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Sexuality education for gender justice in South African contexts: *pitfalls and possibilities*

Tamara Shefer & Sisa Ngabaza
Series Editor: Gabriela Pinheiro

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Foreword: Deevia Bhana

It is with great pleasure that I introduce this book, *Sexuality education for gender justice in South African contexts: pitfalls and possibilities* by two renowned authors on sexualities and young people in the country. For many years, Shefer and Ngabaza have been instrumental, together with other scholars in the country, in contributing to and establishing the empirical and theoretical foundation of young sexualities and education in South Africa. This book is thus a culmination of bringing together their joint work on young sexual subjectivities to provide a consolidated perspective of how we are to understand sexuality education in contemporary South Africa. The book is distinctive in drawing the work of the authors within its local context and is framed through a gender justice framework. It addresses the work that has gone before them and illustrates the complexity of sexuality education in providing healthier outcomes for young people. The book brings together the wide-ranging scholarship, especially in South Africa, although stretching far beyond it, as it critically engages with the question of sexuality education and how it matters to young people in the country. It situates young people and sexuality education within a broader historical context, stamped by the surgical knives of colonialism and apartheid, while addressing the contemporary inequalities that structure the experience of young people in the country.

Let me start by saying that this book is an essential resource for those looking to understand the complexity of sexuality education, both as building young peoples' capacities and as constraining their ability to engage with sexuality. For too long, sex and sexuality in Southern Africa have been angled towards the public health agenda where disease and death have framed a dominant understanding of sexuality as a domain of suffering. With the powerful reminder of the daily injustices that face many in this country, it is easy to see why sexual suffering dominates public discourse and health interventions. Yet, this book is a powerful reminder of the importance of recognising that if sexuality education is to achieve success, then honouring sexuality beyond danger is vital.

Since 2000, sexuality education in South Africa has been implemented through Life Orientation lessons. It emerged in the context of high HIV prevalence rates alongside high rates of violence against women and girls. As I write this foreword, reports of gender and sexual violence remain high. HIV too has increased from approximately 3.2 million people living with the disease in 2000 to over 7 million in 2022. It is in this context that sexuality education continues to be viewed as a vital intervention to engage with young people to question the gendered dynamics of sexual risk, and to explain and challenge girls' disparate vulnerability to disease while bringing attention to masculine entitlements which encourage unequal power relations and violence against women and girls.

Sexuality education, however, is often viewed in contradictory ways as both potentially transformative and constraining. Its transformative potential arises from the view that sexuality education can provide young people with the knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about sexuality and to enable healthy sexual lives. If sexuality education is driven by a social justice framework, underlined by a rights discourse, then it is possible to address longstanding gender and sexual divisions, and unequal relations of power, and provide the platform for young people to engage with oppressive sexual relations and relationship dynamics. However, as Shefer and Ngabaza remind us, sexuality education is promising but has many pitfalls too. In the context of everyday reports of young people's poor sexual health outcomes, gendered risk and violence, several questions have been raised about the failure of Life Orientation sexuality education to provide quality programmes based on human rights and gender justice.

There are three main arguments in this book covering a range of research over the last three decades or so in the country. Firstly, sexuality education constrains young peoples' desires. While HIV and gender violence are important to address, to see sexuality education as only thinkable in this context is short-sighted. Secondly, the emphasis is on sexual danger and disease and the production of normative binaries. Masculinity and femininity are viewed

in oppositional ways where femininity is subsumed under the rubric of respectability while masculinity is deemed to be irresponsible. Herein, heterosexuality is normalised, and sexual diversity is othered while young men and women are seen in a perpetual state of dualisms. Thirdly, adult authority is reinforced where young people are viewed as simultaneously innocent and 'out of control', imbricating the need for adult support, direction and protection.

Despite the pitfalls, sexuality education is of critical importance in the country. In the context of technological developments and the array of social network sites available to young people, new ways of learning and engaging with sexuality have become possible. Alongside these developments are concerns that young people are learning sexuality without any form of support about online sexual content and sexually explicit materials. Thinking differently about what is possible in engaging with young people, Shefer and Ngabaza remind us that the promises of sexuality education are real and that a gender justice framework that focuses on bodies, genders, pleasures, relationships and desires is essential to developing young sexualities. And that also requires taking heed of the changing social and technological landscapes through which young people navigate sexuality.

This book is a powerful reminder of the importance of understanding how sexuality education is conceived of, how it is shaped and changes and why we need to improve how classrooms can work towards an ethical standpoint where everyone is respected regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. This book will be an invaluable resource for those interested in learning more about sexuality education and gender justice. It will inspire more questions and research as we work towards our joint efforts to create a better life for young people in a gender equitable and healthier world.

Deevia Bhana
Durban, February 2023

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No piece of scholarship is attributable to the authors alone, but is always a part of an ongoing dialogue and indebted to a cacophony of thinking-together. We acknowledge that our arguments in this book are entangled with others' thinking and work, especially the many researchers we have collaborated with and the many productive and inspiring research projects we have worked on, together and separately, in South Africa and across diverse geopolitical contexts.

In relation to this book, we are particularly appreciative of the SANPAD-funded project headed by Catriona Macleod on Sexualities Education (2010–2014) that propelled our work on gender, sexualities, young people and education into this rich terrain. We are also grateful to the earlier SANPAD-funded project led by Deevia Bhana and Robert Morrell on teenage pregnancy and parenting at school (2005–2010) which was a productive space for Sisa's own PhD research and for both of us in developing our thinking around sexualities, gender, schools and education in general. We acknowledge also the ongoing collaborative research work located at the University of the Western Cape through the HIV unit in earlier years, and in the Department of Women's and Gender Studies, particularly through our third-year research module that has been a valuable space to take forward our research on sexualities and genders, including students' experiences on campus in relation to intersectional gender and sexual justice, safety and belonging. We further acknowledge the NRF/Academy of Finland collaborative research project on young people (2013–2016) and the A.W. Mellon funded New Imaginaries for Gender and Sexual Justice research project (2018–2022), both of which allowed us the opportunity to think beyond critique to alternative imaginaries of pedagogical and research praxis for gender and sexual justice.

There are many further wonderful scholars, other than those already mentioned, that we have worked with over many years and continue to work with, hopefully for many years

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We acknowledge, with appreciation, Deevia Bhana for writing the foreword to this book. Many thanks to Karen Graaff for her dedicated editorial assistance and to the publishers, CSA&G. Special thanks to Gabriela Pinheiro for inviting us to pursue this project and for holding it with such care and providing valuable feedback together with Pierre Brouard.

Finally, we both acknowledge the special young people in our own lives for helping us develop our critical thinking around adultism and young people, and inspiring us in all our scholarly endeavours.

Tamara Shefer & Sisa Ngabaza, February 2023

Preface

We, Sisa and Tamara, write this book as researchers with decades-long experience conducting feminist research with young people, from primary to tertiary education levels, concerning topics of sexualities, gender justice and education in the Southern African context.

Sisa comes from an education background and has interacted with young people over a long time. Her interest in young people's sexualities was sparked by witnessing the daily challenges faced by pregnant young learners in a South African classroom. Seeing the young bodies in place in classrooms and out of place in the school arena marked the beginning of an exploration of young sexualities, broadly and as issues of justice. These experiences would later inform work on her PhD. Tamara is a South African feminist researcher who grew up with white and middle class privilege. She is deeply aware of how these advantages have shaped and bolstered her career as a researcher in many ways, and that they have always been a part of how she sees the world and what she sees (or does not see). She has been researching gender and sexuality with a focus on young people since the early 1990s when the new South African democracy found itself also facing the deeply gendered HIV pandemic.

We met when Sisa decided to embark on her PhD at the Department of Women's and Gender Studies at the University of the Western Cape. Tamara was privileged to work with Sisa as her supervisor from 2006. Sisa began researching teenage pregnancy and how it impacted on the lived experience of young women at schools. We were also invited in 2007 to contribute to a South Africa Netherlands Research Programme on Alternatives in Development (SANPAD)-funded project led by Deevia Bhana and Robert Morrell. The project focused on young people, gender, pregnancy and parenting at school, which further strengthened our work in the area of young people, sexualities, gender, parenting and education (see Morrell, Bhana & Shefer, 2012). In 2010,

we were once again invited to participate as researchers on a further SANPAD-funded research project led by Catriona Macleod from Rhodes University, entitled 'Life Orientation sexuality programmes and normative gender narratives, practices and power relations' (see Shefer, Macleod & Baxen, 2015, special edition of *Perspectives in Education*). It was this project in particular that took us further into thinking about sexuality education at school and its challenges for young women in particular, something which Sisa's earlier PhD study had already flagged. We are grateful to this project for providing a fruitful space to research this important area of work which articulates many of our wider misgivings about current approaches to young people and their sexualities and gender in contemporary South Africa.

Over the years of our research on young sexualities, we have found ourselves becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the research that has been conducted in South Africa in the wake of HIV and other gender justice concerns. We are increasingly aware of the political effects of mainstream scholarship and associated policy and practice that have been directed at young people (see also Shefer & Hearn, 2022). For the last decade, we have focused more on a critique of mainstream research directed particularly at young people and less on gathering research data. At the same time, we have been increasingly suspicious about the fraught nature of dominant traditions of research and pedagogical practice and have been part of efforts to reconceptualise scholarship. Drawing on decolonial feminist thinking, which destabilises everyday practices of scholarship and calls attention to the epistemic violences of higher education in general, has led us to radically rethink what it means to do research and to teach.

In this respect, we have also worked together a lot in the context of the university where we have experimented with alternative pedagogical and research practices. Our work in this area has mostly taken shape within an undergraduate research module, while also working closely with Lindsay

Clowes, where we have engaged active, student-centred and participatory research practices, like photovoice, and researched issues of gender, sexuality, and other social identities that have been of interest and relevance to students' lives, in and outside the university. We have written from these research projects and, as part of our efforts to destabilise didactic methodologies and the lecturer as 'expert', have encouraged students to publish and present their work to public audiences. Indeed, we have hosted a number of exhibitions of students' rich work that have in some cases impacted on faculty and university stakeholders and have certainly inspired activism and scholarly agency among early career and undergraduate students. Sisa has particularly been instrumental in promoting early career authorship in this respect and has co-authored two articles in accredited journals with students from these research courses. This work, which attempts to challenge and rethink dominant approaches to young people, has also been of great value to our thinking about alternative possibilities for engaging young people in intersectional gender and sexual justice.

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Chapter one: Contextualising sexualities, sexualities education, and young people in post-apartheid contexts

Introduction

South Africa is a nation-state with a long history of oppression, subjugation and violence over decades of apartheid and centuries of colonisation. Gender inequalities and the complex intersections of gender with race, class and other forms of inequality continue to shape everyday experiences of othering, abuse and violence for many. In the post-apartheid period, as part of larger efforts to address and redress the legacies of these histories of subjugation, dispossession, disenfranchisement and many other violences, gender justice has been foregrounded as a key project in redress and transformation efforts. Further foci on gender and sexualities, through ongoing and recently proliferating activism against sexual and gender violence, have bolstered this emphasis. One key avenue for engaging with gender justice has been through schooling and education in general.

Sexuality education, and the Life Orientation (LO) programme at schools in general, has been viewed, at least by feminist scholars and practitioners, as a hopeful productive space for 'teaching' gender and sexual justice (Bhana, Crewe & Aggleton, 2019; Shefer & Macleod, 2015). In democratic South Africa, many critical stakeholders have promoted this forum as an important space for confronting the silencing of sexualities and the erasure of young people's sexualities in particular, as well as a space for challenging gender and sexual exclusions and injustices. Yet, a review of the literature on sexuality education, including our own research, highlights a range of failures, obstacles and inadequacies in how sexuality

education is taught in the classroom and what is taught in the sexuality education classroom and the school more generally.

In this book, we unpack three overlapping arguments about such challenges that emerge from our own work and other critical and feminist literature on sexuality education and broader responses to young people's sexualities. Our key argument is that rather than offering a space of productive and transformative engagement, the sexuality education classroom is frequently invested in and directed towards regulating and disciplining young sexual desire and practice. Dominant practices and narratives that are reported in sexuality classes and the school more broadly, as powerfully shaped by particular emphasis on the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and gender-based violence (GBV), further reproduce in these didactic and authoritative spaces, a range of intersecting binaries that are related to larger injustices, powers and privileges, including:

- Rather than challenging gender divides and normativities, dominant praxis and discourse appear to rationalise and reinstate gender and sexual binaries. Praxis and discourse promote mainstream gendered directives and assume 'respectable' femininity and female responsibility as victims, and 'irresponsible', problematic masculinity as perpetrators.
- Rather than challenging homophobia, heteronormativity and heterosexism, assumptions and promotion of heterosexuality and a particular morality about nuclear legalised familial structures are ever present. At the same time, non-binary and non-normative sexualities and genders remain othered, marginalised and judged in sexuality education classes, the school and in wider public forums.
- Instead of promoting and appreciating young agencies and knowledges, such classrooms and the school in general continue to rely on methodologies

of 'expert' adult knowledge and deploy unitary normative, developmental and civilising discourses of the child and young person as inherently 'a problem' requiring direction, guidance and protection.

Over history, sexualities in South Africa and elsewhere have been shrouded in secrecy and silences, while at the same time always occupying a large place in the public and private imaginary. Early local research in the area, presented through the eyes of predominantly white Eurowestern middle class heterosexual cisgender males, reminds us how young sexualities have always attracted attention from multiple stakeholders who include parents, communities and the state (e.g. Macleod, 2009, 2011; Morrell, 2003). We are also reminded of how these sexualities were controlled, regulated and restricted in precolonial and colonial times (e.g. Duff, 2015). Contemporary work in sexualities research still points to continuities in othering, regulating and silencing, particularly with respect to what are considered 'marginal sexualities' whilst 'normalised' (hetero)sexualities are endorsed and acknowledged. New forms of research have emerged with researchers positioned either as insiders or outsiders, or collaboratively, to unravel what Epprecht (2009, p. 1271) terms 'secret argots' as sexualities research broadens while always remaining contested. Such transformations in research approaches in the field of sexualities studies have indeed facilitated access to previously non-documented knowledges particularly on African sexualities, while also highlighting the way in which dominant 'othering'¹ tropes continue to be

¹ See Epstein, O'Flynn and Telford (2000) for a helpful elaboration of how an objectifying and stigmatising discourse, which sets up non-heteronormative and any non-binary and non-conforming identities, practices and desires as 'other', is deployed within educational contexts. Also of note is the way in which, notwithstanding many alternative traditions of gender and sexuality in African contexts, a discourse on homosexuality as 'unAfrican' and the deployment of Christianity to rationalise the 'othering' of LGBTQIA+ have tended to dominate in the public imaginary (e.g. Bhana, 2014a, 2014b). Scholars like Epprecht (2008, 2014) have argued that rigid notions of heterosexuality as normative was a colonial legacy while more fluid sexualities and genders were more dominant historically in African contexts.

reproduced (Tamale, 2011). Drawing on such postcolonial feminist thinking, a plethora of more critical research in sexualities and particularly in educational contexts, highlights the way in which scholarship, practice and policy continue to problematise young sexualities (e.g. Bhana, 2014a, 2016, 2017, 2018; Francis, 2013a, 2017; Boonzaier & Kessi, 2018; Ratele, 2016; Shefer, 2018, 2021; Shefer & Hearn, 2022). In South Africa, this critique is increasingly being made by critical, feminist scholarly engagements with the curriculum, pedagogies and reported experiences of sexuality education in schools, and this is the focus of this book.

Over a decade, we have worked in this field, drawing on voices of young people, educators and school leadership to critically explore dominant narratives in young people's sexualities and how these play out in the teaching and learning of sexuality education in South African schools, within the constitutional mandates to promote gender equality and social justice. In this body of work, emerging key discourses demonstrate how sexualities are problematised and silenced. Scholars are increasingly flagging how young sexualities are strongly associated with high rates of HIV and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), and also linked with GBV and risky sexual behaviours. Emerging discourses further illuminate how adults and adultist thinking play a part in monitoring and constraining young people's sexualities through sexuality education.

This book draws together arguments, based on our own and others' research, for alternative engagements with young people and sexualities in educational and other settings. We are particularly concerned with illuminating the way that certain logics, colonial and patriarchal, have become entangled with Christian and other religious dogma. These logics were then embedded over centuries of settler colonisation to be particularly entrenched within the apartheid legalisation of racist segregation and sexual repression. This continues to seep into the everyday discursive and material contexts of

sexuality education and the larger public imaginary around sexuality and young people. We argue further that globalised neoliberal capitalist narratives of individualised responsibility for health and well-being add further fodder to historical and current dominant Eurowestern and patriarchal moralities that have been directed at regulating and disciplining young people and their sexualities. As well-known scholar, Louisa Allen (2020, p. 2), argues:

The micro-management of students' lives and emphasis on acquiring skills and knowledge for the future, is vividly apparent in sexuality education.

We are concerned here to illustrate how sexuality education in current contexts, albeit well-meaning in many situations, is haunted by histories of subjugation and control, particularly over marginalised and oppressed bodies, while continuing to extend regulatory and disciplinary approaches, bolstered by neoliberal and gendered notions of self and self-regulation.

In this introductory chapter, we briefly contextualise sexuality education in the larger framework of South African responses to young people's sexualities over the last three decades of democracy and post-apartheid redress. This serves as a significant location for our critical thought on contemporary approaches to sexuality education with young people. We begin with a snapshot of the larger political and academic scholarly context of research on young sexualities in South Africa, which includes a brief overview of the dominant themes that have captured South African scholars and practitioners. We follow with an overview of the chapters and how they speak to our primary arguments.

