and where learners are children, as Tyra suggests——a place where adult–child relations are produced, where sexuality is regulated and

hetero-morality upheld as a default setting. Schools are also places where gender roles are embodied within familiar understandings of dress and behaviour. The thought of gays and lesbians having 'freedom' at school creates disruption and 'havoc'. This disruptive consequence of gay freedom is disorder and, by implication, morally untenable. At ATS, Pat stated:

> It must not be promoted. … I don't like the style of homosexual people … and I don't want the school to promote it.

At the FWS, the following was noted:

> It would depend who's teaching them because I think there's a lot of bad teaching about it. (Gretha)

> We wouldn't want a lesbian or a gay to teach about them … they will, you know, encourage it … so that would be very important, who teaches them. (Lydia)

Teaching about homosexuality is threatening to hetero-moral order. The threat is premised upon the idea that children are vulnerable and could be persuaded by the ideas of homosexuality. It is heterosexuality that is normalized. Gay and lesbian teachers are brought under scrutiny and rejected as incapable of teaching sexuality. This resonates with understandings of homosexuality as excessively sexualized and connects to the compulsory heterosexual network in which gays and lesbians are rendered to be second class South African citizens and immoral (Msibi, 2012):

> I think it's up to parents actually at the end of the day to teach their children … I think the school can create aware, an awareness that, that some people make that choice and that they do exist, ja, but I think it's the parents' responsibility. (Gretha, FWS)

When Gretha talks about awareness, an opening to the possibility of teaching for sexual justice becomes possible, although, in the final instance, Gretha states that it is the work of parents. Schools can be potentially dangerous in teaching about homosexuality and at odds with earlier constructions of the power of hetero-morality. Parents are regarded here as safer options, where hetero-morality can be undertaken without acute disruption. Children are agents and sexual agents but they are located within family contexts where the social anxieties and moralities have effects on how they understand their agency and sexuality. Parental rejection functions to create a sense of rightness and their irrational fears about the 'other'.

Despite the ways in which parents upheld hetero-morality, there was potential to create moral difference based on South Africa's democracy, albeit with conditions:

> … I think at grade 11 level it's perfectly fine for them to, to speak about it, just about every TV programme they watch has got homosexuality … if the teacher is following the syllabus, ok, like the sociology kind of thing … this is what it is to be homosexual, this is the different reasons … it would be one lesson surely, not more than one lesson … (Lydia, FWS)

Noting the normalization of homosexuality in South Africa with reference to tele-vision programmes, Lydia was able to put homosexuality on the agenda on the basis of two conditions. The first relates to age appropriateness, reproducing the idea that sexuality is an adult phase of thinking and being and therefore relevant for grade 11, generally aged between 17 and 18 years old. The other condition is that it should be restricted to one lesson, 'not more than one lesson', thus regulat-ing the comprehensiveness of moral education and an expression of the fear that more lessons can threaten children's assumed heterosexual status.

On the other end of the spectrum, there were supportive parents:

> From my side I will support the school … they leave the way open and make it much easier for us … (Lenny, FCS)

> I also think it would be good because, um, it will also help the children, most of them, to come out, it will also because most of them are still hiding … it becomes an open thing … (Tyra, FCS)

> In life orientation, isn't that what it's about, teaching children how to live their lives, about other people and all of that … (Fifi, FIS)

> How to treat people with respect even if they are homosexual. (Maxi, FIS)

> There's people that have opened up but there are also people that are still hiding that. … They don't have the confidence to come out in the open, scared of their, maybe reli-gious views, or not being accepted in their community. (Fifi, FIS)

> … sometimes a child comes to school, you don't know if that child is gay or whatever, and afterwards then you find out, when the children tease the child … they wanna hit the child or whatever … as parents we must come to school and say my child is gay, my child is a lesbian, so that the school must know what's happening in my child's life. (Lorna, FCS)

