

“YOU SHOULD WEAR TO SHOW WHAT YOU ARE”: SAME-SEX SEXUALITY STUDENT TEACHERS TROUBLING THE HETERONORMATIVE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

Although schools are meant to be places where fundamental human values are taught and embraced, challenges encountered by student teachers with same-sex sexualities are inherently connected to contextual experiences of rejection and of being “othered.” These student teachers navigate the internalised homophobia, low self-esteem and anxiety of the teaching profession and begin to take on the role of the activists who “unsilence” and “visibilise” sexual diversity in normative school environments. However, there is scant research on how self-identified effeminate gay and masculine lesbian student teachers negotiate and navigate their identities in a heteronormative school environment during Work Integrated Learning (WIL). This article interrogates the conflation between gender expressions and the assigned sex that seems to raise the question of fitness of same-sex sexuality student teachers for the profession. In the research project undertaken, a qualitative design, which comprised a focus-group interview to elicit responses from 12 self-identified same-sex sexuality student teachers, was utilised. Themes that emerged from the data analysis are: policed bodies and gender-regulated professional teacher identities; self-regulation and performativity; and disrupting heteronormativity in the classroom. These themes are embedded within Activity Theory (AT). The results of this study show how the policing of dress code, mannerism and perceived sexual practice regulated and “genderised” teacher professional identity

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in schools. This indicates that as part of diversity education, urgency exists for teacher training programmes to incorporate knowledge on inclusive collegial atmospheres that are accommodative of same-sex sexualities.

Keywords: Same-sex sexualities; Work Integrated Learning; teacher education; heteronormativity; performativity; self-regulation

INTRODUCTION

Teacher training programmes prepare students for the profession through coursework and exposure to the world of work, which is known as Work Integrated Learning (hereafter WIL). The WIL component aims to bridge the gap between theory, practice and the realities of the classroom (Beeth and Adadan 2006). Teacher education programmes also create a teacher identity with an already established personal identity (Sumara and Luce-Kaple 1996). This professional identity is often captured in traditional and normative values, beliefs and attitudes (Trend 2010). The South African school system has become a contested space where those who do not conform to the norms and traditions are "othered," monitored, regulated and silenced (Francis and Reygan 2016; Msibi 2012b). The lived experiences of alienation and exclusion that stem from being different are felt more severely by people with same-sex sexualities. This article is particularly interested in how self-identified students with same-sex sexualities, who train to become teachers, navigate and negotiate this strongly regulated and normatively gendered space (Butler 1990). Despite a very progressive legislative framework that advocates for the protection of individuals with same-sex identities (Department of Justice [DoJ] 1996), social values in South African schools still lag behind and fail to recognise and appreciate sexual diversity (Msibi 2012a; Francis, Reygan, Brown, Dlamini, McAllister, Nogela, Mosime, Muller and Thani 2017). Young people with same-sex sexualities in South African schools are still perceived as immoral, are given little support, and are isolated or discriminated against (Butler and Astbury 2008; Butler, Alpaslan, Strumpher and Astbury 2003; Francis 2017; Kowen and Davis 2006; McArthur 2015; Msibi 2012a; Rothmann and Simmonds 2015). Emerging literature also shows that teachers are the main perpetrators of harassment, victimisation and homophobic violence towards school youth with same-sex sexualities (Bhana 2012, 2014; Butler and Astbury 2008; DePalma and Francis 2014; Francis 2012, 2016; Msibi 2012a). It is important to note that much of the work on sexual diversity in South African schools was mainly drawn from phenomenological insights on school youth with same-sex sexualities and teachers' perceptions about sexual diversity, as can be tracked in the aforementioned studies. Very little is known on how student teachers, with same-sex sexualities, navigate a heteronormative school environment in the formative years of their career development (Francis 2014). With this in mind we ask the question: How do self-identified student teachers with expressive same-sex sexualities contest, negotiate and navigate their identities during WIL? Although we concur with Butler (1990)

that sexuality is invisible, we want to point out that gender marks the individual as a dominant force (Rossiter 2016). Butch lesbians express masculine traits and effeminate gay men express feminine traits. Acknowledging this conflation, we examine how student teachers with such identities navigate the schooling system which operates within a fixed gender binary culture. To respond to the research question, we first discuss Vygotsky’s (1978) Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and its relation to sexual diversity and spaces of power in the school setting. We explain the methodology and lastly discuss the responses by our participants. In the discussion section we explore the participants’ responses using CHAT to “trouble” the activities in the various systems, indicating that these systems do not exist in a vacuum, but are historically embedded with tensions and contradictions located in each component of the activities (Cole and Engeström 1993).