South African contexts of sexualities and approaches to young people's sexualities

The story of South African research over the last three decades on sexualities and young people's sexualities is long and complex, and like all stories may be told in different ways.

It is necessarily a partial story; however, it is important for any critique of current sexualities education at school to be located in the larger picture of post-apartheid South African work on sexualities and to sketch the primary concerns that have captured public and professional attention. Indeed, understanding the broader terrain offers valuable insight into the current challenges within schooling contexts around sexualities and sexuality education. For those of us who have been engaged in feminist efforts around sexual and gender justice, it is increasingly evident that much of the scholarship and larger practices and policies related to young people's sexualities over the three decades post-apartheid, have been directed through a problems-based lens with emphasis on young people's vulnerabilities to HIV, high rates of GBV, concerns around male violence, challenges around reproductive health and justice, and relatively high rates of young pregnancy and parenting. In this mix, as we unpack in more detail in chapter five, is the dominance of a developmental psychology notion of adolescence (Boonzaier & Kessi, 2018; Macleod, 2003, 2011; Shefer & Hearn, 2022), where a unitary notion of adolescence as a time of turbulence and contestation prevails, backed up by a barrage of research, including neuroscientific 'evidence' of how parts of the brain around decision making and self-control are not yet fully developed in the adolescent. Not surprisingly, sexualities education, in the public terrain, public health and in educational institutions such as universities and secondary schools, has, as we will show, tended to foreground the 'dangers' of being sexual for young people, a long trope about sexuality across many African contexts (Tamale, 2011, p. 30).

The dominant lens of HIV and GBV in directing South African sexualities research (see also Vetten, 2018) is entangled with the fact that at the same moment as South Africa became a new democracy in the early 1990s, we faced the HIV pandemic as a significant public health challenge. Moreover, young people, particularly those in disadvantaged communities, were rapidly recognised and continue to be considered

as most at risk for HIV infection (Shisana & Simbayi, 2002; Shisana *et al.*, 2005, 2009, 2014; Simbayi *et al.*, 2019). The gendered and sexualised² nature of the epidemic—both in terms of infection and impact—was also evident from early epidemiological work. Further, a strong gender justice agenda as encapsulated in the then new Constitution of South Africa (The Republic of South Africa, 1996), meant that more public, state and professional attention was given to GBV and other gender justice concerns, given the ‘culture of rape’ (Gqola, 2015) now widely acknowledged. Activist efforts, such as the student Fallist movement from 2015 and other public activism, have further taken forward the imperatives of addressing gender injustice and violence against women and other marginalised genders and sexualities in particular. Covid-19 and the constraints of lockdowns have meant that much of these efforts have gone virtual, yet public media, such as the slogan ‘Gender-based violence is everywhere’ taken up by corporates and the state, have mirrored the preoccupations of scholars and policymakers as well.

Research on sexualities with emphasis on young sexual practices, mostly spurred on by HIV and efforts at prevention, have indeed proliferated in the last few decades (Shefer & Hearn, 2022). Public health and other applied social sciences have focused specifically on barriers to safe sex and reproductive health and justice, given the gendered, classed and aged nature of vulnerability to HIV. Researchers have highlighted in particular the intersectionality of vulnerability to unsafe and unequal sexual practices, since poverty,

² Notably, the HIV pandemic was always strongly represented in (negative) sexualised terms, given that infection has been primarily through penetrative sexual intimacy, and initially represented, in North America but also elsewhere, as homosexual, with gay men and sex workers, for example, being highly stigmatised in this respect and considered as ‘risk groups’ in many public health contexts. HIV responses have been powerfully driven by such ‘risk’ narratives and myths about who was at risk and for what reasons, and responses were highly political and shaped by dominant moralities. Such understandings of sex and sexualities underpinned much of the mainstream research conducted in relation to HIV prevalence and reproductive health, and has certainly also shaped educational and preventative work with young people.

together with gender and age, works to compound and complicate young, poor women's access to reproductive health and justice, undermining capacity for agency and resistance to coercive, unequal and unsafe sexual practices (e.g. Jewkes & Morrell, 2010, 2012; Morrell *et al.*, 2012; Mturi & Bechuke, 2019; Shefer, 1999). The materiality of love and sex has been documented as a significant dynamic underpinning inequalities and abuses in what has been termed 'transactional practices' (Bhana & Pattman, 2011; Shefer, Clowes & Vergnani, 2012). While scholars have attempted to challenge the kneejerk moralistic response to transactional forms of sexuality, arguing that as with sex work women and queer men are not by any means passive victims, there is also wide acknowledgement that class privilege intersects with gender binaries in ways that usually disadvantage women given the unequal terms of the exchange (Bhana & Pattman, 2011; Hunter, 2002, 2010; Leclerc-Madlala, 2004; Masvawure, 2010; Shefer *et al.*, 2012).

Gender normative practices and the social pressures and socialisations around being a successful woman and man in one's community have also emerged as very significant in shaping particular vulnerabilities to HIV/sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unwanted pregnancies, coercive sexual practices and so on. In this respect, the stereotyped notion of women as passive and submissive sexually, men as hypersexual and the social affirmations related to 'respectability' for women and heterosexual prowess for men is clearly significant in shaping particular forms of inequality within heterosexual relationships. Again, the intersection of normative gender performance with other inequalities of age, sexuality, class, ability, citizenship and so on, has been shown to complexify and bolster the consequent inequalities and abuses, particularly within heterosexual relationships.

The larger local scholarship directed at young people's sexualities, drawing on international critical masculinities thinking, has also increasingly generated critical work on

boys, men and masculinities (e.g. Langa, 2020; Mfecane, 2018; Morrell, 2001; Ouzgane & Morrell, 2005; Ratele, 2016; Reid & Walker, 2005; Richter & Morrell, 2006; Shefer, Ratele, Strelb, Shabalala & Buikema, 2007). This has been an important turn in the literature and policy and practice-based work, but also has been shown to have some disadvantages politically in terms of reinforcing gender stereotypes, as we elaborate below. On the one hand, a key emphasis has been to illustrate how young men are expected to prove their sexual prowess through multiple heterosexual partners and encounters and how cultural discourses of what it means to be a man are drawn on to rationalise such practices (e.g. Gibson & Lindegaard, 2007; Graaff & Heinecken, 2017; Lesch & Brooks, 2019; Oxlund, 2012; Ratele, 2016). On the other hand, this literature has also pointed to the vulnerabilities and precarities of young men who 'fail' to live up to such expectations and/or prefer to perform gender and sexuality differently, with the 'othering' of gay and those performing 'femininity' being widely noted (e.g. Anderson, 2010; Lynch & Clayton, 2017; Mashabane & Henderson, 2020; Shefer, Kruger & Schepers, 2015).

In recent years, a more critical lens has been developing with respect to the mainstream literature on young sexual practices and the emphasis on vulnerability. Scholars have argued that much of this work and mainstream interventions have reproduced and reiterated gender binarisms and heteronormativity rather than challenge them. Further, a growing body of work calls attention to the ways in which particular emphasis on particular groups of people in South Africa, for example, young, poor, black men, may have bolstered racist and classist 'othering' narratives, thus 'outsourcing' patriarchy (Grewal, 2013) while promoting the 'innocence' (Wekker, 2016) and superiority of more privileged people and communities. Further, a growing discomfort with the patronising way in which young people have been viewed in research and practice has been emerging in critical scholarship (e.g. Boonzaier & Kessi, 2018; Ngabaza, 2018; Shefer, Hearn, Ratele & Boonzaier, 2018; Shefer & Hearn,

2022). Scholarship has also benefited from the activism of young people at universities and in communities who have brought a strong decolonial lens to bear on continued inequalities and injustices in South African society (Andrews, 2020; Ndelu, Dlakavu & Boswell, 2017; Ndlovu, 2017).

As part of this groundswell of reflexivity and critique of the dominant approach to young people, over the last few decades, scholarship specifically focused on sexuality education in South Africa itself has also proliferated (Bhana *et al.*, 2019; Francis, 2017; Shefer *et al.*, 2015a). Much of this work points to challenges and gaps in the teaching and learning of the subjects as well as concerns about the larger messages directed at young people in schools, universities and the public terrain. At the same time, national concerns with high rates of new HIV and AIDS infections among young people, high rates of unintended pregnancies as well as challenges with GBV, continue to complicate the teaching and learning of this component. The general concern raised in this scholarship broadly points to a sexuality education that has failed its imperative. This book generally focuses on this scholarship, to present an intersectional postcolonial feminist critique of sexuality education for gender justice in South African contexts. Much of this work is situated in the teaching and learning of sexuality education in South African schools and the experiences of young people at school with respect to dominant narratives on their sexualities and genders. In this body of work, young people's sexualities, as intersecting with a range of other subjugated identities and stigmatising narratives, emerge as predominantly problematised, 'othered' and silenced. Notably, young people are not a unitary, homogenous group, neither in the public imaginary or in their lived experiences. Thus, certain groups of young people are constructed as 'the problem', given recalcitrant gendered, raced, classed, aged and other discursive framings. Gender and other justice goals for sexuality education such as facilitating young people's sexual agency and autonomy, are undoubtedly a possible and hoped for outcome of sexuality

education. However, a growing body of work highlights the failures of and impossibilities for sexuality education, as it is currently circulated and practised, to be a space for gender and sexual justice, as intersecting with a range of other justice imperatives that promotes reproductive health and well-being for all young people.

Theoretical and methodological locations

This book, as elaborated in the preface, emerges out of our own research over a few decades that has been interested in understanding challenges to gender justice, particularly for young people. We locate ourselves in a postcolonial feminist framework which foregrounds the complex intersections of gender, sexuality, race, class, age and other forms of social identity and differences in power and privilege. Efforts to understand young people, sexualities and the bodies of work, both in research and practice, which have proliferated in this respect in the last three decades, need to be contextualised within histories of colonisation and apartheid and their entanglements with patriarchy. We draw on postcolonial and decolonial feminist thinking in local and global scholarship, within the terrain of sexualities education and sexualities and gender more broadly as primary lenses in our analysis of current reported practices and emerging discourses in schools and the public imaginary directed at young South Africans' sexual desires and practices. Such a lens offers valuable insight into the way in which gender and sexuality continue to be shaped by colonial histories and strongly underpinned by the rigid matrix of deterministic relations of (assumed biological) sex, (assumed socially constructed) gender, and 'practices of desire' that Judith Butler (1990, p. 17) articulated so well.

We are particularly informed by international and local work on sexualities education but are further located within the broader terrain of feminist postcolonial and decolonial thinking that sheds light on the interwovenness of colonial logics with contemporary raced, classed, gendered, heteronormative and ageist responses to young people,

in sexuality education classes and in larger civil society. Locating sexuality education in histories of coloniality and patriarchy necessarily involves intersectional framing, an acknowledgement of the complex entanglements of gender, race, class, age and other forms of identification, subjugation, privileging and power. We have found transnational feminist thinking particularly helpful in opening up critical understanding of the way in which concepts travel, often reinscribing racist, classist and other geopolitical inequalities: notably, a focus on particular groups of people and nation-states across geopolitical differences may reiterate and re-entrench problematic 'othering' practices, an 'outsourcing' of patriarchy (Grewal, 2013) or homophobia through homonationalism (Puar, 2007).

Our methodological approach comprises a critical literature review of existing research findings, mostly in post-apartheid South Africa, but is also informed by international literature that has raised many similar issues. In our arguments, we draw on the broad field of empirical research, including our own research on young people's sexual practices and sexualities education in research collaborations and individually (see preface), and the larger body of scholarship on sexualities and sexuality education in the South African context, to critically interrogate sexuality education. We are particularly concerned to unpack and illustrate how young people's sexualities continue to be othered, silenced, erased and often shrouded in controversy in the South African public imaginary, and how this is increasingly evident within LO sexuality education and the teaching of lessons about gender and sexualities in South African schools in general. We aim to showcase how the ambiguity, complexity and fraughtness surrounding young people's sexualities are grounded in socio-political and cultural mainstream discourses, shaped by histories of colonialism, reflecting and reinforcing dominant moralities related to family and relationship, patriarchal logics of gender binary and heteronormativity, and adultist, deterministic and unitary notions of youth and young people.

Overview

In chapter two, we discuss sexuality education in historical and contemporary contexts with emphasis on the LO Programme and the way in which sexualities education has developed as a key component of this, particularly in higher grades. This chapter traces some of what we know about precolonial sexualities and sexual educational practices and reviews current developments in sexuality education policy and curricula. We flag in particular how educational contexts remain haunted by colonial and patriarchal logics articulated through the ‘civilising’ and regulating endeavours directed at young people’s sexualities, a thread which weaves through the next few chapters.

Chapter three addresses challenges with the way in which sexuality education appears to have failed to meet the goals of gender and sexual justice, as was the hope of progressive and feminist stakeholders. In this chapter, we deconstruct dominant discourses around young people’s sexualities and genders as these emerge from their reported experiences of sexuality education. Following on from international and local empirical and theoretical studies on sexuality education, we surface the way in which the LO classroom tends to reproduce and rationalise gender binarisms and heteronormativity, rather than subvert or challenge these. Drawing on narratives of young people from various studies, we illustrate the way in which sexuality education delivers messages that bolster gender and sexual stereotypes, such as a *responsibilisation* discourse (Jearey-Graham & Macleod, 2015; Macleod, Moodley & Young, 2015) for young women, and unitary assumptions of masculinity as predatory and violent, while silencing sexual and gender diversity through heteronormative and heterosexist assumptions. Homophobia and stigmatisation of non-conforming genders and sexual practices seem to characterise schools and the sexuality education site of learning. We

also draw on examples in the popular media³ to explore the way in which schools may be spaces of opportunity, yet more frequently are spaces of constraint in relation to young people's sexual and gender choices and desires.

Chapter four elaborates on what we see as the failure of educational efforts around sexualities with respect to opening up more positive and constructive safe spaces for engagement. Taking up the arguments of postcolonial African and global Southern feminist scholars and others, we interrogate how sexualities research, policy and practice, particularly as directed at young people in disadvantaged geopolitical contexts, but also globally, tend to be conducted through a negative lens of disease, damage and danger (Allen, 2008; Macleod, 2009; Tamale, 2011). Research is increasingly reporting on young people's experiences of the dominant negative lens on sexualities in the LO classroom and an overriding punitive response which is directed at silencing and disavowing young sexual desire or practices. In this chapter, we explore narratives from young people about sexuality education and how it reproduces shame, stigma and othering with respect to young sexualities and attempts to erase any sign of young sexuality, as well as any positive narratives on sexuality as relationality, care and pleasure. We also pay particular attention to young people's voices in South African research and popular media narratives, how they are pushing back, how they are speaking out and responding to such repressive discourses.

In chapter five we look at the way in which the mainstream approach to teaching sexualities is framed in adult authority and didactic methodologies within a psychologised notion of human development and the stereotype of the inherently volatile nature of young people. We draw on narratives from school contexts as well as public media alarmist messages,

³ For example, the DF Malan High School queerphobia incident that took place in 2021 that we refer to in chapter four. To read about the incident, follow the link: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-06-11-probe-launched-into-claims-of-homophobia-after-pride-month-celebration-at-df-malan-school>.

parents' and school bodies' narratives on young people's sexualities which speak to a 'civilising' discourse towards young people's sexualities. We unpack the dominant narrative of young sexual innocence and need for guidance as well as the troubling notions, couched in a protectionist discourse, around the assumed 'perverse' consequences of exposing young people to sexualities information and resources. We also draw on public and social media debates, such as the recent parents' pushback debates on social media where such parents reject sexuality education. Further, we explore schools' ambivalence and negative responses to pregnancy at school and any signifiers of sexual expression. Yet, we also illustrate young people's resistances to dominant representations and how they are able to access alternative appropriate information on sexualities.

Chapter six concludes with a synthesis of the key arguments and concerns raised here about the challenging context of contemporary sexuality education for intersectional gender and sexual justice goals. We also think about alternative approaches, including the imperative of centering young people's voices and a radical re-thinking of dominant approaches towards opening up spaces for constructive and creative engagement with sexualities, information and resources towards young people's agency, empowerment, and pleasure.

Chapter two: Sexuality education in context

Introduction

In this chapter, our primary goal is to contextualise sexuality education in South African histories and their continuities, tracing the scant empirical work and other narratives available on sexualities and 'sexuality education' in precolonial times. We then look at the introduction of sexuality education in schools during colonial times, taking into account the ontological justification of the curriculum at the time. This historical context remains important for understanding contemporary arguments and contestations. Moreover, it is of significance since sexualities and sexuality education in contemporary times, whether in schools, the public or universities, continue to be shaped by the complex and fraught histories of centuries of colonisation and the decades of apartheid's particular sexual repression (e.g. Macleod, 2011; Posel, 2004, 2005; Ratele & Shefer, 2013). Undoubtedly, certain undercurrents in contemporary discourses in sexuality education find their roots in entangled raced, classed, gendered, sexualised histories of the way in which sexualities and sexuality education were deployed within larger political and historical contexts. We then focus on sexuality education in post-apartheid South Africa, looking at the Department of Basic Education's (DBE's) principles underlying the teaching of sexuality education.