In stark contrast to the tight restrictions underpinning hetero-morality advanced so far, the potential to support schools in the work towards sexual justice is evident. It is argued that such work, premised upon the culture of rights and respect, will support parents' role in moral education, addressing school-based homophobia and the silencing and closeting of sexuality. Such fractures point to the opportuni-ties of working against heterosexual power and starting to work towards moral education premised on sexual equality. Undermining the fixed meanings associated with gender and sexual desire, parents show how meanings are far from stable and that they may be reconceptualised and transformed. Undoing hetero-moral con-ceptions involves working with tensions and contradictions, resonating with Butler (2004), who notes that within heterosexual constraints, there are possibilities for improvisation. Parents, within constraint, undermine the hetero-moral order and enable conditions for sexual transformation in schools. Parents are critically aware of some of the ways in which gays and lesbians are disadvantaged in and out of school. The discussion above suggests that whilst parents differed in relation to how much of teaching for homosexuality they would support, a sense of political awareness and support for the struggles against gays and lesbians is clear. Support

for the homosexual agenda involved awareness around current restrictions in relation to 'coming out', community views, religion and homophobic violence at school. Parents' critical reflection about the ways in which gays and lesbians are 'still hiding' and the homophobic violence and harassment at school, as elucidated by Lorna, was revelatory and prompted a broadening of support for gays and lesbians.

Their capacity to transform the conditions through which the hetero-moral order is produced is significant as it links to their acute recognition of the disadvantage that gays and lesbians experience in and out of the school. For Lenny, this involved offering the school permission to open up the sexual agenda in ways that counter dominant hetero-morality. Work towards sexual justice requires support from both parents and teachers where homosexuality becomes an 'open thing'. The prospects for changing views and a re-thinking of the hetero-morality are clear and provide further warrant for encouraging schools to broaden the sexual justice possibilities in their teaching and in life orientation, in keeping with South Africa's Constitution (Van Zyl & Steyn, 2005; Epprecht, 2012).

This section has thus shown that, within constraints, the possibility to transform the conditions under which hetero-morality is produced remains possible (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). Whilst some teachers note that they only want one lesson about homosexuality, pointing to restrictions, the support that parents render to schools is premised on current practices in schools, in the community and in religion that limit justice for gays and lesbians. The views presented here are critical beginning points in mobilizing schools and parents to support the sexual justice agenda in teaching and life orientation. However, the gravity of hetero-morality, which framed the earlier parts of this section, is clearly a cause for concern. Resistance to the homosexual agenda at school is part of the enduring barrier to sexual justice and the overwhelming power of hetero-morality, albeit with tensions and contradictions. Parents support for transforming conditions that support hetero-morality sit in tension with that of parents who support the normalization of morality produced through potent homophobia, which hinders a progressive school agenda. Yet, as this section has shown, in spite of the inferiorisation of homosexuality, parents' attention to, and encouragement against, sexual oppression of gays and lesbians can challenge hetero-morality, opening up the possibility for disrupting the deeply potent ways in which parents give power to heterosexuality.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to show how parents of South African school-going learners might work in the interests of moral education, premised upon the law that provides protection and dignity for gays and lesbians. In the context of homophobic crimes in the country, and the negative experiences of gays and lesbians on the African continent, the development of moral education that works in the interests of sexual rights is vital. Parents' role in this cannot be underestimated. The study highlights the ways in which hetero-morality is upheld, on the one hand

through religion, culture and discrimination. On the other, there is evidence that parents can be mobilized to work in disrupting hegemonic moral patterns. Arising from vastly differentiated social and cultural contexts, shared meanings exist in relation to both reinforcement and resistance, although hetero-morality is connected to culture, gender and traditions that speak of the value of doing research in context-specific sites and point to the development of context-driven moral education programmes that have local relevance. Morality is underpinned by heterosexual power, Christian religious values, gender, culture and tradition, and these are important factors stymieing social and educational transformation. Nevertheless, parents can make a difference in the pursuit of moral education informed by sexual inclusivity of citizenship. Of concern, however, is the persistence of religious, cultural, gender and sexual norms and values that uphold hetero-morality, endorsing broader inequitable sexual and gender relations that continue to create notions of sexual deviance. These are narrow and oppressive morals and unless schools work with parents, as they are obliged to, in addressing sexual equality, this might go untroubled. By contrast, and in contradiction to the dominant forms of moral values, it is possible to promote sexual transformation in education, addressing homophobia premised on rights, respect and dignity. School governing bodies have a moral obligation to put homosexuality on the agenda, to seek support from and work with parents in instilling new values and new morals as provided for by the *manifesto* (Department of Education, 2001). The generative spaces offered by South Africa's human rights framework, and picked up by parents, albeit contradictorily, provide clear potential for addressing the enduring forms of sexual inequalities that plague South Africa's democracy.

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