SAME-SEX STUDENT TEACHERS’ PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY THROUGH CULTURAL-HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY (CHAT)

We draw on Vygotsky’s (1978) notion of the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (Figure 1) to understand the implications of *becoming* a teacher with a same-sex sexuality in a heteronormative school environment. CHAT looks at artefacts and people as embedded in dynamic activity systems. While it is beyond the scope of this article to provide a full description of CHAT, we rely on Engeström’s (1987) formulation of the third generation Activity Theory (AT) to understand the experiences of self-identified same-sex sexuality student teachers during their WIL. We argue that Activity Theory presents a flexible framework for facilitating the debate around gendered professional teacher identity where homophobia is internalised, and the lack of tolerance for sexual diversity in South African school environments is accepted as the norm. The theory creates a space for debate, discussion, critique, validation and ultimately expansionist learning—that is “learning beyond what would have been possible if actors from each perspective remained insulated” (Robertson 2008, 819). The elements of the triangle in the context of this article refer to self-identified same-sex sexuality student teachers (subjects) involved in the activity of their work. The initial object is ambiguous, requiring interpretation and conceptualisation; it is the motivating influence behind the subject’s participation in the activity, which is to gain skills, values and knowledge during WIL which facilitate the consolidation of their professional identities as teachers and help them improve as teachers in becoming. Thus, the self-identified same-sex sexuality student teachers are step-by-step invested with a personal sense of self identity and cultural meaning as they go through multiple transformations during WIL periods (object) until they stabilise as observed in the finished outcome.

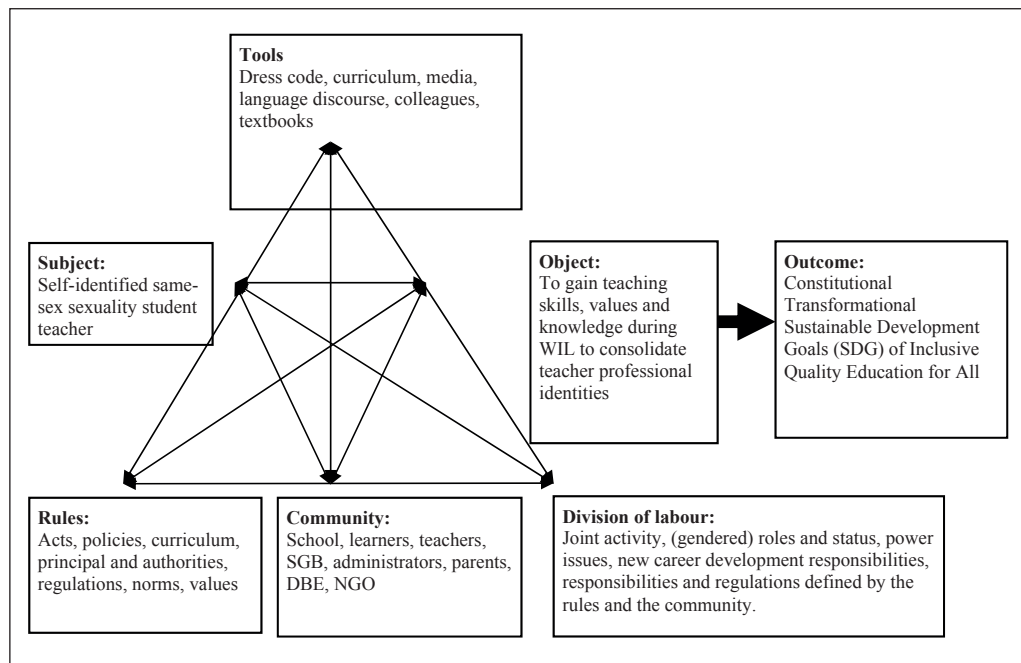


Figure 1: Same-sex sexuality student teachers' professional identity from an activity system (adapted from Engeström 1987)

To mediate the activity between the subject and the object, the student teacher may use mediating tools (dress code, curriculum, media, language, discourse, colleagues, principal), along with internalised images, concepts and physical, cognitive and/or symbolic tools to direct actions towards the object. These tools have the potential to engender a dynamic, multi-layered and multi-voiced reflective dialogue about confronting the silence on queer teacher identities in the workplace (Hooker 2009). All these activities take place within social and cultural community groups (school, learners, teachers, parents, administrators, school governing bodies, DBE, NGOs) that the self-identified same-sex student teachers are part of. The student teachers have to take into cognisance the division of labour (roles, status, power relations, new career development responsibilities, and the responsibilities defined by rules and the community) that define how tasks and responsibilities are shared among system participants. Finally, implicit and explicit rules (acts, policy, curriculum principals, authorities, regulations, required qualifications, norms, values), and other beliefs shape the behaviour of the community members (Center for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research [CATDWR] 2003; Diale 2016). Influenced by the agency to trouble the regulation of a compulsory heteronormative professional identity of teachers in schools, these activities provide us with a useful mechanism that enables us to analyse these multiple complexities which

can either contradict or create opportunities for expansive learning, since they are the heart of educational practice (Engeström 1987).