Sexualities in precolonial and colonial South Africa

The dissemination of knowledges on sexualities and practices that served as sex education were of course present in precolonial times across diverse communities in the African continent. Social systems and structures within communities

ensured that accurate knowledge and processes were conveyed to age sets of young people (Hunter, 2005; Ntuli, 2018) at particular times in their life trajectory. Of key importance and perhaps worth noting here is how the bodies of young women became an essential part of these pre-colonial discourses around sexualities and sex education. We refer to these systems as sexuality education because they were ingrained in community ways of knowing and also critical in guiding young people towards sexual agency and well-being. Of significance in sexuality education in precolonial indigenous South African contexts, as with other similar societies and also prevalent in this early discourse on young people's sexualities, was puberty as a significant marker of emergent sexuality (Erlank, 2004; Krige, 1968; Scorgie; 2002). Puberty seemed to be represented as particularly significant for women, associated with readiness for marriageability as the young woman transitioned into womanhood through social rituals and practices. While such studies need to be drawn on with caution, given the speculative lens of coloniality endemic in research conducted by white scholars on African communities, these studies do provide some relevant insight into pedagogical practices around sexualities in some local communities. Krige (1936), for example, writing on *The social systems of the Zulus* shares how sexualities were managed and learned through social structures that guided young women and men in matters of sexual practices. For example, in her work, Krige (1936) shows how older girls who were already courting, '*amaqhikiza*',⁴ played a lead role in educating and empowering younger people with respect to their sexualities. Notably, although young women were predominately the focus of such teachings, *amaqhikiza* had the power to discipline young men who coerced young women into pre-marital sex. Such young men were punished by *amaqhikiza* and in rare cases of premarital pregnancy, the young men were fined or paid *inhlawulo* (reparation) to the family of the pregnant young woman (Hunter, 2004). The practice of *inhlawulo*

⁴*Amaqhikiza* refers to older girls who were already courting/had already selected boyfriends and would act as 'go between' in assisting younger girls to choose prospective lovers.

has seen a lot of modifications over the years but it is still practised in many black communities in South Africa today.

As documented by early ethnographers, historians, and also contemporary scholars (Hunter 2005; Krige 1936; Ntuli, 2018; Scorgie, 2002) within these social and community systems, non-penetrative sexual practises (*ukusoma*; *ukumetsha*⁵) were relatively permitted, practised and normalised among young people in this and other similar South African contexts. Here sexual activity was seen as a necessary and pleasurable activity which allowed young people to engage in sexual play without the possibility of pregnancy (Burns, 1996; Erlank, 2004). *Amaqhikiza* and similar cohorts of younger women in other cultural groups took up the mentorship of those younger than themselves towards providing support for sexual agencies. Young people were provided with information and skills for negotiating desire, intimacies, their relationships as well as modes of sexual expression (Hunter 2004; Scorgie, 2002). Although it was normative for young people to express themselves sexually in their age cohorts, some scholars have however cautioned against romanticising these sexual expressions, arguing instead that power and coercion also characterised these engagements (Erlank, 2004; Gumede, 2019). Notwithstanding, in these institutionalised practices, we cannot overlook the fact that a primary focus was simultaneously to afford young people agency to manage their sexualities but also to regulate and control these young sexualities. Zooming into these precolonial processes magnifies how heterosexuality was normalised within a drive to maintain chastity and purity before a heteronormative union. There is apparently a silence on other sexual expressions, including non-conforming sexual desires and/or self-pleasure and possibilities by young people during this time. At the same time, we cannot overlook how women's bodies remained central in these social structures. Older women aided the work of *amaqhikiza* by conducting

⁵ *Ukusoma* in isiZulu and *ukumetsha* in isiXhosa translates to thigh sex (Burns, 1996, p. 88).

virginity tests (Hunter, 2004; Krige, 1936; Scorgie, 2002) to ensure that young women remained 'chaste'. Practices such as, for example, *'ubuntombi'*⁶ were honoured and celebrated and a young woman who lived a 'way of chastity' had 'value' compared to one who did not (Delius & Glaser, 2005). These systems also open notions of shame and humiliation, as young women who violated these systems faced consequences. Hunter (2004) reminds us that although parents set firm boundaries around young people's sexualities, they were never involved in the day-to-day socialisation of young people in this regard. They did not discuss sex or sexuality issues with their children: this was the prerogative of social structures such as *amaqhikiza*, and other older women in communities. Subsequently, colonialism and industrialisation gave rise to urbanisation, eroding and obliterating many traditional social systems (Duff, 2015; Tamale, 2011); new forms and modes of surveillance of young sexualities also emerged.

A number of scholars trace the history of sexuality education in South African schools to the colonial nineteenth century after the first world war, when there was a huge health concern around the outbreak and spread of syphilis globally. The high rates of syphilis triggered worldwide advocacy for accurate knowledge on sexual hygiene and sexual health matters. This drive also appealed to eugenics who found this an opportune time to promote physical and 'moral' health and an ideal way to enforce a particular kind of prescribed sexuality; a monogamous heterosexuality (Duff, 2015). Duff (2015) further reminds us that during colonialism, the church and state took interest in childhood and children through the work of missionaries. The main focus of the state was to produce morally 'upright' children, defined in particular moral and ideological framings, and the church played a central role in enforcing this.

⁶ *Ubuntombi* translates to 'state of being chaste' and generally refers to young women past puberty who have 'upheld chastity', that is not being sexually active, especially among isiZulu communities.

The state's efforts to control and regulate black communities' sexualities, or rather reproduction, were also noted through the state-sponsored family planning programme of the 1970s. There was a concerted effort to control and regulate reproduction among the black population in South Africa, within the broad framework of population control (Kaufman, 2000). The apartheid government's preoccupation and anxieties around the growing black population led to a massive roll out of the family planning project which saw a decline in birth rates. In her 1987 work, *Facing the 'Black Peril': The politics of population control in South Africa*, Barbara Brown further emphasises that although the family planning project was directed at the entire population, the main concern of the state was controlling the rise of the black urban population, and women's sexualities became a focal point. Of particular interest in the family planning project was the use of particular family planning methods and the coercion of black women to accept methods such as the progestin injectable, Depo Provera contraceptive, which had been contested and discontinued for its hazardous side effects in other parts of the world (Brown, 1987). Women's sexuality was thus policed, regulated and controlled within the broad project of population control. In the same manner, sex education was later to be introduced as a regulatory tool for young sexualities.

Although sex education was introduced as a global imperative to contain the spread of disease and more insidiously as a form of population control, in South Africa it was also seen as a perfect tool to regulate and police young urban sexualities in the new urbanised order. Burns (1996) tells us that one of the successful targets of missionary work during this time was to problematise and demonise young people's traditional ways of sexual expressions. It was not surprising that young people's playful but controlled sexual expressions were demonised and sexual abstinence enforced. Consequently, with the rise of urbanisation, the increased influence of the church as well as the erosion of traditional ways of learning about sexualities, new urban sexualities emerged. Black male sexualities were

perceived as risky and dangerous (Harris, 2010), while young women were associated with sexual immorality (Delius & Glaser, 2005). Through its moralistic pedagogy, the church then became the most effective tool in fighting and controlling what were viewed as 'troubling' sexualities and masculinities. This racial profiling and pathologising of sexualities in the new urban order in colonial South Africa continue to exert a strong influence on the packaging and dissemination of sexuality education in contemporary contexts.

The emergence of sexuality education in South African schools

In South Africa, sex education was introduced initially in white schools in 1967 and in black schools in 1981, framed as 'Guidance' (Duff, 2015, p. 218). These times were characterised by a proliferation of teaching manuals by different organisations, including health and religious bodies, as schools struggled with what content to disseminate. What was undoubtedly evident, though, was how sex education had been adopted as a tool to fight and contain sexually transmitted disease, in particular syphilis. It was therefore not surprising that some of the manuals contained graphic images of disease and messages disseminated were meant to scare and terrify young people to abstain from any sexual activity (Duff, 2015).

In some of these early manuals, particular key messages and normative framings of sexuality education are powerfully evident (see also the Department of Education (2002a) report *Protecting the right to innocence: Conference on sexuality education* by Minister Asmal), with undertones still prevalent in contemporary packaging and dissemination of sexuality education in South African schools today. Firstly, the notion of childhood innocence and children's asexuality was central in colonial sex education. Here, questions on how sex education could be framed and disseminated without sexualising or raising curiosity to those who were

'pure and untainted' were centralised, but also posed a challenge. Duff (2015, p. 220) describes this situation as being "caught in an epistemic bind", as the church and the state were forced to abandon the myth of the asexual child and accept the shift to an asexual but potentially sexual child dynamic, in framing curriculum content.

Secondly, we also notice that the introduction of sex education during colonialism ushered in a particular categorisation of young people according to gender and age. Even if we are aware that some pre-colonial traditional systems were already using puberty and age as markers of transitioning from childhood to another level, Duff (2015) argues that it was G. Stanley Hall (1844–1924) who is responsible for the definition of a clear stage of young people 'adolescence', coining the term 'storm and stress' (Dacey *et al.*, 2008, in Shefer, Duncan & Van Niekerk, 2021) — the trope of an uncontrolled and problematic sexuality which needed containment, guidance and regulation. These categorisations saw age sets, which were already being used in colonial times (Hunter 2005; Ntuli, 2018), crystallise as sex education was packaged and disseminated. These categories have continued to play a significant role in how young people are understood, judged, controlled and put under surveillance in contemporary policy and practice directed at young sexualities. Contemporary work in sexualities education foreground these age cohorts as sexuality content is packaged and disseminated in schools.

Thirdly, another key challenge of sex education in colonial South Africa that has continued to challenge contemporary epistemologies in sexuality education was the issue of content. Religious bodies, as health and education colonial leaders, came together to establish what was acceptable and appropriate sex education (Duff, 2015). Beyond enforcing physical and moral health education, sex education consequently shifted to promoting, upholding and normalising heterosexuality within a nuclear family as the sanctity of marriage was foregrounded. Sex education by the 1920s and

1930s drew heavily on Christian values and morality. Young people were indoctrinated to abstain from premarital sex and uphold heterosexuality as the only acceptable sexual preference and practice in numerous South African contexts (Delius & Glaser, 2005; Duff, 2015). Such teachings were also reinforced in the large community spaces. Delius and Glaser (2005) remind us that, while precolonial communities acknowledged and allowed young people to experiment and manage their sexualities, albeit within heteronormative parameters in any contexts, in their age groups, colonial teachings brought shame and stigma into the act of sex. We are further shown how the church would demonise premarital pregnancy. Young women who fell pregnant before marriage would be excommunicated and publicly shamed in churches. Their peers would be warned against associating with them as the notion of respectability was enforced and upheld (Gumede, 2019). These broad socio-cultural and political processes had a huge bearing on the school system. Sex education in colonial South Africa consequently served to endorse the rigidity of sexuality education in the school curriculum and the broad framework in which young sexualities were perceived and understood.

Sexuality education in post-apartheid South Africa

In the new democratic order, the DBE introduced the Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) curriculum in South African schools. OBE was key in transitioning the country from the apartheid system of education to a more inclusive approach which took into account learners' new-found freedoms and human rights. The curriculum focused on learner-centred approaches, activity-based pedagogy and on inculcating critical thinking skills on learners. In 2000, this curriculum was revised to the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and a life skills programme, LO, was introduced as a way of moulding young people to be 'responsible citizens'. LO mainly focused on equipping learners with appropriate and comprehensive skills

as well as teaching them accurate information on HIV and AIDS. This curriculum also included a focus on sexualities, GBV, mental health, and sexual and reproductive health matters, which included contraception and pregnancy (Department of Education, 2002b). Prinsloo (2007, p. 155) would emphasise that LO was necessary in South African schools to provide appropriate and ideal skills to learners who had come out of a tumultuous and violent colonial context, where economic circumstances and overpopulation, the result of unplanned urbanisation, all contributed to poverty and a 'rapid moral decline'. The introduction of LO at this point was therefore viewed as necessary to equip learners with appropriate skills with which to navigate their lives in this new, rapidly transforming postcolonial context. The NCS was further revised in 2005 and again in 2009 and finally in 2011 following recommendations from the Kirby report (Wood & Rolleri, 2014) but the LO curriculum has basically remained unchanged. The curriculum provided some form of flexibility which meant that schools could modify it to suit their contexts (Smith & Harrison, 2013). The current curriculum, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), summarises LO as (DBE, 2011, p. 8):

central to the holistic development of learners. It addresses skills, knowledge and values for the personal, social, intellectual, emotional and physical growth of learners, and is concerned with the way in which these facets are interrelated. Life Orientation guides and prepares learners for life and its possibilities and equips them for meaningful and successful living in a rapidly changing and transforming society.

Although the LO learning area was meant to equip learners in their emotional, intellectual, spiritual, personal, social and physical capacities, it was the huge concern with HIV and AIDS that instantly turned the subject into a tool with which to prevent, control and manage disease. The urgency to this focus on HIV and AIDS education was noted in *The HIV and AIDS emergency: Guideline for teachers*, which emphasises educators' role in giving young people appropriate knowledge on HIV and AIDS and their sexualities (Francis, 2013b). We realise

here that in the same way sex education was introduced in the colonial era to manage and control the spread of syphilis, under the banner of LO, sex education once again, both in schools and in popular culture, was viewed as the most ideal tool to manage and control the spread of HIV and AIDS. This focus on HIV and AIDS advocacy was also bolstered by the emergence of multiple media advocacy programmes, such as *Soul City*, *Soul Buddyz*, *Takalani Sesame*, *Siyayinqoba*,⁷ etc, all targeting young people of various age groups. Consequently, sex education became a series of injunctions on danger and disease with sexuality education approached from a lens of managing and controlling disease (Francis & Reygan, 2016; Macleod, 2009; Shefer *et al.*, 2015a). Reminiscent of earlier colonial trends of sexuality education, which promoted horror and scare tactics through graphic displays of illness, some of the messages targeted at young people are similarly packaged in visual images of diseased bodies, as elaborated later (Ngabaza, Shefer & Catriona, 2016).

The biggest setback for the LO curriculum, and particularly the sexuality education component of the curriculum, was that teachers were reportedly not trained or fully prepared to teach the subject. This concern continues to complicate the teaching and learning of the subject in contemporary South Africa (Francis, 2013b; Helleve, Flisher, Onya, Kaaya, Mũkoma, Swai & Klepp, 2009; Helleve, Flisher, Onya & Klepp 2011; Wood & Rolleri, 2014). Because LO allows educators flexibility to modify the pedagogical processes to suit the learners' broader socio-cultural contexts, educators tend to draw on their own experiences and positionalities to shape the sexuality education classroom. This approach has further undermined the justice goals for LO and sexuality education, as we unpack further, in that sexuality education classrooms have become spaces where teachers reportedly reinforce preferred sexualities and knowledges, silencing and marginalising narratives they reject or feel uncomfortable with (Francis & Reygan, 2016; Ngabaza *et al.*, 2016; Reygan & Francis, 2015)

⁷ See The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), 2005.

as they fail to separate their personal convictions from their educational imperatives. The DBE is keen to upscale sexuality education into Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in South African schools. CSE mainly focuses on equipping learners with knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 2018). The Department recently developed scripted lesson plans (SLPs) as a way of supporting teachers with research-based appropriate and meaningful ways of disseminating sexuality education. These SLPs have been piloted in some provinces. This more regulated curriculum from the authorities was clearly in response to widespread research which has raised the challenges related to sexual education educators' capacity and intentions (Helleve *et al.*, 2009; 2011; Masinga, 2009; Mathe, 2013). However, the SLPs have triggered a major pushback from parents and different stakeholders who generally believe that school should not be teaching sexuality education at all (Ngabaza, 2022). Interestingly, most of this resistance is through a digital platform, *#LeaveOurKidsAlone*,⁸ which also serves as a valuable resource for gaining a sense of public response to young people's sexualities and sexuality education; and which we also draw on in support of arguments in chapter five in particular.

Another piece of constitutional and legal support that weighs in on more subtle messages about sexuality at school is the South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996)⁹ which ensures that all young people have a right to education and should not be unjustly excluded or discriminated against. Through the provision of this Act, pregnant students are permitted in schools and schools are obliged to ensure a supportive environment for the young women to complete their schooling successfully and to ensure gender equality and justice. However, scholarship in the field shows that even if some teachers do care and support pregnant students (Bhana,

⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/leaveourkidsalone2020/>

⁹ See the South African Constitution, chapter 2 of the Bill of Rights, subsection 3 <https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/images/a108-96.pdf>.

Morrell, Epstein & Moletsane, 2006), the young women are usually shamed and humiliated, ironically often in the sexuality education lessons (Morrell *et al.*, 2012; Ngabaza, 2010; 2011), the very educational spaces that are meant to equip young people with appropriate skills with which to manage their lives. Pregnant and parenting students have reported how they are described and flagged as examples of deviancy (Bhana *et al.*, 2006; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2013; Ngabaza *et al.*, 2016), and such narratives clearly show how teachers are in tension with policy (Morrell *et al.*, 2012).

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted a number of key threads of the complex history of sexuality education in South African histories. We have argued that these precolonial, postcolonial and apartheid historical backgrounds on sexualities in South Africa continue to play a very significant role in how young people's sexualities are understood, packaged and disseminated in contemporary contexts.

We note how women's sexuality, considered a heteronormative, unitary practice, has always been a focus of interest, in both colonial and postcolonial contexts. We further note that although the introduction of sexuality education in South African schools ushered in a dominant shift towards HIV and AIDS and reproductive health concerns, the preoccupation with women's and young people's sexualities, grounded in colonial history and racist, colonial control, continues. Macleod (2009) argues that, historically, the colonial preoccupation with young sexualities lay in anxieties around traditional sexual practices and was underpinned by colonialist 'civilising' efforts, ultimately deployed towards population control. This gaze has not changed, even though the subject of focus shifts in different contexts. More recent anxieties about contemporary sexualities, Macleod (2009) emphasises, have been focused on teenage pregnancy, abortion and HIV and AIDS.