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study was to explore how student teachers with same-sex sexualities negotiate their identities within the school environment during WIL. An interpretivist paradigm informed the context of this article. Narratives presented by student teachers during focus-group sessions serve as a useful resource to understand and support them as they negotiate their own spaces in schools. In identifying the participants, we used convenience and purposive sampling to select 12 participants who were self-identified same-sex sexuality students studying towards an education degree at a South African university. It is worth mentioning that the first author identifies as a publicly gay man and his office serves as a safe space for students with same-sex sexual orientations. Six of the participants were from his class and regularly visited his office to share their experiences in and around the university. The remaining six participants were identified through these students who were part of the class of the one author. Seven of the participants identified as lesbian, one female identified as bi-sexual and five males identified as gay men. The participants were in their 2nd, 3rd and 4th year of studies and conducted WIL sessions at schools through these years. The average age of the participants was 22 years. Consent was sought to participate and student teachers were informed that they have the right to withdraw at any moment. Although participants were placed in different schools and different communities, they shared similar experiences.

As an integral part of the narrative approach to this research, data were collected through one semi-structured focus-group interview, which presented the participants with the opportunity to speak with a collective voice and proved to be valuable for the participants to share their experiences. Even though the interviews focused on how the participants negotiated and navigated their identities during WIL, we were more flexible—allowing their ideas to guide the process (Gillham 2005). Therefore, participants were allowed to speak freely about the issues raised during the interviews, since we envisaged that their self-identities would have had an impact on other aspects of their professional lives as student teachers. Thematic analysis (Francis 2017) was used to identify broad themes that surfaced in the experience of our participants.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Three major themes characterise how student teachers with expressive same-sex sexualities negotiate and navigate their identities during WIL, namely: policed bodies and gender regulated teacher professional identities; self-regulation and performativity; and disrupting heteronormativity in the classroom. These themes are discussed and supported by selected excerpts from participants' contributions that informed a

particular theme. Figure 2 depicts the tensions and contradictions amongst different activity systems in CHAT.

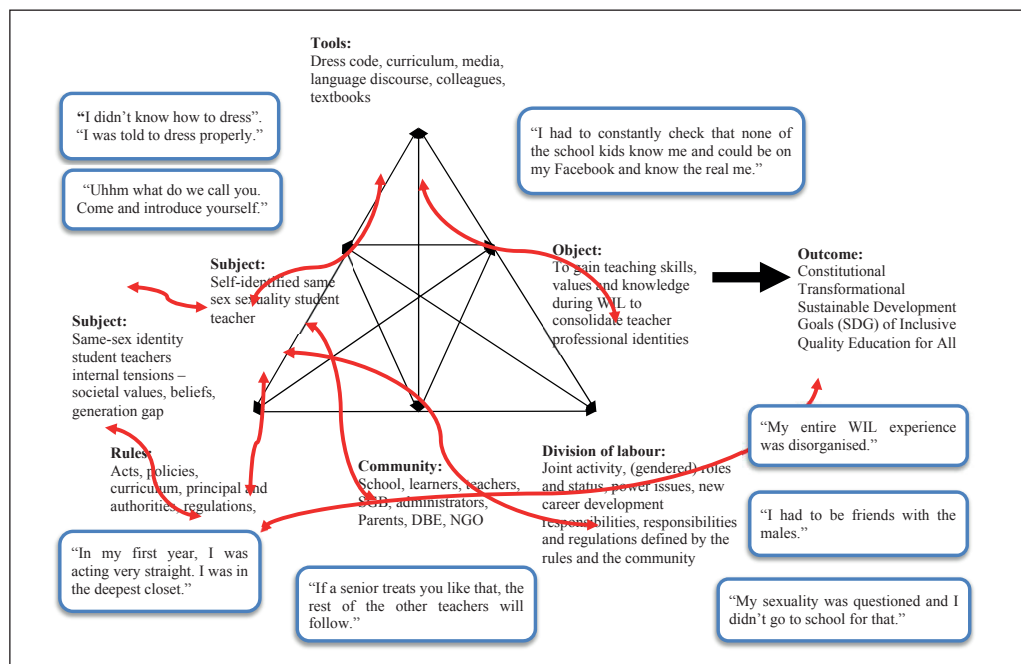


Figure 2: Tensions and contradictions amongst the different activity systems (represented by arrows) with extracts from same-sex student teachers (Adapted from Diale 2016, 104)

This conservative construction of sexuality is no different in the majority of South African schools as seen in a study by Msibi (2012b), where learners refused to be taught by a student teacher who dressed in a perceived gay manner. The student teacher wore tight pants as a sense of fashion and style while the students alleged it to be “un-African” and a concealment of same-sex desires.

This study by Msibi (2012b) shows that although the basic function of clothing is to cover the body, types of clothes “make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly” (Foucault 1977, 173). Clothing subjectively communicates human identity and serves as a prototype for acceptable behaviour (Moorosi 2012). In this article, we are reminded how the surveillance of clothing as a tool in the activity marks the body identity, creating internal tensions regarding the self-identity of the same-sex student teachers and the perceived or regulated and gendered identities of teachers within schools. Clothing serves to demarcate gender and sex identities, which is consistent with the findings of Evans and Balfour (2012). Butler (1990, 6–7) contends that both

sex and gender are discursive constructs; underscoring this view we found how a sense of dress style was continuously configured with homosexuality. The narrative below shows how the biological sex of the female student was not only used to produce the body, but its performance through the socially attached meanings was regulated with the insistent alignment with feminine dress sense.

As a first year on WIL I didn't know how to dress. I looked like a young boy. They introduced us in the [school] assembly. I don't know how I came to be the last one but I was last to be introduced ... When he got to me he was like "Uhhm what do we call you. Come and introduce yourself." At that point I was overwhelmed. It was in front of all the learners and teachers. My sexuality was questioned and I didn't go to school for that. My entire WIL experience was disorganised. I introduced myself and I was shaking. I was told to dress properly and he told me a lot of things ... He said you should look like a woman. You said you are a woman and you are dressed like a man. You should wear to show what you are. I told him I dress to show what I am but you are just refusing to accept what I am. All teachers were bad to me. If a senior treats you like that, the rest of the other teachers will follow. (Lesbian student 1)

This account suggests that gendered clothing "*shows what you are*" as inscribed in the parameters of the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990). This "ideological system denies, denigrates and stigmatises any non-heterosexual form of behaviour, identity, relationship or community" (Herek 1992, 89), in the process, creating tensions between the student teacher as the subject and others around her. This student teacher's deviation from the threshold of heteronormativity warranted harassment and discrimination, infringing on her human rights as enshrined in the rules embedded in the activity (Engeström 1987). The tension between the student and the school as the microsystem of the community shows how gendered clothing exposed the body to the alignment of sex with sexual orientation. This misalignment pointed out by the deputy principal was improper for the professional teacher identity. Moorosi (2012) explains that the professional female teacher identity in many conservative school settings in South Africa is marked by a female dress or a skirt and stockings, which symbolise morality and are used as a tool to police the regulated gender identities of teachers. This normativity is seen in the statement by the lesbian student in saying "I didn't know how to dress," indicating tensions between the subject and the tools that the student has to employ to mediate learning during WIL. How can we forget the moral policing incident in 2007 when a woman who wore trousers was stripped naked and physically abused (Mitchell, Moletsane and Pithouse 2012)? The forms in which regulations are enforced can range from violence that is emotional and psychological, which is symbolic to physical violence, all of which are justified to the same logic that one's gender performance must correlate to one's sexual identity in heteronormative and heterosexist ways. The governance of heteronormativity and sexuality is reinforced through various forms of oppressive power as indicated in the deputy principal's announcement: "Uhhm what do we call you. Come and introduce yourself."