The next chapter turns to the current context with a focus on the ways in which gender is mobilised through sexuality education to regulate and control young sexual practices, thus perpetuating and reinscribing gender binaries and stereotypes while also bolstering ongoing anxieties about young people.

Chapter three: Sexuality education in the regulation of gender binaries and stereotypes

Introduction

One of the hopes that feminist scholars, activists and practitioners have had with regard to sexuality education is that it would be deployed as a productive space for gender and sexual justice goals. Critical education scholars and others have long highlighted how school is a space that tends to legitimise and reinscribe normative gender roles, schooling young people in binary oppositional gender roles and practices. Efforts at transforming educational spaces in the last few decades of democracy have been strategically directed at shifting inequalities, including raced, gendered, classed, and other historical divides, privileges and subjugations. As elaborated in chapter two, the LO curriculum was particularly directed at empowering all young people for an agentic and empowered future, with justice goals high on the agenda of challenges to be taken up in this space. This is articulated in the DBE's NCS (Grade R–12), and also highlighted in the key four LO CAPS, which are directed at 'equipping learners irrespective of their socio-economic background...with knowledge, skills and values necessary for self-fulfilment and meaningful participation as citizens of a free country' (DBE, 2011, p. 4). Moreover, in the light of the HIV and AIDS pandemic and the understanding that young people, particularly those in disadvantaged and poor communities, were at greatest risk of infection, sexuality education was viewed as a welcome space to impart messages about HIV, sexualities, reproductive health and GBV towards gender and sexual justice goals.

Notwithstanding the possibilities of sexuality education at school and in other community health spaces, such as clinics and public education institutions, there has been a growing concern that rather than challenge gender binarisms and heteronormative sexual practices, such binarisms have been reinstated through dominant approaches to and contents of sexuality education. Research over the last decade or so on sexuality education is increasingly flagging the way in which the LO classroom tends to reproduce and rationalise stereotypic gender and heteronormative sexualities.

In this chapter, we deconstruct popular discourses around young people's sexualities, as evident in the curriculum and in public spaces and as these emerge from reported experiences of sexuality education, towards illustrating the gendered hidden curriculum (the informal unofficial lessons and messages learners pick up from school). Drawing on narratives of young people from various studies, we illustrate the way in which sexuality education bolsters gender and sexual stereotypes, such as a 'responsibilisation discourse' for young women in which young women are handed primary responsibility for ensuring their own and male partners' well-being; and a stereotyped representation of young men as sexually predatory and inherently violent.

The policing of normative gender binary practices

In LO we learn about HIV and teenage pregnancy and that we can avoid these problems by not having sex, they [our LO teachers] say we must not break our virginity. (Lumka, all female group, Township 3)

*We are taught in LO to be careful about keeping our virginity; as girls we have to be careful about it. (Xolile, all female group, Township 1)*¹⁰

Thus, performing respectability for young women necessitates rejecting and resisting male sexual advances and upholding a sexually restrained and obedient femininity (Bhana, 2016; Bhana & Anderson, 2013a, 2013b; Kruger, Shefer & Oakes, 2015; Mayeza & Vincent, 2019; Van Wyk, 2015). Respectability is also raced and classed, given colonial stereotypes of black women's sexualities characterising many (post)colonial racist spaces in which black poor women have been particularly sexually stigmatised and 'othered' (e.g. Lewis, 2011; Mazibuko, 2022).

Lessons about respectability have been contested in local contexts. South Africa is admittedly a space where gender inequality and coercive practices dominate, particularly in young people's relationships (Morrell *et al.*, 2012). At the same time, scholars warn that teachers should be cautious not to teach and enforce young women's passivity under the guise of respectable femininities (MacPhail & Campbell, 2001). Wood and Roller (2014) remind us that most teachers across race have been socialised in a country where there is great resistance to changing social practices and it is not surprising that learners share how they have been taught how to speak, sit and walk 'like women should do' (Ngabaza *et al.*, 2016). At the same time, in another study, young men emphasise how they have also internalised and normalised these binary gendered expectations of what women should and should not do (Ratele, Shefer, Strebel & Fouten, 2010, p. 477):

¹⁰ In South Africa, the term township has been used to refer to urban areas where those disenfranchised by apartheid and categorised as African, Coloured or Indian/Asian in apartheid nomenclature lived in and usually were forcibly removed to as part of racist segregation policies. Townships were usually built on the periphery of towns and cities. The schools drawn on in this study were therefore in these areas which remain poor and disadvantaged in contemporary South Africa.

Interviewer: What do you mean when you say they [should] carry themselves well?

Jabu: Like they must not look like boys whilst they are girls.

Such revelations further emphasise the amount of time and effort directed at grooming young women towards 'acceptable' femininities, rather than utilising sexuality education to critically engage with socio-cultural gendered norms that constrain efforts towards gender equality and social justice. Silencing young people and particularly young women, as seen in these contexts, has also been argued to be counter-productive for young women's safety, undermining their sense of confidence and agency, arguably rather predisposing them to violence and abuse in unequal relations (Epstein *et al.*, 2004; Pattman & Chege, 2003).

Young people who choose to subvert gendered hierarchies are reportedly silenced and told to 'behave', and the LO class ironically appears to be a key space for such lessons of conformity. This citation also foregrounds the complex interwovenness of normative male–female performance with gender and sexual categorisation, and the difficulties that non-cisgender, intersexual, asexual and trans young people must face within this rigidly policed—by both students and teachers—binary expectations of gender (and sexual) performance.

Gendered languages of consequence: 'responsibilisation' of young women and 'irresponsibilisation' of young men

Normative gender binaries, as evident from young people's narratives about their experiences, are particularly reinstated through the language of *consequence* around sexualities, shown to predominate in the sexuality education classroom, curriculum and material. This vocabulary of consequence is also strongly gendered so that it is young women who are

primarily set up as the 'responsible' ones, who must protect themselves and their male partners (Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). Young women, through what some scholars term a 'discourse of responsabilisation' (Macleod *et al.*, 2015; Jearey-Graham & Macleod, 2015) that is specifically directed at young women, are continuously reminded how they are not only responsible for their sexual choices but carry the burden of managing their male partners' sexual desires and practices as well (Kelly, 2001; Kruger *et al.*, 2015; Ngabaza *et al.*, 2016). This extends gender binary logic, rationalising and re-affirming oppositional gendered sexual roles. At the same time, this portrays women as passive and submissive and essentialised as victims always vulnerable to exploitative masculine power, sexual risks, and violence, while men are positioned as problematic, dangerous sexual predators. The deployment of consequence in such a manner further deprives young people of accurate knowledge that will assist them in nurturing their sexual and reproductive health and well-being.

The messages that young women receive about feminised responsibility, and their prescribed role to police male sexual desire and practices, also serve to consistently reiterate stereotypical notions of male irresponsibility and a general lack of care (Shefer & Macleod, 2015). A double standard, which has been documented in the research on young sexual practices (see e.g. Abdool Karim, Abdool Karim, Preston-Whyte & Sankar, 1992; Bhana & Anderson, 2013a, 2013b; MacPhail & Campbell, 2001; Selikow, Zulu & Cedra, 2002; Shefer *et al.*, 2015b), seems to be promoted in the sexuality classroom. The narrative below from a group of young women talking in a focus group from one of our studies (Shefer & Ngabaza, 2015, pp. 72–73; also cited in Shefer & Hearn, 2022, p. 56) flags so many of these messages, while at the same time pointing to these young women's questioning of such orthodoxies:

Interviewer: You guys are talking about important things. You guys are talking about gender roles, you know. Where a girl is supposed to be, where a boy is supposed to be, and how that creates a situation where the boy will lose interest in the girl, and the girl is left feeling, it's my fault because I'm confused, so I need to know if I want to do this but I don't want to do it. So, that's an interesting situation, and then you guys are talking about, also, the roles being swapped, where ... it doesn't mean the boys have to initiate sex; you're saying that girls are coming to the point where they are initiating sex. How do you guys feel about that? Is that OK or is that not OK?

F6: It's not OK.

Int: It's bad. It's not OK?

F1: It's not part of the girl-code.

Int: OK, so, you're saying that it's normal for the boy to initiate sex. The girls need to be the ones who have to wait for the boy to come and ask them.

F1: *Yes, because if we girls initiate the sex, then we are going to be seen as a B I T C H [spells out the word].*

F8: Sluts.

Int: OK, so, if you ask for sex from your boyfriend, you're going to be seen ... or from a guy, you're going to be seen as a bitch?

Participants [in unison]: Yes, or a slut.

Int: OK, a slut, and a bitch. So, in some ways there's also pressure on the girls to be a certain way, hey? Boys have more freedom.

Participants [in unison]: Yes, it is.

Int: Is it like this in your school and community?

F2: Yes. That's how it is.

F1: *Girls are more closely guarded than boys.*

Int: So, girls have to watch ... you have to watch yourselves?

F6: *Yes. Self-control always.*

(Female group, Blue Lagoon High) (our emphases)

Here we see the way in which responsibility is gendered in the lessons these participants report that prop up and legitimise gender binaries. While these interlocutors do not say that these are specific to the sexuality education classroom, they identify the different expectations of boys and girls and the self-surveillance that is the lot of young women; these messages are everywhere, in the home, community, school, and certainly evident in the LO classroom as articulated in the narrative below (Shefer & Ngabaza, 2015. p. 69):

Even though we do learn about sex in class, we don't even go out there, and like ... We know, OK, we know, once you have sex, all these consequences, you might fall pregnant, you might get STDs, etc., etc. We know about this stuff, but we still go out there, and we still have sex. But unprotected sex, but ... and we still know what's going to happen after that. So for me, I could say that, even though the teachers say, like, about sex in class, we don't listen. It's like, OK, if I'm having sex right now, nobody's going to tell me what, you know. If I feel like, if I know how to protect myself, I know to protect myself, so we don't listen. Don't listen, at all.

(Male student in focus group).

Also revealed in this narrative is young people's resistance to these disciplinary and gendered prescriptions—'we don't listen'—a disruptive narrative that we take up further in chapter five.

While young women are advised about sexuality through a language of consequence and responsibility, young men are arguably subtly encouraged to continue to be 'irresponsible' in their sexual practices in order to achieve successful masculinity. This message, conveyed through the emphasis on young women's responsibility and respectability,

serves to both reproduce a negative representation of young men as inherently irresponsible, 'bad', and abusive perpetrators, while also reiterating oppositional gender roles and reinforcing young women's victimhood and burden of care in ensuring their own and others' safety and well-being. As Shefer and Hearn (2022, p. 72) note:

There is also evidence of the popular construction of the "bad boy" perpetrator, juxtaposing the young woman victim that is being articulated in relation to young men, both in reported experiences and in the materials being used in the classes and sexuality education.

These authors draw specifically on an analysis of mainstream sexuality education manuals by Macleod *et al.* (2015, p. 98) that illustrate the way in which young men are particularly targeted regarding lessons about sexual coercion and hypermasculine (hetero)sexuality which assumes a deterministic and unitary 'male teen':

[14] A male teen may think he has to "score" as much as possible with girls so that he can be popular with his peers.

[15] Boys who believe these myths are at risk of becoming rapists because they will not listen when a girl says "no". They may find themselves feeling guilty because they had sex just to say they had "scored".

While well-intended, and indeed based on research findings, these messages hinge around and arguably further extend unitary ideas of young men as inevitable perpetrators and of young masculinity as primarily directed at heterosexual 'scoring' with women, which may not be the experience or practices of many young men (see e.g. Anderson, 2010; Bhana & Anderson, 2013a, 2013b; Ratele, 2016; Shefer *et al.*, 2015a). Indeed, such young men have been shown to be ostracised for 'failing' to live up to hegemonic ideas of male virility and conquest (Ratele, 2016; Ratele, Fouten, Shefer, Strebels, Shabalala & Buikema, 2007;). Furthermore, as we elaborate below, notions of 'toxic masculinity', which

currently dominate in the public imaginary, particularly through increased focus on GBV, result in the stigmatisation and 'blaming' of particular raced, classed and aged groups of men (see e.g. Bhana & Patmann, 2009; Shefer & Hearn, 2022). Even when critical masculinities scholars have repeatedly raised the way in which young, poor men are statistically most at risk of violence and death at the hands of other men in South Africa (see Ratele, 2016; Van Niekerk, Tonsing, Seedat, Jacobs, Ratele & McClure, 2015), the deterministic trope of such men as perpetrators and the denial of victimhood, also in relation to structural violence, prevails.

At the same time, the binary messages provided for young men and women set up particular contradictions for young women, as Kruger *et al.* (2015) have argued. Reflecting on the way in which sexuality education sets up women as always at risk, always possible victims of negative consequence, these authors argue that, at the same time, they are also provided with the contradictory assumption of their agency to be responsible: 'They were simultaneously told that they have agency and that they do not have agency' (Kruger *et al.*, 2015, p. 42). These researchers point out the problematic effect of this contradictory set of messages, since, in effect, it prevents young women from sharing their own experiences and challenges and ultimately further 'exacerbates the challenging location in which they find themselves always already vulnerable, yet always already responsible' (Kruger *et al.*, 2015, p. 43). Notably, the fraught concept of agency has been widely interrogated in feminist scholarship with many scholars pointing out the problematic ways in which agency is deployed by researchers and practitioners and the political and ethical implications of such naming, particularly in global Southern contexts (e.g. Bhana, 2019; Jungar & Oinas, 2011; Shefer, 2016; Shefer & Hearn, 2022). Further, the constraints on agency in material terms, given the entangled conditions of structural violence and endemic patriarchal power and gender binaries for many women, are more than evident and have been increasingly highlighted by key South African gender

scholars (Gqola, 2015, 2021; Ratele, 2022).

The (re)making of young masculinities as a danger and problem

Chapter two introduced us to constructions of problematic men and masculinities, with the lens firmly on poor, black men, within the rise of urbanisation in colonial South Africa. The 'dangerous and problematic' young male masculinity narrative continues to characterise much research and practice directed at young masculinities in South Africa, as pointed out by many scholars (e.g. Anderson, 2010; Bhana & Pattman, 2009; Ratele, Shefer & Botha, 2011; Shefer, Stevens & Clowes, 2010) and particularly within the context of violence (Ratele, 2014). Although evidence shows that a large body of work has been conducted on particularly young black men, and particularly those in marginal, often impoverished communities (Bhana & Pattman, 2009; Gibbs, Jewkes & Sikweyiya, 2018; Pattman, 2007; Pattman & Bhana, 2006; Ratele *et al.*, 2011), there is also a noticeable shift from a focus on women to a renewed emphasis on young men, particularly in projects aiming at challenging violence against women (Gibbs *et al.*, 2018, Gibbs, Myrntinen, Washington, Sikweyiya & Jewkes, 2020; Graaff, 2017, 2021; Graaff & Heineken, 2017). This focus, while important, also inadvertently extends the trope that young masculinities are a danger and are problematic perpetrators who should be targeted (Gibbs, Vaughan & Aggleton, 2015) in order to 'save' women. What this body of work overlooks are the vulnerabilities and nuanced challenges to gender-equitable masculinities experienced by young men as a result of hegemonic masculinity and other inequalities (Clowes, 2013; Gibbs *et al.*, 2018; Shefer *et al.*, 2015a; Shefer, 2014). Some of these precarities are articulated in work on sexuality education classrooms as shared in these young men's narratives (Shefer *et al.*, 2015a, p. 100):

Tumelo: Once you are told that you are a man, there are expectations that from yourself as man and from

your family and some of us think about having a baby without thinking through about this thing, just to prove to yourself that you are not shooting blanks [slang for male infertility].

Lenka: There is this belief that only males are expected to have more than one partner. In fact, as we are seated here, some of us laugh if you say you have one girlfriend and you become teased. It's funny when it's a girl with different men, she has to hide that while we do that openly 'coz from our side it's expected. (FG 3)

So the young male participants claim that they are conscious of the stereotype and play along with it even if they find these stereotypical messages of 'normative masculinities' contradicting their own values and beliefs about masculinities, as shown through these voices from the focus group in the study cited above (Shefer *et al.*, 2015a, p. 101):

Baruti: For me I think we have two types of information, one, we have this information we get from school, we have to be faithful, have one partner, condomise, when we are out there with other guys *we ignore* this information deliberately, we want to be players and want 'esh-to-esh'.

Dingane: I agree with what this guy is saying, you see, Meneer (Sir), I can be faithful you know, concentrate on only one girl, but when I am with the guys they tease me for having only one girlfriend so I end up dating one, two, three girls although I know this is wrong 'coz we talk about this thing at school but to please my friends I do the opposite. (FG 3).

This research highlights the importance of acknowledging young men's precarities within the larger project of including them in gender justice efforts and transforming masculinities. Whilst a focus on male violence as enmeshed in dominant expectations of masculinity in many contexts and in facilitating women's vulnerability to violence remains important, assuming that young boys are always perpetrators

is problematic. Such a lens reproduces binaries that are implicated in GBV and arguably acknowledging male precarity or any privileged position's vulnerability is key in facilitating alternative imaginaries of collective relationality and responsibilities. The trope of the inevitable male perpetrator fails to create a balanced picture of how young people deal with binary gendered norms and values as they wrestle, albeit in different ways, with their genders and sexualities.

Conclusions

In sum, this chapter has argued the diverse ways in which mainstream sexuality education has served as a vehicle with which to reinstate, legitimate and regulate binary gender norms, as also evident from the growing body of critical and feminist work on sexuality education and larger responses to young people's sexualities. We have shown how dominant narratives and the messages that young people receive at school reinforce stereotyped versions of masculinity and femininity, reinscribing rather than challenging normative and damaging gender and sexual practices. Notably, both young women and young men are assailed by contradictory and untenable prescriptions about their sexualities and genders. On the one hand, young women are persuaded into hyper-caution and self-discipline through narratives of respectability and responsabilisation, thus made to carry a heavier load for their own and their male partner's safety. At the same time, they are trapped in a passive, submissive, un-agentic feminine position, always vulnerable and already violated. Young men are, on the other hand, stereotyped into a unitary position of inevitable perpetrator, hailed as already guilty, and represented as a danger to themselves and others, especially young women. They are doomed if they conform to hegemonic masculinity, then fulfilling the dominant expectation of their 'badness' and unruliness; and doomed if they don't, and this is ironically inscribed through the expectations of what they normatively desire and do and are warned against, such as being predatory and having

multiple sexual partners. The binary messages that young men and women receive and the different responsibilities they carry ultimately serve to reproduce and re-entrench gender binaries in larger social contexts. We have also been given some indication of how young people resist and trouble the lessons they receive in respect of sexuality and gender, which emerges further in the next chapter.

Closely interwoven with gender binaries are the rigid set of prescriptions related to sexual desire and orientation, given the deterministic matrix of relations between sex, gender and sexuality (Butler, 1990). Heteronormativity, homophobia and the stigmatisation of non-binary and non-conforming genders and sexual practices seem to characterise schools and sites of sexuality education. This concern is taken up in the next chapter through a deeper exploration of young people's experiences and narratives in this respect while we also explore the larger framework of media and parental responses in which all forms of young sexual expression are questioned and silenced.

Chapter four: Sex education in the silencing of young people's sexual desires and curtailment of diversity of sexual expression

Introduction

On 10 June 2021, social and popular media was abuzz with what most referred to as an incident of queerphobia, at an upmarket high school in Cape Town's Bellville suburb¹¹. It is alleged that on Monday, 7 June at break time, a group of learners had gathered to informally mark the first week of International Pride month. These learners had previously requested permission to organise a formal event and their request was turned down by the school authorities. This group of learners was apparently surrounded by other learners who threatened, intimidated and hurled homophobic slurs at them. When the matter was brought to the school authorities, the authorities seemed to blame the learners who were 'attacked' for going ahead with pride celebrations against the school's caution. Nothing was done to the homophobic learners. In response to this whole incident, the member of the executive council for education in the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) released a statement indicating 'a deep concern' about the alleged discrimination against the LGBTQIA+¹² learner community, emphasising that the department will work closely with the school to ensure

¹¹ Snijman, L. 2021. Probe launched into claims of homophobia after Pride Month celebration at DF Malan school. *Daily Maverick*, 11 June. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-06-11-probe-launched-into-claims-of-homophobia-after-pride-month-celebration-at-df-malan-school/>.

¹² The acronym 'LGBTQIA+' refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual with the '+' denoting those who are also sexual and/or gender minorities or sexual/gender non-conforming or non-binary, and whose identity/expression may not be captured within this.

that such discriminatory incidents are not repeated. The department continued to emphasise how its schools remain committed to the inclusivity of all learners.

The LGBTQIA+ community students' experience here is one of many incidents where young people have been silenced, discriminated against and excluded for expressing their sexuality, particularly in school. This group of learners organised the event, knowing that it was their constitutional right to do so, but were also aware that they needed the clearance from the school authorities to hold the event. The incident serves as a stark indication of schools' failure to promote sexual diversity and inclusion, and how they continue to uphold and encourage heteronormativity. It also provides insight into how young people experience their sexualities within educational institutions and how they actively resist the exclusion of non-cisgender, non-binary and queer identities. Their actions are also critical for showing the larger public that the homophobic slurs and intimidation experienced by this small community is a microcosm of the intolerance of sexual and gender diversity among many South Africans. It is a solid example of responses to expressions of sexual diversities in the larger South African community. Over many years, notwithstanding a progressive and rights-based Constitution, the LGBTQIA+ community has been met with hate speech, physical attacks and horrific murders which seem to continue unabated. Quite recently, on 8 July 2021, Brodie Nechama,¹³ writing for the Mail and Guardian, in an article reviewing violence against black lesbians in South Africa over the last decade, recounts the multiple documented murders of women identifying as lesbian over this time. Writing for the Sowetan newspaper, Chris Makhaye,¹⁴ in an article 'LGBTQIA+ people in SA are under siege', reports how

¹³ Nechama, B. 2021. Hate killings of black lesbians in South Africa: 2008 to 2018. *Mail & Guardian*, 8 July. <https://mg.co.za/news/2021-07-08-hate-killings-of-black-lesbians-in-south-africa-2008-to-2018/>

¹⁴ Makhaye, C. 2021. LGBTQIA+ people in South Africa 'are under siege'. *New Frame*, 22 April. <https://www.newframe.com/lgbtqia-people-in-south-africa-are-under-siege/>

a young 19-year-old boy dropped out of school because he could not take homophobic slurs and attacks anymore. In the first six months of 2021, the South African media reported numerous murders of particularly young people identifying as LGBTQIA+, raising renewed concern about the continued high levels of intolerance of sexual diversities in a country whose constitutional ideals promote freedoms of sexual expression as enshrined in the Bill of Rights.

The incident of queerphobia at the Cape Town school parallels many other documented and undocumented experiences of silencing of sexual expression by young people in South African school contexts as elsewhere. Notably, South Africa, as with many geopolitical contexts, continues to be underpinned by assumptions and promotions of heteronormativity and non-conforming and non-binary sexual and gender identities remain othered, pathologised, discriminated against and violated in many social contexts (e.g. Francis, 2017; LRC/Iranti-Org/Genderdynamix, 2016; LCR/Iranti-Org, Triangle Project, Genderdynamix, 2017; Matebeni, 2014; Matebeni, Monro & Reddy, 2018; Swarr, 2009, 2012). Schools are particular spaces for the disciplining and regulation of binary gender and sexuality which are built into both the curriculum and the hidden curriculum through, for example, the deployment of gendered uniforms, and many other practices. Schooling spaces are notably sanitised spaces (Bhana, 2016; Shefer, Bhana & Morrell, 2013), nonaccommodative of sexual expressions of any kind as we elaborate on later in the next chapter. They are particularly punitive with respect to non-binary sexual and gender identities and practices. In this chapter, we draw on learners' voices from scholarship on sexuality education, particularly in South African classrooms but also in the larger schooling environment, looking at what messages they receive around sexuality and sexual orientation and how such messages negate particular sexual desires and experiences and attempt to silence any expressions of sexual desire and agency among young people.

Heteronormativity and the silencing of sexual and gender diversity

Swanepoel and Beyers (2019), also noted by Chaka (2017), remind us that the community within which the school is located plays a significant role in how the school is experienced by both learners and educators. The incident above therefore ushers in a powerful image of how sexualities play out in schools and how schools respond as institutions and spaces meant to educate and empower young people to be responsible sexual citizens in their country. The Cape Town school incident happened on the school grounds and not in the classrooms, but it remains key in our understanding of how the hidden curriculum and the mainstream curriculum intersect to shape learners' experiences in schools. This incident exposes what a huge body of research in sexualities education in South African classrooms has shown: how LGBTQIA+ students experience the school and classrooms as exclusionary and intolerant of diverse sexualities (Bhana, 2014a, 2014b; Brown & Buthelezi, 2020; Francis, 2019a; 2019b, 2021; McArthur, 2015; Ubisi, 2020) and this intolerance often plays out during LO lessons. These are spaces where, ironically, sexual diversity should be affirmed and promoted.

Thus, while educators declare tolerance of sexual diversity in teaching and learning spaces, empirical studies flag how heterosexuality continues to be assumed and is encouraged while non-normative sexualities and genders are condemned, stifled and pathologised (Bhana, 2014a, 2014b; DePalma & Francis, 2014; Francis, 2012, 2021). The literature exposes how homophobia silences learners with alternative desires, identification and practices (Msibi, 2012; Mthatyana & Vincent, 2015; Ngabaza *et al.*, 2016). Further evident is how moralistic discourses are drawn on to undermine, shame and challenge gender and sexual non-conforming identities and practices (Bhana, 2014a, 2014b; Smith & Harrison, 2013). South African scholars have shown the extent and nature of heteronormativity and heterosexism in schools (Bhana,

2014a, 2014b; Shefer & Ngabaza, 2015; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). Such research emphasises how heterosexuality is assumed normative and promoted within the heterosexual nuclear family, as well as in approaching HIV education. This excludes non-heterosexual learners, compromising young people's reproductive justice. As a female respondent in a qualitative study we conducted at some Cape Town schools shared (Shefer & Ngabaza 2015, p. 58):

So, in Life Orientation they explain that sex is sleeping with a male.

Compulsory heterosexuality renders any sexual intimacy or relationship outside of male–female nuclear partnering unimaginable. Scholars have suggested this compulsory heteronormativity may be a result of educators' inadequate knowledge of and resistance to gender-inclusive learning spaces (Beyers, 2012; Bhana, 2014b; Francis & Msibi, 2011; Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014). Some researchers attribute this resistance to the educators' own moralities and culture-rationalised heteronormative convictions (Baxen, 2010; Baxen & Breidlid, 2009; Helleve *et al.*, 2009; Helleve *et al.*, 2011; Johnson, 2014; Khau, 2012).

Francis (2019b) conducted a study on what South African queer youth said they needed from sexuality education. The young people's responses in this work reveal that they need a curriculum that acknowledges sexual diversity amongst other issues. This sentiment has been raised by other scholars as well (Francis & DePalma, 2014; Mayeza & Vincent, 2019).

In this work, young people's voices reveal how they have been silenced by educators who at times claim that they do not have much knowledge and experience with homosexuality and could therefore not respond to learners' questions and quests for knowledge in this area of sexualities. They also share how discussions that include sexual diversities at times cause silences and awkwardness in classroom engagements during LO lessons. Subsequently, such encounters would

push young people into silence or force them to resort to the internet for knowledge on diverse sexualities (Francis, 2019b).

Swanepoel and Beyers (2019) talk about how these silences are instigated by the broader communities. Teachers, who are also community members, would not want to be articulating what the broader community disparages and silences. A further complexity is that sexual diversities are also silenced and erased in school resources (Potgieter & Reygan, 2012; Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014), and peers are complicit in the marginalising of LGBTQIA+ students on school grounds (McArthur, 2015), as we are also reminded of by the Cape Town school incident. Where these silences are unambiguous or visible, then heteronormativity is encouraged and endorsed as the only norm. Such silence and silencing demonstrations promote socially unjust practices (Swanepoel, 2020; Swanepoel & Beyers, 2019).

Although researchers and other stakeholders have asked critical questions about teachers who fail to dissociate personal convictions from the obligation to educate and support learner inclusivity in teaching and learning spaces (Helleve *et al.*, 2009, 2011), young people's experiences continue to speak to how sexuality education spaces inadvertently or overtly spur homophobia. Examples are given where teachers proclaim homosexuality as a sin (Mayeza & Vincent, 2019). Such reports are particularly disconcerting given the authoritative power that teachers yield in many schools and classrooms (Dixon, 2011). Such homophobic messages may spill out of such classrooms into communities and serve to rationalise and bolster the homophobia and hate speech that already proliferate in many South African communities. Nor are schools a safe space for teachers who are gay or lesbian as heteronormativity and overt homophobia silence such teachers, who are forced into 'the adoption of passing as an identity management strategy...' as Thabo Msibi (2019, p. 400) reports in a recent study.

And indeed, young people's voices in some of the research directly speak to negative discourses on LGBTQIA+ and an 'othering' of queer learners as evident in the following extract (Ngabaza *et al.*, 2016, p. 75):

Interviewer: Okay. Do you have same sex-relationships in your school? Like gays and lesbians?

Participant: We have lesbians at school.

Interviewer: Okay, but how do you see them?

Participant: I hate them. I hate the fact that they turn God's nature. Because if God wanted lesbians he would have created Adam and Adam and also Eve and Eve, you see? He created Adam and Eve because he wanted a guy and a girl. Not so a girl can fall in love with another girl and a boy with another boy

Interviewer: Is it not supposed to be like that?

Participant: We all agree that it is not supposed to be that way, a girl is not supposed to date another girl, but we do speak with them when we have to.

Silencing of family diversity and the hegemony of Eurowestern nuclear family moralities

Along with the heteronormativity and homophobia elaborated above, embedded within messages on sexuality education is a discourse that emphasises a particular set of family values which promote heterosexual marriage and the nuclear family (Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). As explored earlier, antecedents of the colonial politics of birth control are evident in reproductive health policies which continue to flag their entanglement with South Africa's settler colonial political ideologies (Macleod, 2003, 2009), carrying continued implications for reproductive justice. Eurocentric notions of the heterosexual nuclear family, and North American pro-family discourses in African countries (McEwan, 2018; Vetten, 2014) continuously shape

narratives on sexuality and sexual and reproductive health in the policy and public domain and find their way into the sexuality education curriculum. For most South Africans, a stereotypic nuclear family is not the norm, nor is it historically representative. However, the heterosexual nuclear family structure, and other imagined moralities associated with it, shape much of the sexuality education curriculum.

Further evidence from learners and educators points to how sexuality education assumes a heterosexual nuclear family, prescribing such values and sexual assumptions to judge young pregnant learners in schools. Educators tell learners to abstain from sexual activities *until* they are heterosexually married at an 'appropriate' age (Ngabaza *et al.*, 2016). This not only foregrounds the nuclear family as the only acceptable context for sexual desire, intimacy, and parenting, but also stigmatises school-aged parents as not conforming to the assumed 'model'. Young parenting within extended families while at school continues to be pathologised and problematised in post-apartheid South Africa, even if this phenomenon is widely common (Mkhwanazi & Bhana, 2017). Indeed, as further elaborated below, sexuality education is deployed as a space where a moral panic related to sex, gender, and reproduction is articulated. The space reproduces particular moral assumptions and norms about the family that may result in an undermining of sexual, gender and reproductive justice, and freedom for young people.

The silencing of sexual desire and agency: danger, disease and damage

'Sex is a huge monster that should be feared and not done...' said a student in a sexuality education classroom in South Africa (Ngabaza *et al.*, 2016). The learner's voice projects a lens through which sexuality education is understood and disseminated to young people in South African schools. The key narrative propagated here is that young people should completely abstain from sexual activity because they are young, and sex is dangerous. Researchers have explored

and critiqued this approach to teaching sexuality education (Francis, 2011; Francis & DePalma, 2014; Macleod 2009; Ngabaza *et al.*, 2016; Shefer, Kruger, Macleod, Vincent & Baxen, 2015), and elsewhere (Allen, 2007; Kirby, 2008), arguing how it is located in a de-eroticisation (Allen, 2004) and denial of young sexualities and that there is a 'price' to pay for insisting on sexual innocence, particularly given challenges of HIV and reproductive justice (Bhana, 2016, 2017). Scholars have further argued the pointlessness of teaching abstinence when evidence shows that for most young people, sexual debut begins as early as 13 years (Jewkes, Morrell & Christofides, 2009). Further, it has been argued that sexual-abstinence-only messages are ineffective and may hamper efforts to equip young people with accurate knowledge on sexual reproductive health and their sexualities (Santelli, Ott, Lyon, Rogers & Summers, 2006). It is also evident that the abstinence-only approach may be overlapping with certain religious (Eriksson, Lindmark, Axemo, Haddad & Ahlberg, 2011) and cultural interests that are not necessarily invested in gender justice goals (Moletsane, 2011; Vincent, 2006). Vincent (2006) reminds us how the revival of virginity testing after 1994 may be increasingly exploited for 'moral purity' identity and belonging discourses. Moletsane (2011) similarly cautions that this cultural nostalgia and the revival of such traditional practices validate patriarchal and (post)colonial systems which continue to manipulate and exploit women's sexualities. Although such other mechanisms are mobilised to encourage sexual abstinence among young people, evidence points to the reality that many young people's relationships are characterised by sexual activity, as shared by a learner from one of the studies (Mayeza & Vincent, 2019, p. 477):

But many learners here at school have boyfriends and girlfriends and they're having sex.

Moreover, young people dispute abstinence-only messages, asking instead for a pedagogy that foregrounds safe methods as noted in another study, '... teach us safe sex methods, not only abstain'; 'That is what we are taught ... ABC. It does not

work for the youth' (Beyers, 2013, p. 556). A key component of the silencing of young sexualities through the sexuality education classroom is the deployment of the lens of damage, disease and danger. Sexuality lessons are offered through a dominant vocabulary of consequence. Continuously conflated with the message that young people should avoid sex, is the notion that sex is dangerous and risky as it results in HIV infections as well as STIs, unwanted, early pregnancies and 'a ruined life', particularly for young women as explored in the last chapter. When asked about what they had learnt, or their experiences in sexuality education, a number of learners were quick to give detailed responses of how they have learnt about danger and disease associated with sex in sexuality education. Young people shared how they were shown visual or digital images of 'disease infested sexual organs' clearly directed towards scare tactics (Francis, 2019b, p. 779):

We had this one lesson where we showed this PowerPoint about all these STIs and HIV all horrible looking diseases. And then we saw the pictures of a penis with like horrible sores and then a picture of a vagina with blisters ... sores like rotting.

Similar experiences of students' exposure to documentaries or films showing disease infested sexual organs were noted in other local South African contexts (Francis, 2019b; Shefer & Ngabaza, 2015) and elsewhere (Allen, 2008). Students' experiences are indeed in line with researchers' observations that in South African classrooms, sexuality education has over the last few decades mostly been used as a conduit through which HIV education is disseminated (Francis, 2010). Thus, the teaching and learning of sexuality is primarily located within a risk, damage and disease framework where young people are constantly reminded of the negative consequences of engaging in sexual intimacies, with little effort made to also show positive or pleasurable possibilities (Macleod, 2009; Ngabaza *et al.*, 2016; Shefer & Macleod, 2015). Such experiences are not unique to South African classrooms. Allen (2008, p. 582) shares young people's

experiences in learning about reproductive health issues in sexuality education in Aotearoa/New Zealand, where young people similarly share how they were castigated against terminating a pregnancy, a narrative underpinned by punitive responses to their active sexuality:

Louisa: What kinds of messages did you get around abortion?