Foucault (1981) explains that power is accompanied by resistance, as denoted in the statement "you are just refusing to accept what I am," indicating that the rebelling "butch" lesbian appearance, which is associated with socially assigned masculine roles, clothing and short hair (Huxley, Clarke and Halliwell 2014) is perceived as immoral and deviant (Francis 2012). It is not surprising that the lesbianism expressed by this student teacher was symbolised by wearing male clothing. The insistence of the deputy principal "to dress what you are" and his refusal to hear that "I dress to show what I am" can be seen as a disciplinary power that upholds the heterosexual gender binaries identified by Foucault (1977). It further symbolises the tensions between the subjects and the rules in the activity. Wilmot and Naidoo (2014) explain that compulsory heteronormative gate-keepers in schools would do everything to keep things straight, as can be seen by the behaviour of this school leader who actively denied the existence of the student's authentic sexual expression. The deputy principal's actions and the power he commanded created further tensions between the lesbian teacher and the other teachers in the school, as alluded in the statement: "All teachers were bad to me. If a senior treats you like that, the rest of the other teachers will follow." Most teachers in South Africa perceive heterosexuality as the only accepted sexual orientation (DePalma and Francis 2014). As a result, this biologically female body had to wear what is considered to be women's clothes. The tension between the deputy principal and the student is symptomatic of the battle to name and represent as well as to (not) recognise and (dis)respect. "[T]hose who have the power to name and to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you" (Rich 1986, 199). The discordance of body and dress created a tug-of-war between the perpetuation and disruption of hegemonic identities. Research on sexual diversity in the South African education system shows that homosexuality is viewed as something that should be hidden and kept away from teaching spaces (Bhana 2014; Francis 2012; Kowan and Davis 2006). Sexuality is regarded as a private matter (Epstein 1994) and schools are places of sexual innocence (Bhana 2014), notwithstanding that school is a space of gender (re)production (Francis 2017). The retort of this "butch" lesbian student teacher has the potential to influence the object of the activity system such as values, attitudes and behaviour of a rigidly constructed gender expression in schools, thus creating expansive learning opportunities (Engeström 1987) that can fulfil the constitutional and transformational goals of a diverse country such as South Africa. If teachers with same-sex identities have the option to express themselves freely, then their learners automatically have permission to do the same (Francis 2014).

Although the student teachers were always conscious of their attire as a marker of gender and sexuality, schools were not homogeneous in conservative reactions towards sexual diverse expressions as shared by other participants.

Dress code was my biggest fear. Going to school where I was expected to wear a skirt was a no no! I can't even stand two hours wearing a skirt. When I go to church I wear a dress just to respect my grandmother and when I am back I put my jeans on. So dress was my fear during

WIL. I thought they would tell me to dress like other females and be presentable. Luckily that never happened. (Lesbian student 3)

I was the only lesbian teacher there. I have tattoos and the way I dress the principal made a comment to say it is the first time to have a teacher who identifies differently. I think it was an opportunity for the principal to see the world as diverse. With my colleagues I was not sure if they portrayed friendly or if they were really friendly. They never said anything that would offend me. (Lesbian student 2)

These student teachers also show how the semiotics of clothing can be deployed as a power tool which acts as a gatekeeper of who and what is affirmed within the teaching profession. This tool of power can control masculinity and/or heteronormativity (Foucault 1981). In the abovementioned extracts, choice of clothing functions as an accessory of femininity and masculinity and a means to respond to gender (Evans and Balfour 2012). As mentioned earlier, the surveillance of the gendered dress was used to regulate the body and its practices.

SELF-REGULATION AND PERFORMATIVITY

The surveillance of gendered bodies is not limited to the disciplining powers of the authorities in schools, but becomes internalised as it is compared to the function of the regulatory panopticon which literally means "all-seeing" (Gallagher 2010, 262). The panopticon is a conscious-building concept of a prison where power is exercised through surveillance and monitoring of behaviour to discipline a person into subjugation (Foucault 1977). Out of fear for punishment, those under the constant gaze regulate themselves to comply with an expected behaviour. We traced similar behavioural patterns in this study with student teachers who did not wait for gender patrons to police their sexual identity expression but conformed to the norm. The risk of losing credibility as a teacher increased levels of anxiety, which led to individuals adhering to heteronormative social scripts, as explained by (Francis and Brown 2017). These social scripts created internal tensions, reminding them of the social order of sexuality and how they had to conform to the ideal form to avoid isolation.

In my first year, I was acting very straight. I was in the deepest closet. I used to go to a strong church where they wear the hat and the badge. Going to WIL was an anxious moment. I had to watch how I talk. When I get excited about my teaching my hands start to move, and my voice would pitch in a certain way, and I would laugh in a particular way. I had to be careful with my outfits. I had to make sure that there was nothing colourful and I had to practise my walking. I had to stand in front of the mirror and practise my talk and how I will introduce myself ... I lived in fear. I had to constantly check that none of the school kids know me and could be on my Facebook and know the real me. (Gay student 1)

My personality is bubbly and outspoken. I had to come up with a voice, and my voice has always been squeaky. I don't even have a beard, and there is nothing masculine about me. You lived in fear and didn't know what to expect. You don't know what learners would say. I tried

the masculine thing, I would date girls, and it wouldn't work. It took long, but now that I am comfortable I don't care. (Gay student 3)