Chelsea: It's bad and evil and don't do it.

Kylie: Yeah negatives, so don't get into the position where you have to do something like that.

Ruth: Yeah, don't have sex so you don't have to have an abortion and kill your baby and all the rest of it.

The DBE incorporates HIV prevention education in the school curriculum, which shows how the department is concerned about the high rates of HIV infections among young people, high rates of unintended pregnancies and a need for accurate information on sexual and reproductive health. We are aware that historically in South Africa, sexuality education has always been associated with 'problems' and epidemics, such as syphilis and now HIV, and also bound up with regulating populations with emphasis on birth control through teaching about reproductive health and contraception (and enforcing such practices in many contexts). This historical focus, as unpacked in the first chapter, continues to be the anchor for contemporary sexuality education and larger lessons about sexuality and health. While teaching accurate information about HIV and AIDS is imperative for young people's reproductive health, the dominant lens on disease and danger is also problematic, reproducing a powerful association of sexuality with danger and victimhood, while neglecting a positive, vital and agentic engagement with sexuality, embodiment and well-being. Emphasising negative consequences does not stop young people from having sex, as was stated so boldly by the student in chapter three (p. 50), neither does

it empower them with accurate information and skills with which to manage their sexualities (Santelli *et al.*, 2006).

Silencing of sexualities: Stigmatised pregnancy and motherhood

Another key terrain where punitive messages and efforts to deny young sexual practices is evident is in relation to pregnancy and parenting at school. Learners reveal mixed reactions and experiences with pregnancy and motherhood in schools and in sexuality education lessons. Stigma and shame narratives continue to dominate young women's experiences in sexuality education spaces. For example, in sharing experiences of pregnancy and young motherhood in classrooms in one study, learners shared how, ironically, in LO classes they have been paraded as objects of deviancy and pathologised for risky sexual behaviours as shown by this narrative from a participant in one of our studies (Ngabaza & Shefer, 2013, p. 110):

In LO (Life Orientation) lessons we discuss pregnancy issues—like when should people get pregnant and the dangers of teenage pregnancy, etc. And it is during these lessons that pregnant learners and mothers are brought to shame.

Similar sentiments and experiences are picked up in other studies years later, which point to continuities in how young pregnant learners experience sexuality education spaces in contemporary South Africa. Moralistic, judgemental and othering discourses are directed at young women, some of whom end up dropping out of school because they cannot bear the negativity in these responses. In the work of Mjwara and Maharaj (2018, p. 136), students share how teachers would single them out and shame them for falling pregnant:

The teachers would often go class to class and point to the pregnant girls saying that 'we are loose girls and what example are we setting since we are in secondary school and pregnant'. ... They didn't directly tell us to drop out, but we just saw it was useless coming back to such negativity.

Malatji, Dube and Nkala-Dlamini (2020) explore young mothers' experiences after returning to school following their pregnancies. In their study, young mothers share how teachers call them 'baby mama' (Malatji *et al.* 2020, p. 313). They share how they feel judged and othered because they are young mothers. Such othering and exclusionary practices push them to silence and they feel uncomfortable due to the negativity directed at them in these learning spaces. This emphasis on negativity towards young pregnancy and motherhood points to a general feeling among educators that pregnant young women and mothers should keep away from schools, as they are a bad influence on other learners. This negativity has been widely documented (Morrell *et al.*, 2012; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2013; Nkani & Bhana, 2010, 2016). Peers also contribute to this humiliation by calling young pregnant and parenting women names, all meant to demean and embarrass them for their pregnancies. Even if such shaming and exclusionary practices took place in classrooms, Bhana, Clowes, Morrell and Shefer (2008) and Ngabaza and Shefer (2013) further remind us of how young pregnant women have also been excluded through policy implementation challenges. The South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996) prohibits any form of discrimination against learners, emphasising that pregnant learners should not be excluded from mainstream education. Evidence shows that multiple complications abound when schools make decisions on when young people should leave to have their babies and when they should return to resume mainstream education. It is within this framework that schools send learners away when they deem it fit to do so and this varies from school to school. Some students leave school of their own accord, others are sent away when the pregnancy begins to show, yet others are asked to leave at six months (e.g. Morrell *et al.*, 2012). It all comes down to the discretion of the particular educational institution and young women are often disadvantaged by such inconsistencies. This variability in policy interpretation and implementation leads to exclusionary tendencies (Bhana & Mcambi, 2013; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2013; Nkani & Bhana, 2010). Exclusionary practices and general

negativity towards pregnant young women interfere with their access to education, a gross violation of their constitutional right, which has implications for social justice.

A lack of a clearly defined national policy on managing learner pregnancy in South African schools exacerbates exclusionary tendencies. There is no national policy on how schools should manage learner pregnancies at the time of writing. In 2007, the DBE released measures for the prevention and management of learner pregnancy in schools. These were later withdrawn due to inconsistencies in how schools interpreted and implemented them. Currently, the DBE is working on a national policy on the prevention and management of learner pregnancy. The draft policy, which has been published, is open for public response. This is a consultative process and efforts towards the finalisation of this policy are in progress. Quite striking from this draft policy is its commitment to ensure that learners' rights are respected as they continue education without stigma or discrimination. We, however, note with concern that the general practice in schools is that even if appropriate policies are in place, there is a disjuncture between what learners experience and policy provision (Ngabaza & Shefer, 2013).

Stigma and shame do not end with school experiences. Although some young people drop out of school due to negative responses to pregnancy and motherhood, they face a similar backlash in their communities and facilities. The young women share how they have been met with hostility and community stigma (Nkani & Bhana, 2016) and how they face challenges with their parents (Mjwara & Maharaj, 2018). In communities and families, young people are blamed for violating social norms and values of respectability (Naidoo, Muthukrishna & Nkabinde, 2021). Shefer and Munt (2019, p. 146) talk about how shame is utilised as a way of surveillance, policing and regulating practices which are meant to contain women within idealised, respectable femininity (see also Ahmed, 2014; Probyn, 2005). Ahmed (2014, p. 105) argues the

way in which shame works through an individualising, punitive logic for those who transgress social norms:

Crucially, the individuation of shame—the way it turns the self against and towards the self—can be linked precisely to the inter-corporeality and sociality of shame experiences. The “apartness” of the subject is intensified in the return of the gaze; apartness is felt in the moment of exposure to others, an exposure that is wounding.

As is clearly intended by the shaming that young mothers experience from both peers and teachers, even in the LO classroom (Ngabaza, 2010), shame ‘can work as a deterrent ... Shame can also be experienced as *the affective cost of not following the scripts of normative existence*’ (Ahmed, 2014, p. 106–107). This resonates strongly with the reported experiences of young women who fall pregnant and mother whilst in school. Ideally, they are expected to ‘abstain from sex’ until they are married, a view shared by numerous student voices. The general belief and key message directed at young people is that sex is for married, heterosexual people and therefore it should not be done. These responses are framed in a discourse of moral degeneration in which young women’s pregnancy and motherhood is regarded as a threat to the moral fibre of the community (Shefer & Ngabaza, 2015).

Within broad responses to young pregnancy and motherhood, young women are continuously inundated with cautionary messages that remind them to take care of themselves and be responsible agents, which translates into ‘avoid sexual practices with men’ (Shefer & Ngabaza, 2015). The general narrative, which is underpinned by the fear tactics elaborated above and the responsabilisation discourse discussed in the previous chapter, is that young women need to take care of themselves, or they will ultimately ‘lose out’. They will be ‘used’, damaged and left with the baby to carry the consequences. These responses to young pregnancy and motherhood have been widely documented (Ngabaza *et al.*, 2016; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). What is even more disturbing about this

narrative is that it is the mainstream narrative. Quite recently, in August 2021, a report by the member of the executive council for health in Gauteng in parliament revealed that there were 23 226 pregnancies among young women aged 10–19 years between April 2020 and March 2021 in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. A total of 934 of these pregnancies were among young people aged 10–14 years and 2976 young women chose to terminate their pregnancies. There was a huge national outcry and sensationalised reaction to these figures. What is worrying is not that young people have unintended pregnancies whilst in school, but the responses to these pregnancies show some disturbing trends. The general narrative, which resonates with literature on experiences of teen pregnancy in schools, continues to present young women as deviant and ignorant, and emphasises teaching the *consequences* of teenage pregnancy and preventative measures. Messages directed at those who are underage, emphasise that they be ‘taught their rights ... and to know that at no point is anyone allowed to force themselves onto them’. Some believe that the numbers are an indication of ‘a great need by the Gauteng Department of Education, Department of Social Development and Department of Health to strengthen their teenage pregnancy and sex education campaigns in schools’¹⁵. In these and other similar responses, a particular gaze continues to be directed at young girls and women. These messages and calls require young women to be ‘taught’ to look after themselves, to ‘know their rights’ and the relevant departments need to upscale their ‘campaigns’ against teen pregnancy. There is silence around the responsibility of partners or other responsible bodies where such evidence is available. The same documented message in literature on teenage pregnancy that young women take responsibility for their sexuality or bear the consequences is also directed at the 10–14-year-olds, who are burdened with the responsibility to know their rights and ensure that

¹⁵ Bhengu, L. 2021. Gauteng records more than 23 000 teen pregnancies in one year, some moms as young as 10. News24, 17 Aug. <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/gauteng-records-more-than-23-000-teen-pregnancies-in-one-year-some-moms-as-young-as-10-20210817>

no one forces themselves on them. We are drawn back to Swanepoel and Beyers's (2019) reflection that messages disseminated in sexuality education classrooms are not free from the ideals and perceptions of the broader communities. These same cautionary messages shape young people's experiences in the classroom, as shown in the voices of these learners from one of the studies (Ngabaza *et al.*, 2016, p. 75):

It's [messages of abstinence], sort of, mostly for girls, because we are told not to have sex because we are going to get pregnant, and the boys won't get pregnant, so we are told, Don't have sex, don't have sex, because you will fall pregnant and you will ... You will be the one with the baby. And they will make you pregnant and then they will leave.

The emphasis is on the consequences of pregnancy, and young women are warned about how they will be destroyed and deserted, as seen in the voices of these learners. This gaze further flags the significance of gender in sexualities and how young women's experiences are mediated by gendered norms and expectations from their sexuality education teachers and communities, as elaborated in chapter three.

In contrast, it is also notable that schools mostly ignore and erase teenage fatherhood, even while this is a common occurrence at many South African schools (Morrell *et al.*, 2012; Nkani & Bhana, 2010; Swartz & Bhana, 2009). The dominant stigmatising lens on young mothers then also flags a silence on young fathers, which inadvertently reinforces the dominant stereotype (and expectation) of neglectful, absent and irresponsible men as fathers more generally.

Concluding thoughts

In the beginning of this chapter, we referred to a homophobic incident that occurred at a high school in Cape Town. One take-away from that incident, which strongly resonates with the sentiments raised in other narratives of resistance and transgression in relation to the mainstream lessons about sex, is that young people 'push back', and 'they do not listen'

to the punitive response to their sexual practices. Indeed, LGBTQIA+ advocacy and activism have increased in many schooling contexts (e.g. Reygan, 2021). In the said incident, although the school had completely denied the group of students permission to organise their 'celebration event', they went ahead notwithstanding, refusing to be silenced, they defied the school authorities and 'organised an informal event' instead. It is of great significance that young people are empowered with the appropriate and accurate knowledge on sexual reproductive health so that they are well equipped to take care of their own and others' sexual and reproductive health and well-being in general. There is also no doubt that schools are well positioned to deliver this message to young people (UNESCO, 2009). Notwithstanding, young people are resisting the packaging of messages they receive in class and in school and in the larger community, where they are repeatedly cautioned against the consequences and dangers of engaging in sexual activity and are told to abstain. They are 'not listening' because, for them, it may be too little, too late as they are most probably already engaging in sexual practices and/or sexualised thought, desire and observation. What young people are asking for, as documented here, is a space, both in sexuality education and the larger school environment, that acknowledges that they are sexual subjects with their own knowledge, thoughts, experiences and challenges. More appropriate for young people appears to be a sexualities education forum for engaging with and gathering information, skills and knowledges with which to ensure their own health, safety, well-being and pleasure.

This chapter has foregrounded the overriding focus on disease prevention and the lack of alternative 'troubling' of these dominant optics. Young people clearly have a right and may wish to be understood, to be listened to and heard, and certainly it is imperative that the LO component be relevant and responsive to their lived and situated experiences, needs and wishes (Jacobs, 2011).

Further, we would argue that young people are 'not listening' because they are being 'told' by adults who assume they have more knowledge and authority over young people. It is to this problematic didactic pedagogical tradition and the larger adult-child binary that plays itself out in particular ways in the sexuality education classroom that we turn in chapter five.

Chapter five: Adult authority over young sexualities

Introduction

In this chapter, we explore how sexuality education in South Africa is framed in adult authority and didactic methodologies within a mainstream developmental psychological framework that is embedded in unitary and deterministic notions of human developmental processes. We locate ourselves within a critical adult studies (CRAS) framework (Hearn, 2018; Shefer & Hearn, 2022) to illuminate the way in which the adult-child binary and adult authority and young subjugation play out in and around sexualities education.

We have already illustrated in chapter three how young people are perceived as sexually 'innocent', as therefore vulnerable to sexual exploitation or being misled, and require guidance, information and knowledge from adults, who include parents, educators or school governing bodies (SGBs) and other relevant stakeholders in a position of authority in the school, community or elsewhere. In this chapter, we explore this adult protectionist discourse, unpacking the dominant narrative of young sexual innocence and need for guidance as well as troubling notions, couched in a protectionist discourse, around the assumed 'perverse' consequences of exposing young people to sexuality information and resources. We also draw on public and social media debates and outcries against sexuality education, such as recent parents' responses and debates on social media, including the recent public push back against the DBE's effort to upscale and strengthen the teaching of comprehensive sexuality education through introducing SLPs in schools. We further explore patterns of resistance by adults and school authorities to any signifiers of young people's sexuality in schools as a further problematic outcome of the adult-child binary and the denial of young sexualities, articulated through schools'

and communities' resistance to pregnancy at school. We argue that these problematic outcomes are also linked to the dominant adult-authoritative pedagogical framework in the sexuality education classroom and in schools and society more generally. However, it is evident too that young people resist and are agentic within and against this adult protectionist discourse. Finally, we look at the challenges that teachers face as a result of these hegemonic narratives on young people, sexuality and the adult-child binarism.

Adult framing of young people's sexuality as innocent

While current emphases on sexuality research and education and gender justice efforts seem new and progressive, they instead are bound up with the history of sexual repression, regulation and surveillance within apartheid segregationist policies and dominant moralities of the state. Such attention and focus then remain entangled in colonial and patriarchal logics. And while the current beneficiary and protective narrative on young people as 'our future, our hope' is affectively inviting, it continues to pivot on a set of authoritative, divisive and unequal axes (Shefer & Hearn, 2022, p. 81).

In South Africa and elsewhere, young people are mostly characterised as innocent, vulnerable, and asexual. There is a persistent, dominant assumption that young people are in an inevitable state of development, requiring adult guidance and protection. While globally we have moved from an overly authoritative and disciplinary view of adults' relationship with young people to a benevolent, protectionist narrative, the binary continues to operate, albeit more insidiously, to confer power of older people over those represented as young. This is particularly so in representations of adolescents and young adults, assumed to be in a volatile state of 'development' as popularised by developmental psychological orthodoxies of human development (Burman, 2008; Macleod, 2011).

Mainstream developmental psychology has contributed much to this unitary idea of teenagerhood, coined the 'storm and stress' stage by G. Stanley Hall (1844–1924), 'the father of adolescent psychology' (Dacey *et al.*, 2008, in Shefer *et al.*, 2021). As Shefer and Hearn (2022, p. 102) note:

Notwithstanding critiques of the assumption of one common experience of adolescence or early adulthood, to use the language of developmental psychology, and observations of contested perspectives across disciplines (Matusi & Hindin, 2011), the idea that young people are inherently rebellious, are "a problem", and require adult direction persists in many contexts.

While it has been widely argued that the binary continues to privilege adult authority while legitimating disciplinary and punitive responses to young people, such notions are ever present in mainstream pedagogical practices, not least the sexuality education classroom, with young people. The protectionist discourse, certainly dominant in contemporary South African responses to young people, is presented as a form of care for those who are constructed as dependent and needy. Yet such notions of care, protection and patronage are deeply problematic in reproducing the authority of those in power and the subjugation and othering of those represented as requiring 'help', direction and protection. As articulated by Shefer and Hearn in the opening quote and by the work of feminist reproductive justice scholars, notably Catriona Macleod (2011), such notions echo a colonial 'civilising' discourse in relation to indigenous communities, which, when not engaged in brutal extermination as was so often the case in many parts of the world, were then engaged in practices of control and regulation under the guise of protection and care. Such relations are also mirrored in current global capitalist relations of patronage between more advantaged countries and people and those in global Southern and other disadvantaged geopolitical spaces.

This fraught adult view of young people, particularly in relation to sexuality, is problematic for its implications for

how schools subsequently approach and engage teaching and learning around sexuality and gender. This kind of adult thinking about sexuality has created complexities in how schools package and disseminate this learning area. Hearn (2018) coined the term CRAS as a critical lens for engaging with current approaches to young people, including in education. Such a CRAS lens asks for attention to be drawn to adults and adult-centric thinking and to problematise the assumption of adult authority and expertise, thus destabilising the trope of young people as a problem. In sexuality education and in the school more generally, a significant underlying discourse is that of childhood innocence.

Childhood innocence, Robinson, Smith and Davies (2017) argue, is imbued in an assumption that sexuality is an adult domain, and children cannot be associated with what happens in the adult domain. Prinsloo, McLean and Moletsane (2011) also remind us that childhood in contemporary contexts is always constructed in opposition to adulthood, and because of this juxtaposition, children cannot be seen to be doing adult 'things'. The denial of young people's sexuality has been well illustrated in the larger educational institutional messages that sexuality does not belong at school, as elaborated earlier. Any overt displays of sexual expression, as particularly noted in literature on pregnant and parenting students at school, are silenced and demonised by the schools. The general perception is that any such displays disrupt the sexual innocence of the school and other students and may 'infect' other young women, as outlined in the last chapter.

The adult-childhood binary discourse confers adults' authority over young people and good parenting is then associated with adults who can protect their children from the 'harm' associated with sexuality. Adults who adopt this protectionist stance then rely on teaching abstinence primarily, if they can do so, as a form of prevention from sexual danger (Bay-Cheng, 2013). Notably, the adult-childhood binary is dispelled by numerous scholars who have worked

with children in different parts of the globe and attest to childhood sexual desire and practice (e.g. Bhana, 2017; Goldman, 2008). These scholars argue that sexual innocence in children is largely an 'adult wish' (Goldman, 2008, p. 421) that is projected onto young people who are far from being asexual. Moreover, the contexts in which children are born, shape their genders and sexualities through the gendered and sexualised ideologies and prescribed moralities of their families and communities, and young children are urged to perform gender as boys or girls (Bhana, 2008, 2016; Blake, 2008; Byron & Hunt, 2017; Goldman, 2008). Since gender prescriptions are strongly entangled with sexualised prescriptions, children are encouraged to identify with binary genders and sexualities and construct their masculinity and femininity through the gendered and heteronormative ideologies which pervade their familial and larger contexts.

In contemporary transnational contexts, young people across diverse geopolitical contexts grow up in a world that commodifies sex in a global market-based economy. The proliferation of the internet, cell phones and social media also means that young people have access to a wide range of online sexualised material. As taken up in more detail in the final chapter, sexting, electronic generation and sharing of sexually provocative material, 'seem to have become part and parcel of adolescents' social lives' (Garcia-Gomez, 2016, p. 1). Notably, sex is not only a primary vehicle for advertising, but is also becoming bound up with normative practices of communication and virtual engagement among young people (Beyers, 2013; Goldman, 2008). In contemporary global capitalist contexts where the internet and social media are primary modes of communication, and spaces for consumerism and social engagement, young people are growing up exposed to a wide range of sexual material, including internet pornography (IP) and what others have called sexually explicit material (e.g. Bhana & Nathwani, 2022; Carboni & Bhana, 2017; Gibbs *et al.*, 2020; Naezer, 2020; Naezer & Van Oosterhout, 2021).

There is a growing international literature that focuses on young people's engagement with IP and the role of digital or social media sexual representation, including cyber-bullying and sexting (García-Gómez, 2022; Hasinoff, 2013, 2014, 2015; Mckeown, Parry & Light, 2017; Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone *et al.*, 2013; Ringrose, Regehr & Whitehead, 2021). Similarly, in South Africa, emergent literature is engaging with young women in particular and also arguing the challenges and benefits of their reported engagements with such material. We take up the challenges and possibilities of young people's exposure to IP and other virtual sexualised material in chapter six, towards arguing for the acknowledgement of young people's prior knowledge of sexuality. Such research also clearly flies in the face of the popular insistence on young people's sexual innocence.

It is therefore not surprising that by the time young children arrive at preschool, they are already conscious of their sexuality and conscientious teachers begin teaching age-appropriate sexuality. Commenting on a study conducted with preschool teachers and learners in Turkey, Ünlüer (2018) shares preschool children's displays of knowledge on sexualities and how teachers in this setting responded. Teachers responded to these displays of sexuality in ways that encouraged or discouraged certain behaviours among children, foregrounding how, for them, teaching sexuality at school became a series of reactional injunctions to children's displays of sexual behaviour. This response to certain displays of sexuality has also been documented in the research we have engaged with students and teachers (Ngabaza *et al.*, 2016), as shown in the previous sections of this book. The concern in teaching sexuality in this way, as extensively argued in this work, is how most often, heteronormative notions and gender stereotypes are crafted and instilled in young children, to be monitored and regulated throughout the children's schooling, as displays of any other sexualities and genders that teachers deem out of line, are quickly silenced in these spaces. In South Africa,

Bhana (2008, 2014a, 2016, 2017) has done extensive work on children's sexualities and argues that whether adults approve or not, young children of six to eight years are active participants in sexual cultures and desires of their social contexts, eschewing the trope of childhood innocence.

Contestations between adults over young people's sexual education

Within the discourse of childhood innocence, the issue of age, and questions on at what point should young people be introduced to sexuality education are points of contention. Although the highlighted studies report that sexuality education can be introduced as early as preschool, age remains a contentious point even for curriculum design and implementation. It also bubbles up in ongoing conflict between different adults, in particular schools and parents. Schools are frequently blamed for 'sexualising' young people through content and resources used in the teaching of the subject. The contest around the challenge with respect to 'the appropriateness' of age is also steeped in a deterministic psychological understanding of human development. This strand of human development foregrounds cognitive readiness and age-appropriate behaviour for human beings in their life trajectory. In this understanding, the assumption is that young people should be introduced to sexuality education at a particular stage, when they are ready and this readiness for some is associated with puberty or adolescence (Goldman, 2010). At the same time, we are reminded that fixating on the appropriateness of the right age at which to introduce sexuality is bound to be complicated by the reality that children develop and mature at different rates (Goldman, 2008) and that this is also context-based. Thus, using age as a mark of readiness based on adult notions of what ages mean may be inappropriate for the needs and experiences of young people. There needs to be an understanding that sexuality is not about at what age it should be introduced but more about appropriateness for whatever age learners are at.

Here the assumption is that the content should be designed in such a way that it is appropriate for children at a particular stage, given the broad circumstances under which they are growing up. Age controversy overlooks the fact that children are sexual agents who should be central, and most probably are, in determining when and what they require to know and gain. Moreover, whether a universalised framework of age and development or a more nuanced context-based framework is applied, such contestations reflect continued adultist assumptions that adults 'know better' and that young people are passive and unagentic in their own sexual identities, desires and practices.

Closely related to the age appropriateness debate are questions on what content needs to be taught and from whose culture should this content draw on in a multicultural society (Francis, 2010, 2012; Khau, 2012). Such contentious questions have heightened anxiety among adults, fuelling resistance to sexuality education discourses. These questions are significant. We are aware that South Africa has a diverse population, so have the schools. Individuals are shaped by their cultural norms and values (Wood, 2012). Notably, sexuality education cannot ignore young people's cultural contexts, nor can sexuality education be completely detached from particular situational normative practices and values (Beyers, 2013) and yet, it is argued, teachers should not be deciding which cultural positions should dominate (Beyers, 2012). Instead, Beyers argues that teachers should focus on the key challenges facing the young people they are working with instead of adopting and promoting certain cultural and religious positions in their classrooms. We have noted how numerous scholars have criticised teachers for failing to create boundaries between personal beliefs and what they present to learners as fact (Ahmed, Flisher, Mathews, Mukoma & Jansen, 2009; Bhana *et al.*, 2008; Helleve *et al.*, 2009, 2011). We are also aware that the DBE allows schools flexibility to use resources that are relevant to learners' social context over and above those supplied by the department. Such flexibility has

created challenges as noted in the seeping in of, for example, dominant Christian and other religious dogma into sexuality education classrooms. Religion-based discourses appear to be characterised by a series of injunctions on morality and chastity, and strongly promote abstinence-only approaches, which, as raised earlier, undermine and pose challenges for a gender justice-based sexuality education in South Africa. We have seen how such debates position pregnant learners, those who are parents, or identify as LGBTQIA+ as 'other'. Subsequently they are shamed, stigmatised, and ridiculed for violating Christian or other context-based dominant moral values and norms (Francis, 2019a, 2019b, 2021; Mayeza & Vincent, 2019) and viewed through a narrative of moral degeneration (Macleod, 2011). Such an infusion of personal beliefs and personalities with curriculum content by educators creates anxiety among parents who are keen 'to protect' their children from what they are taught about sexualities, especially in multi-diverse communities like South Africa.

Adult panic and resistance to young people's sexualities and sexuality education

Another terrain in which an adult-centric and protectionist response is evident is in widespread adult resistance to sexuality education at school. Thus, while we highlight the authority of the adult in teaching sexuality, the sexuality education classroom is itself under scrutiny by parents, family and communities as a result of the extension of the adult-as-protector discourse. While in some contexts there is parental support for sexuality education, including sexual and gender diversity as in Ullman and Ferfolja's (2016) finding that Australian parents agree that LGBTQIA+ be acknowledged within a comprehensive sexuality, CSE in general appears to be contested by some South African parents. Adults believe it is their duty to protect young people from sexuality education because they are adults and these protectionist narratives further lead to parents resisting any other narratives and

approaches that seek to teach sexuality education otherwise (Ahmed *et al.*, 2009). It is also through this protectionist stance that schools are ironically blamed for sexualising young people even when the very messages received have been shown to be mostly repressive of sexual desire and agency.

When adults panic, they are bound to resist sexuality education. Some scholars detail other reasons underlying adult resistance to sexuality education and a few key issues stick out in this debate. Writing from a Canadian context and citing a 2015–2016 study on resistance to sexuality education in Ontario, Bialystok and Wright (2017, p. 343) tell us that in most cases when adults resist sexuality education, the nature of these resistance debates has nothing to do with the pedagogical concerns of the subject. Rather, such resistance is driven by anxieties related to the social and political identities of groups and individuals and their cultural beliefs, as Posel (2004, 2005) has pointed out in the early post-apartheid public preoccupation with sexuality and sexual violence. In fact, when compared to other learning areas, sexuality education invokes public backlash, which is indeed steeped in multiple contexts beyond the schooling framework, exposing ‘fault lines’ in other intersectional factors such as race, class, religion, belonging, identity, etc. In their observation, Bialystok and Wright (2017) note that what started off as adult resistance to sex education by some immigrant communities in Ontario, Canada, deteriorated to a contest about citizenship, national identity, and the right to dissent for immigrant communities. Multi-layered socio-political concerns that oppose sexuality education in most cases reflect the complicated entanglement of responses to sexuality education with a wide range of complex factors mediating the offering of this learning area in schools.

In South Africa around 2019 to 2020, the DBE, keen to strengthen the teaching of CSE in South African schools, produced SLPs for Grade 4 to 12, which were meant to guide educators in disseminating CSE in schools. The SLPs

were followed by a huge backlash from parents and others who claimed that the department should 'leave their kids alone'. This resistance was driven through a hashtag handle *#LeaveOurKidsAlone* and a dedicated Facebook page under the same handle. The Facebook group, which has more than 130 000 users, claims that the curriculum is age inappropriate as the SLP content seems to violate parents' cultural and religious values and norms on sexuality. The curriculum now has largely been blamed for aiming to sexualise children and encouraging risky sexual behaviours among learners. Once again, Bialystok and Wright's (2017) suggestion that adult resistance is usually not about the curriculum per se, but more about the adult anxieties about their own cultural and religious narratives, plays out clearly in the discourses around the *#LeaveOurKidsAlone* debate in South Africa. In the South African debates, adults call for the teaching of biomedical aspects of sexuality, rejecting gender and the relational aspects of the learning area (Ngabaza, 2022). Sham, Zaidi, Zahari, Danis and Razali (2020) say a matter of concern in these resistance discourses is that adults often assume that sexuality education means sexual activity/sexual intercourse and this pushes them into panic as sexual activity is closely guarded as an 'adult domain' (Robinson *et al.*, 2017). Baku, Agbemafle, Kotoh and Adamu (2018) believe that such a presumption is steeped in the understanding that some adults were never exposed to sexuality education and their idea of what is involved in the actual teaching and learning of sexuality education might be far from the reality of what is taught in schools. What then needs to be done and is recommended by scholars who have followed these episodes of resistance across the globe, is that adults need to be conscientised, consulted and informed on accurate information of what the syllabus entails and permitted to have an input or even be involved in the teaching and learning of sexuality education as this will allay their fears and anxieties (Bialystok & Wright, 2017; Goldman, 2008).

We have witnessed different forms of adult resistance and control of young sexualities in South African schools. A few years ago, as outlined in chapter four, there was an outcry in both research and popular media on how schools challenged and violated young pregnant women's constitutional rights to education. School principals and SGB policies barred pregnant young women from remaining in school (Morrell *et al.*, 2012; Nkani & Bhana, 2010). In this debate, we are reminded of the landmark case between Welkom High School and Harmony High School vs the Free State department of education in 2013. Welkom High School and Harmony High School learner pregnancy policies stipulated that any learners who fell pregnant had to leave the schools. Two learners were subsequently suspended because they had fallen pregnant and violated the school codes of conduct. The Free State department of education then took the two schools to the Free State High Court citing their 'exclusionary' school codes of conduct and how the codes of conduct violated the young women's right to education, as stipulated in section 3 of the South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996), which is embedded in section 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (The Republic of South Africa, 1996). In court, the SGBs argued that their school codes of conduct were constitutional, and they had the right to design their own learner code of conduct. The Free State High Court ruled in favour of the school SGBs, indicating that the Free State department of education had no right to overrule the SGB codes of conduct. The Free State department of education then took the matter to the constitutional court fearing that this ruling would legitimise exclusionary responses to pregnant students. Such exclusionary responses could result in an extension of schools' exclusions and resistances to pregnant learners, thus undo the gains of the progressive reforms to education, following the Welkom and Harmony High Schools SGB victories. The constitutional court overturned the Free State High Court ruling. The argument of the constitutional court was that the SGBs' school codes of conduct, which excluded pregnant learners, violated section 29 of the Constitution of the Republic

of South Africa, violated the learners' right to education and was unconstitutional and invalid¹⁶. While the outcome was favourable, implicit in this case, which also laid a precedent in South Africa, is that adults *have* authority and will deploy their authority to regulate young sexualities in schools. This case continues to be used as a reference point to the exclusion of young pregnant learners from mainstream education. Although schools continue to retain pregnant learners, there is massive evidence pointing to challenges that pregnant learners and mothers face whilst in school, as shown in this work already. Writing from a North American context, Pillow (2003) responds to this adult panic and 'othering' of pregnant learners in schools. In a paper on teen pregnancy and education in the USA, she argues that the pregnant learner's changing body is considered 'emblematic of teen sexuality', 'imploding' all that schools, as authorities in this regard, stand to regulate and control. To the authorities, pregnancy is not only a sign of irresponsibility on the part of the learner, but it also carries other social and public debates on morality and social decay and schools work very hard to silence the pregnant learner (Pillow, 2003, pp. 65–66). So, we see how this is done through exclusionary ways, through stigmatising and shaming, as we have also seen in the South African context.

In the South African context, we have also seen how adults treat the young women in their households as well as how the communities they come from treat them. Young pregnant women are punished by their parents on the assumption of shaming their parents and compromising family honour. They are shamed in their religious groups because they have failed to uphold chastity, moral values, and norms. Further attempts to equitable access to education are thwarted by educators and learners, as seen in the previous chapters of this book.

¹⁶ For the court judgment, see <http://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZACC/2013/25.pdf>

Popular representations of ‘the problem’ with young sexualities

Bound up with adult panic and anxiety related to young people’s sexualities are public and social media responses to and reports on issues about young people’s sexualities, not only in South Africa but also globally. Writing from a British context, Renold and Ringrose (2013) remind us of the sensational nature with which the media presents young people’s sexualities. These are approached from a position of deficit, irresponsibility and risk, as also observed in other contexts (Macleod, 2009). In South Africa over the years, we have witnessed the sensational nature in which the media reports on young people’s sexualities, especially concerns around teenage pregnancy. Newspaper headlines continue to present young sexualities in emotive language, pathologising young sexualities through the dominant lenses of sexual violence and early pregnancies. Young women’s sexuality, in particular, is strongly associated with danger and damage through these portrayals, mirroring the lessons young people receive at school (Ngabaza & Shefer, 2013, 2017, 2019). In this common and recalcitrant trend, young people’s pregnancies continue to be portrayed as disastrous and damaging (Ngabaza, 2011) not only to young people themselves but also to the broader society. We are reminded of a headline on 20 February 2011, in a local publication, *The Times Live*, where the caption read ‘Pregnancy tsunami’¹⁷ and the article went on to document disturbing statistics on the high number of pregnancies among young women in Gauteng. Flagged as disturbing in this report was that more than 100 of those who were pregnant, were even younger people in primary school. A decade later, we still experience the same emotive narrative as Gauteng is hit by a Covid-19 related ‘pregnancy crisis’. On 21 August 2021, a *City Press* headline reported that the country was reeling from shock and rage at the revelation of the rates of pregnancy

¹⁷ To read the article, follow the link: <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2011-02-20-pregnancy-tsunami/>

among young women during the COVID-19 lockdown in the previous year. Key stakeholders are responding to these alarmist figures with utmost concern, and this continues to position young people's sexualities in the spotlight once again. A sensationalist framing of young sexualities attracts pathologising discourses in a country that continues to view young sexualities within a deficit and problematising trope.