Bodily movements and gestures dictated if the body was appropriately gendered. Feminine hand gestures, colourful clothing, a high pitched voice and flamboyant personalities were perceived to be markers of a gay identity that had to be managed. The risk of being linked to any gay dispositions was punishable, since, as Msibi (2012b) explains, even the learners in the classroom could challenge your legitimacy as a teacher. Although these student teachers were aware of their sexuality, entering the school boundaries with their true identity was not an option. It is also indicative how self-regulation has turned to deeply rooted tensions within themselves, leading to censored self-expression. All efforts had to be made to ensure that their heterosexuality was not questioned. As another gay student teacher reported: "In my first year, I was acting very straight, I was in the deepest closet," whilst the second one said: "I hate wearing a tie, I hate wearing formal pants. But to be accepted I had to wear those ties and pants." Any form of homosexual "symbols" had to be mitigated for student teachers to be awarded access in the circle of professionalism. All of this performance was undermining the students' well-being, their human rights as enshrined in the Constitution and denied them of their authentic self. The building of relationships with colleagues and rapport with learners was valued more, as will be seen later in this article. More so, WIL forms part of the practicum module in the teaching programme, and a section is assessed by mentoring teachers. Therefore, how teachers and learners in school perceived student teachers was critical. The fear that sexuality could be held against them could risk not only their entire teaching education but their future successes, which would be too costly. For these student teachers, the ability to teach became secondary to the maintenance and management of the professional self as a teacher. This was a clear indication of how the tensions created between the subject and division of labour in terms of gendered roles and status and the new career development roles, contravened the student teachers' constitutional rights of the freedom to choose and not to be discriminated against because of their same-sex gender identity.

It is important to bear in mind that the majority of teachers construct homosexuality as sinful, immoral, abnormal and un-African (Bhana 2012, 2014; DePalma and Francis 2014; Francis 2012; Msibi 2012a). The battle to maintain a professional identity is real, thus leading students to perform and enact the "acceptable" school community role as experienced by this gay student that "I had to come up with a voice." Student teachers had little choice but to conceal this private "evil" lifestyle as explained by one of the gay student teachers. "You see I am from a rural area and when you are gay or lesbian, it is like the biggest sin ever. I constantly had to think of appearing straight." This indicates how the rules made by the community lead to student teachers being forced to self-regulate and view their lives as acting out heteronormative scenes, leading them to continuously "mask" the true selves, because as stated: "I had to constantly check that none of the school kids know me and could be on my Facebook and know the real me."

Student teachers entered the school space with an all too familiar backlash of living their true self as reported in the narrative below. (Lesbian student 1)

When I was a learner, I did not see eye to eye with my teacher simply because I was not girl enough, so now I knew I was going to meet people like her. I had it in my mind that I will be colleagues with such people. What will happen to me? When in school I was in a classroom, but she [the teacher] treated me as if I was not there. Even if I raised my hand in class she would ignore me. I was scared. Would this be the way I will be treated again? (Lesbian student 4)

This student teacher's conservative school experiences link with a study by Bhana (2014, 362) in which teachers expressed that:

... [homosexuality] is abnormal because we are living by norms ... deep down it is about our norms, that is why I classify it as abnormal. I can accept it. I can understand it, but I don't like it. I am ruled by my norms.

There is a moral panic that this "evil" lifestyle will infiltrate the schools and run an agenda of homosexual recruitment (DePalma and Atkinson 2006). The age-old misconception that homosexual teachers are more likely to be pedophilic (Epstein and Johnson 1998; King 2004) resurfaced in these student teachers' experiences.

One of the male teachers came to me and asked me if I am fine. I told him I am and he said not in that context. So he asked fine, making a gesture of a hand with a weakened pulse symbolising femininity. Not that I didn't know what he was referring to. I ignored the question. He kept insisting. I said to him yes I am and so what. He said do not touch any learner in this school. You will be a very bad influence to our learners. Those two weeks at school felt like a year to me. (Gay student 5)

Such crippling experiences are reminders of why student teachers would opt to self-regulate their non-normative sexual identities. The "deviant" sexual identity was conflated with the student teacher's ability to function in his duties ethically. "No matter how gay teachers demonstrate their ability to teach, there is a large chance that anti-gay biases could dramatically alter how they are perceived and treated in schools" (Russ, Simonds and Hunt 2002, 312). Although student teachers may have experienced this alienating treatment as a learner, this type of behaviour between colleagues came as a surprise. Butler (1990) explains that constant maintenance of the heteronormative matrix is used as a form of power to oppress any alternative expressions. On the contrary, conforming to hegemonic expressions at times is used to resist and disrupt the persistent homophobia found in schools (Francis and Reygan 2016; Govender 2017). When student teachers choose to perform and conform, they disempower the grip that gender gate-keepers could have over them. How they adjust with various techniques to the social script enabled them to evade the constant gender policing. The non-compliance with the basic rules that normalise a behaviour set by a homogeneous group, could lead to culprits being ousted, "othered" and forbidden (Brown 2016). While the disclosure of same-sex orientation can be viewed as a political positioning of constitutional rights,

the non-disclosure, often called the closet, has utility in a South African context (Francis and Reagan 2016). They posit that the closet should not necessarily be regarded as a lack of honesty and openness or victimhood, but be viewed in a pragmatic light. The threat and risk to be perceived as non-normative or to embody the queer self in education in South Africa, has had devastating outcomes for student teachers and other educators in the past (Msibi 2016, 2012b). The uncalculated disclosure of sexual orientation can lead to emotional abuse, physical violence and institutional and social isolation (Govender 2017). For some of these student teachers, complying with the rules was critical for their studies and sense of belonging during their WIL school visit.

DISRUPTING HETERONORMATIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM

The previous themes show how student teachers' visibility and same-sex sexuality expressions troubled heteronormative schools. Heteronormativity can be explained as reproduction of heterosexuality as the preferable sexuality through which society exists (Warner 1993). In order to interrupt the social reproduction of the staged heterosexual script we first have to dismantle the natural essentialism of the male/female anatomy as the norm of being (Bem 1995; Francis and Msibi 2011). Although the two earlier themes show that student teachers were discredited simply because of the expression of their disclosed same-sex sexualities, this theme has evidence that self-disclosure could aid teacher-learner relationships. Self-disclosure became a powerful tool in the activity system that was used to mediate learning and respond to the learners' curiosity to share their knowledge and experiences around sexual diversity. As argued by Engeström (1987), WIL presented students teachers with same-sex identities the opportunities for expansive learning as it opened the opportunity to debunk the fears, prejudice and myths around homosexuality. Moreover, it became a chance to restore the dignity of and respect for the diverse expressions of their sexuality before they could permanently enter the teaching profession. Students narrated that:

I taught business legislation. We got to the part where we had to talk about the Labour Relations Act. It touched on issues related to diversity in the workplace. It was a grade 12 class. There was a boy who identifies as gay. So, there was a lot of tiptoeing around sexual diversity. I think their curiosity of my sexuality made them linger longer on the topic. I decided to divert from my lesson plan and teach about this. So, they wanted to know more about the workplace and homosexuality. In the discussion, I just said to them I am gay ... After that brief session, the boy in class was even more comfortable. (Gay student 4)

In my subject (maths) we hardly touch on sensitive stuff, we just deal with content. You see learners mumbling on whether I am gay or straight ... I had to stop the lesson and address it. Even if I am gay, you don't have the right to call me *stabane* (a derogatory reference to an effeminate gay man), or you can't be taught by me, so I addressed it. (Gay student 6)

My situation is different because I am feminine and no one can tell if I am lesbian. People won't even think that I am lesbian. I was the one who came out to my learners when I addressed the topic of sexuality. I told them I am lesbian. The learners were surprised. They said I am lying ... They kept on asking how. The boys were like "I can change you, you will be straight again." This was interesting. (Lesbian student 6)

As explained by Bhana (2012, 308) the normalisation of a heteronormative code in schools is perpetuated through lessons, jokes, and outright discrimination. This is also evident in Activity Theory, as these teachers used tools such as the classroom, the curriculum, and language discourse to satisfy their learners' curiosity while expressing their experiences around sexual diversity. Although some of the learners still made derogatory comments about homosexuality, student teachers found that most learners showed a genuine interest in knowing more about sexual diversity. Discussions about homosexuality often surfaced through humour. It is Freud (1905/1991) who explained that humour is often used to express topics of discomfort and taboos. Student teachers also found that humour was used to regulate normativity and express dissonance, as identified by Butler (2015). Humour, direct teaching and confronting misconceptions were used as pedagogical tools to address issues of sexual diversity, as seen below.

My learners picked it up quite quickly. After a few days of greeting, they responded by saying "good morning, Ma'am." I just kept quiet, and the next day when I greeted them they would say good morning Sir, and I would say let us keep to the ma'am reference, and it became a joke. (Gay student 3)

I could hear them whisper in class saying she is lesbian and others would say she isn't. I don't always dress in a masculine way, but for the large part, I do. I just stopped the class and said let us talk about this ... I told them that I am a lesbian and my dress code does not define me. I wear what I feel comfortable with. So they wanted to know if I have a wife and I told them that I have a girlfriend. I got to tell them my story. There was a learner who identified as a tomboy and wanted to know the difference between a tomboy and a lesbian. She shared how she always had to correct her peers that she is a tomboy and not a lesbian. I had to explain the difference. (Lesbian student 4)

The visibility of a teacher with same-sex sexualities generated a curiosity around the subject of homosexuality, which revealed the desire of learners to understand sexual diversity without the fear of being linked to this "deviant" identity. The engagement with a teacher with a same-sex sexuality in a constructive manner provided learners with new meanings and various forms of interpretation. The enhanced visibility of same-sex sexualities in the classroom was an opportunity for learners to reflect on personal and social constructions of sexual diversity within a local context. The visibility and unsilenced voices of student teachers with same-sex sexualities have the potential to normalise non-normative identities within this gender-regulated spaces. Same-sex sexuality expressions, after all, are not so invisible in the South African society (Msibi and Rudwick 2015) and a growing youth population embraces their same-sex sexuality at a young age (Francis 2012). While discourses around sexual diversity in South African

schools are primarily contained in Life Orientation (DePalma and Francis 2014), we noticed that students across subject areas addressed aspects of sexual diversity. It is not our intent to make teachers with disclosed same-sex sexualities responsible for the education of sexual diversity, but their experiences certainly provide a critical knowledge base for teacher education programmes. Teacher education programmes largely focus on enabling teachers to create inclusive and safe learning environments for learners with same-sex sexualities (Rothmann and Simmonds 2015). We also noticed that student teachers were more relaxed when they were authentic to their same-sex sexuality. Research shows that teachers who are open about their same-sex sexualities experience less stress and have greater job satisfaction (Lineback, Allender, Gaines, McCarthy and Butler 2016). For this reason, an inclusive school ethos should not only focus on learners with same-sex sexualities, but should be extended to the entire school community, including teachers who live and express their diverse sexualities. It is, therefore, critical that education which is propelled by social justice should provide individuals with knowledge that will enable a critical understanding of “systemic oppression, how it works, how it is sustained and how it can be contested” (Muthukrishna 2008). For this very reason we suggest that initial teacher education programmes should adopt an anti-oppressive education, as will be explained in our conclusion.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that sexual diversity is still a strongly contentious issue, regardless of progressive legislation that welcomes the citizenry of people with same-sex sexualities in South Africa. From our study we concluded firstly that an insistent heteronormatively regulated school environment causes student teachers—who live with self-expressive same-sex sexualities—to grapple with their level of openness. Secondly, those who choose not to disclose their same-sex sexuality are perceived to flaunt and recruit while those who conceal it are labelled as lying to themselves. Thirdly, we have learnt that the (un)compromising strategies by student teachers with expressive same-sex sexualities were all in an attempt to humanise their (professional) identity. Although student teachers initially disassociated themselves from the homosexual symbols, they challenged stigma, confronted myths and made visible sexual diversity in the curriculum. We need to point out that learners’ curiosity—aided by the visibility of same-sex sexualities—enabled student teachers to respond to discussions around sexual diversity in the classroom, bringing about the possibility of addressing the embedded tensions and contradictions within and amongst the different systems in the schooling activity. This is indicative that young people in schools are interested in learning about sexual diversity. We are of the view that learner engagement with an openly homosexual teacher diversified learning experiences and potentially reduced biases towards same-sex sexualities. The different strategies used by student teachers to navigate around schools provided us as teacher educators with a bird’s eye view on how to respond to sexual diversity in

the teacher education programme. We therefore propose that initial teacher education should incorporate an anti-oppressive education theory and pedagogy to advance the constitutional ideals of diversity and social justice. In brief, within this anti-oppressive education, Kevin Kumashiro (2002) suggests four approaches to address an inclusive and enabling schooling environment for same-sex sexual orientation identities.

The first approach focuses on improving the everyday experiences of people who are othered in and around learning institutions. Kumashiro's (2002) second focus is an education about the other. This focus is on the teaching and learning of knowledge that challenges oppression in learning institutions. A third focus is to zoom in on education that is critical of privileging and othering. This focus suggest that education should not merely explore how identities are othered, but examine how certain people are privileged within learning institutions. Kumashiro (2002) finally proposes an education that brings transformational change among students and society. Social stereotypes have a cultural historical root that is used within a particular community of people (Kumashiro 2002). To facilitate this transformational change, educators will have to create learning environments that will allow learners "to address their own subconscious desires for only learning certain things and resistance to learning other things" (Kumashiro 2004, XXXVIII). We are of the view that an anti-oppressive education that promotes advocacy and social justice will address the "complex intersections of a number of overlapping categories of social identity and conflict" (Muthukrishna 2008, IX). We cannot transform teacher education programmes if we do not understand the construction of discourses and the (re)production of power that generate the different meanings for social identities and their relations (MacNaughton 2000). A safe and inclusive learning and teaching environment should be prioritised for the entire school community and not only learners with same-sex sexualities. Given the findings of this study, future research should examine how aspects of sexual diversity and inclusive collegial ethos are infused within teacher education programmes.

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