As already indicated, responses to young people's sexualities in the South African context have in recent history been bundled up with HIV and AIDS. As a result, sexualities have therefore been directed by initiatives to contain the spread of HIV and AIDS and an underlying discourse of 'moral panic' around sexuality in general (Macleod, 2011; Posel, 2004, 2005) and young sexualities in particular. This framework of addressing sexuality through the lens of HIV and also more recently GBV, therefore presents young sexualities as irresponsible, problematic, risky and dangerous within a framing discourse of moral degeneration (Macleod, 2011). Arguably, such pathologising discourses serve to detract from a productive, holistic and empowering narrative on young people's sexualities. The emphasis on sensationalising through the use of numbers also undermines an appreciation of the multi-layered factors that mediate these numbers and how different stakeholders can support young women instead of weighing them down with discourses of moral degeneration, doom and gloom.

Didactic adult-centric methodologies in the teaching of sexuality education

Many of the challenges and contestations shared above are arguably related to the problematic 'expert-centred' methodologies that dominate in the sexuality education classroom as they do more generally in mainstream educational institutions. In many ways, the dynamics in this classroom reflect larger educational methodologies which have been founded on the adult as provider of knowledge and the learner as passive recipient, the tabula rasa. As Shefer

and Hearn (2022, p. 87) have pointed out recently in their application of a CRAS lens to the mainstream approach to young people:

An unquestioned sense of adult authority underlies much of the work that is directed at young people globally and particularly in global Southern contexts in the light of HIV ... A notion of expertise that is built into the very ontologies and epistemologies of knowledge also assumes a particular knowledge maker ... As with heterosexuality and whiteness, the privileged adult perspective is assumed and therefore invisible in the research that is conducted about young people's sexuality.

This authoritative adult-centric perspective is evident in the sexuality education classroom where it seems that adults feel tasked with 'telling' young people and giving information which adults believe young people need. A study by Jearey-Graham and Macleod (2015, p. 18) documents this very well. As Shefer and Hearn (2022, p. 88) also note, these researchers 'describe how their participants, a group of young people in a tertiary college reflecting on their experiences of sexuality education, use the word "preached" to describe the sexuality educator as a "moral authority", delivering a "sermon". These researchers point to the lack of dialogue and more participatory and active engagement (Jearey-Graham & Macleod, 2015, p. 18).

It seems, however, that in 'teaching sexuality' at school, educators are particularly prone to fall back on normative didactic methodologies, as summed up by Jearey-Graham and Macleod (2015, p. 14) in the study cited above:

[M]essages are often provided in a didactic, non-interactive manner in South African classrooms, with transmission teaching methodologies being the mainstay of the interactions (Francis, 2010; Rooth, 2005). This has been found to be related to large class sizes, under-trained teachers (Rooth, 2005), teachers' anxiety and embarrassment in teaching sexuality, teachers' fear of being accused of encouraging sex among learners, and teachers' wish to keep a professional distance from learners (Francis,

2010). *The use of the “chalk and talk” model leads, however, to low learner engagement and boredom (Rooth, 2005).*

Mainstream sexuality education in contemporary South Africa, as so clearly illustrated in the quote from Jearey-Graham and Macleod, is strongly underpinned by the assumption of adults having knowledge and young people’s innocence and lack of knowledge around sexuality. In this way, messages about sexuality in the classroom are arguably located in a ‘civilising discourse’ in relation to young people who are assumed to be in a vulnerable, volatile or ignorant state, requiring adult protection and guidance. Such frameworks leave no space for young people’s own knowledges, own experiences and articulation of what they wish to speak about or know. Yet, it should not be forgotten that young people are pushing back and are resisting adult expectation and authority. As we have seen earlier, young people openly dismiss teachers’ directions and criticise the disciplinary approach to their sexuality (Jearey-Graham & Macleod, 2015; Mthathyana & Vincent, 2015; Ngabaza *et al.*, 2016). A young woman in Mthathyana and Vincent’s (2015, p. 60) study shows how young people are also calling for what they need and desire from the sexuality education space:

And when they tell about sex it’s always in black and white and it’s like this happens and this happens like you don’t get to hear the emotional part of it.

This call for more nuanced engagement and engaging emotions is very telling. It is also interesting in the light of current scholarly calls for re-invigorating, ‘breathing life’ (Allen, 2020, 2021), into sexuality education as we take up in the final chapter.

Educators' responses to the teaching of sexuality education in South African schools

The sense that adults should 'know' and impart 'knowledge' to those who don't know, as elaborated above and which becomes visible through a CRAS lens, is not comfortable for adult educators either. Arguably, this script results in a range of challenges for educators who need to teach this curriculum. As adults tasked with disseminating sexuality education to young people, teachers have shown mixed reactions with most failing to engage constructively, by their own and young people's reports. Such failures are not only a result of pedagogic challenges but also relate to educators' own discomforts and challenges with either communicating about sexuality with young people and/or being unable to dissociate themselves from their own convictions and beliefs, not to mention personal histories around sexuality and sexuality education (Bhana *et al.*, 2008; Helleve *et al.*, 2011) when teaching.

Historically, for many indigenous South African communities, communicating sexuality issues to young people commonly happened within particular social structures with adult relatives and peer groups facilitating this education, as explored in chapter two. With the rise of colonialism, urbanisation, and disrupted family structures, that practice has dissipated for many communities. Yet, most adults still find it a huge challenge to discuss sexuality in constructive ways, outside of a punitive framework, with their children. Studies have further shown that even in those communities, such as middle class educated families, where it is assumed sexuality is more openly discussed, information shared with young people has often been inadequately framed in a biological and scientific framework (Goldman, 2010; Leung, Shek, Leung & Shek, 2019; Moulton, 2013). Further, disciplinary warnings that young people should abstain (Bay-Cheng, 2013) tend to dominate these conversations.

Parents have also been blamed for failing to provide relevant and timely age-appropriate sexuality education (Goldman, 2008), which is one argument for viewing schools as the most ideal and appropriate spaces for providing accurate and age-appropriate sexuality education (UNESCO, 2018).

Educators are positioned as figures of authority in their classrooms, they are 'knowledgeable adults' who are also mandated to act in loco parentis—acting in the place of parents—with learners in school. Educators, as with parents, are schooled in the mainstream belief that young people need *their* guidance in sexuality education. While educators may have a sense that young people wish to gain more constructive and useful knowledge about sexuality, reproductive health, and so on (Blake, 2008), their location within adult expertise and within didactic pedagogical frameworks as discussed above, means that they rarely question their role in deciding and disseminating what they believe young people need to be taught (Beyers, 2012). In taking such steps, educators frequently fail to offer a space for young people to articulate their needs and challenges. Beyers (2012) suggests that educators have no right to teach their beliefs but need to focus on larger knowledges and social contexts and allow young people's agency to inform classroom interactions. There is caution, though, that it is usually difficult to avoid incorporating the school culture, which is in most cases the community culture, when teaching sexuality (Ahmed *et al.*, 2009).

Conclusion

This chapter has applied a critical feminist and CRAS lens to reflect on sexuality education in schools as well as community, familial, public and social media responses and messages to and about young people. We have highlighted again the way in which notions of sexual innocence and a denial of young sexualities are key in framing dominant narratives and undermining the positive possibilities of sexuality education at school. Entangled with the developmental notion of young

people as requiring guidance and protection, is the adult-child binary which informs mainstream pedagogical practices as well as sexuality education pedagogies. It also informs the negative public responses and contestations related to sexuality education while undermining the capacity of the sexuality education teacher.

The centering of adult authority and expertise is evident in most educational curricula, and acts in particularly problematic ways in the class to disallow any space for dialogue or for young people's agentic engagement with what they would like to share or know about. It is evident that far more is required than ensuring that teachers are prepared and that lessons are appropriate and helpful for young people's reproductive health needs. To ensure that the school and LO are productive and resourceful spaces for gender and sexual justice, a more radical engagement is called for. In the final chapter, we turn to these propositions for alternative ways of engaging young people in sexual and gender justice.

Chapter six: Thinking differently about sexuality education and young people's sexualities: concluding thoughts

Sexuality education has always been a queer proposition for schools. Its queerness lies in the disruption it poses to the traditional academic landscape of schooling otherwise peppered with “intellectual maths and science”. The Cartesian dualism that structures education renders schooling the province of the mind (Paechter, 2004), with student bodies and the messiness of their sexuality an excess to be managed. ... What makes sexuality educational queerer still is that its focus—sexuality—is socially constituted as private, embarrassing, dangerous, sinful, and potentially pleasurable (Hawkes, 2004). These associations have shrouded it in longstanding debates about whether it should be taught, when, by whom, and what its content should be (Irvine, 2002). Sexuality education's queerness also lies in the disruptive potential of these debates to highlight and question conventional binaries between child/adult, innocence/knowledge, danger/pleasure, homosexual/heterosexual, and cisgender/gender diverse (Allen, 2018, p. 1).

This chapter concludes with a synthesis of the key arguments and concerns raised here with respect to the challenging context and failures of contemporary sexuality education to reach gender and sexual justice goals. We also share our thoughts, through a number of recommendations and provocations, for ensuring this potentially valuable space is appropriate and productive in facilitating gender and sexual justice. In particular, we argue the importance of and suggest some avenues for centering young people's voices and knowledges, while opening up spaces for constructive and creative engagement with sexuality information and resources

as well as space for dialogue and collaboration towards sexual agency, equality and pleasure. We have attempted to highlight the way in which much of the sexuality education practice in South Africa that has emerged through current research, as Allen (2018, p. 1, above citation) puts it, considers 'sexuality [as] an excess to be managed'. Yet, as this lead international scholar in sexuality education has argued so well, the disruptive possibilities of sexuality education are also more than evident, not least as being raised through activism by young people at schools and elsewhere. It is to these spaces of contestation and possibilities that we turn in our thoughts on going forward and beyond the repetitions illuminated here.

Key arguments

Our primary goal in this book has been to critically examine sexuality education, both the direct and the more nuanced messages about sexuality, within the context of post-apartheid South African schooling. Many had hoped that sexuality education might be a productive space for promoting gender and sexual justice while also addressing key national challenges of reproductive health and wellbeing of young people. High rates of HIV and unwanted early pregnancy, and the increasing awareness of the role of coercive sexual practices in these challenges, as well as GBV in general, meant that schools and the LO curriculum, directed at preparing young people for their futures, place large emphasis on messages around HIV. Based on a review of feminist and other reflexive research on sexuality, including our own research, we have argued that there are major challenges with the praxis of sexuality education and the experience of young people in sexuality education classes, in schools and other educational contexts. We have shown how rather than challenging gender binarisms and stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, lessons have been directed at re-entrenching such divides and unequal expectations in the larger project of socialising young people in heteronormativity. A language of consequence, which is also strongly gendered with young women being

schooled through interwoven discourses of respectability and responsabilisation, has also been shown to be ever present in the ways in which sexuality is addressed for young people, as unpacked in chapters three and four.

In related respect, in chapter four we have drawn attention to the ways in which schools and the sexuality education classroom have silenced and denied young people's sexual desires and practices, as well as their knowledge and experience of sexuality and sexual practices. Any material expression of young people's active sexuality, such as pregnancy and parenting at school, often results in an 'othering' of such young people. Further, as illustrated in chapter four, the sexuality education class may be a space of humiliation for these young people and schools have been shown to engage in strategic efforts to conceal this perceived disruption of the sanitised school space by making it difficult for pregnant students to be at school, often reportedly on the flimsy basis of concerns for their safety and a lack of equipment. A further silencing, and in some cases active marginalisation and/or stigmatisation, of concern in the sexuality education class and in the school generally relates to the dominance of heteronormativity, the assumption of binary gender and sexuality. In this way, heterosex as well as dominating notions of the acceptable sexual relationship and familial structure in the format of the heterosexual marriage and nuclear family, are assumed and actively taught.

A further key critique that we have surfaced in the book relates to the adult-child binarism that is strongly institutionalised in schools and other social contexts and a framing developmental psychological narrative in dominant approaches to young people. The notion of the adult expert and authority that is so part of mainstream pedagogical practices in schools appears to be reinscribed within the sexuality education classroom too, as is argued in chapter five. We argue for a CRAS approach that reflects on this dominant underlying discourse that does not allow space for young

people's voices on their own experiences, nor allows space for young people to articulate their needs for information or sharing in this potentially valuable space. As we continue to elaborate below, addressing this hierarchical and didactic form of pedagogical practice is indeed key to ensuring sexuality education is of value to young people and opens up possibilities of gender and sexual equality and justice.

Beyond danger, disease and damage

Going back to Sylvia Tamale's (2011, p. 30) argument that much of the research on African sexuality has been framed in a trope of negativity, 'tired polemics of violence, disease and reproduction', we would argue that the LO sexuality education curriculum and practice need to also engage with the pursuit of pleasure and flourishing and representation of the positive role of sexuality outside of the dominant prism of violence and injustice. A discourse of pleasure, as feminist scholars such as Michelle Fine (1988; see also Fine & McLelland, 2006) have argued, may open up possibilities of greater agency and capacity for sexual and reproductive justice among young people. On the other hand, 'the missing discourse of pleasure' has also been critiqued and contested (Allen, Rasmussen & Quinlivan, 2014), not least of which in terms of its location in neoliberal governmentality and individualised narratives (Lamb, 2014; Macleod & Vincent, 2014). Nonetheless, the lack of any association of sexuality with pleasure and any positive experience and its overwhelming association with negative outcomes are also glaringly evident in young people's reports on sexuality education. While there was an emergent call for the importance of a positive discourse on female sexuality and desire in the light of HIV and AIDS concerns in earlier post-apartheid decades (e.g. Kahn, 2008; Lesch, 2000; Lesch & Kruger, 2004; Miles, 1992; Shefer, 1999; Shefer & Foster, 2009), little appears to have shifted regarding the focus of researchers nor in messages provided in educational settings. Renowned African feminist scholar, Patricia McFadden (2003) also raised early concerns about the troubling ways in

which responses to HIV and AIDS undermined possibilities for positive discourses and practices of women's sexuality in African contexts through the extension of increasingly heteronormative and constraining discourses. Similar silences in the light of the emphases on damage, danger and disease, as critical sexuality education researchers locally and elsewhere have flagged, have resulted in the obfuscation of alternative narratives on gender and sexuality.

Perhaps more importantly, as we have argued, sexuality education messages have been located in a gendered but also neoliberal individualised framing of consequence and responsibility. This has not only reiterated young women as responsible for their own and men's safety within a heteronormative orthodoxy but has also removed challenges for safe and equitable sexualities from social and political frameworks of understanding and challenge. As Healy-Cullen, Taylor, Ross *et al.* (2022, p. 214) on the basis of narratives from young people in Aotorea/New Zealand reflect, 'youth reportedly want to reach *past* a discourse of harm, risk, and protection'. They recommend a '*critical ethical sexual citizenship pedagogical framework*' towards a 'sexuality education going beyond responsabilisation of the individual to the societal and cultural levels' (Healy-Cullen *et al.*, 2022, p. 217). Such a critical ethical sexual citizenship framework needs to locate sexual and gender justice in larger intersectional inequalities so that a larger framework of justice is built into these lessons and schooling more generally. In South Africa, as we have elaborated at the outset, this requires recognising the way in which gender and sexual justice is entangled with racist, classed, and other forms of inequality of our past, present and future. Macleod and Vincent (2014) make a strong argument in this respect for moving beyond the emphasis on individualised notions of citizenship and responsabilisation and to engage feminist and queer reconfigurations of citizenship theory to inform a critical sexual and reproductive health citizenship.

Young people as knowledgeable agents

A key provocation for current sexuality education, given the pitfalls we have raised, is to find ways of acknowledging young people's prior knowledge and experience with sexuality, *not* towards surveillance and control, but towards opening up a non-didactic and dialogical space. Acknowledging that young people are already exposed to, as we have argued in chapter five, and may have experienced a range of sexual practices and intimacies may serve two important goals: Firstly, this will disrupt the dominant childhood sexual innocence discourse that continues to permeate educational and public contexts, and that has undermined the possibilities of the sexuality education classroom as illustrated; secondly, such an acknowledgement may be deployed towards opening up spaces to develop a more critical sexualities and gender lens and vocabulary for young people to engage with the multiple messages and sometimes problematic messages they are receiving.

One key contemporary terrain young people's possible knowledges of sexuality in this respect includes is the public and online space of what has been called IP or online sexually explicit material that we have raised in the previous chapter. Notably, both international and local studies (Albury, 2014, 2018; Attwood, Smith & Barker, 2018; Oosterhoff, Muller & Shepard, 2017) have highlighted how such material has been reported by young people as being of some value. As Carboni and Bhana (2017, p. 2–3; see also Bhana, 2022), in one of the first pieces of research on IP, or, what they prefer to call sexually explicit material in South African schools, point out:

It is important to note that exposure to sexually explicit material is common and online pornography may be an important means by which young people learn about gender and sex (Stern, Cooper, and Gibbs 2015; Zwane 2017). Furthermore, the educational value, benefits and appeal of porn for young people need to be acknowledged as they have the potential, if handled well, to inform progressive and comprehensive approaches

to sexual health promotion (Attwood 2007; Hare et al. 2014; Oosterhoff, Muller, & Shepard, 2017).

In international contexts, notions of IP, as Healy-Cullen *et al.* (2022, p. 4) sum up, similarly have been argued as:

[A] novel platform for young people to negotiate their sexual subjectivities, their sexual relations and their constructions of masculinity and femininity (Coy & Horvath, 2018; Martin et al., 2007). Thus, IP as a representation of sex and sexuality can challenge, disrupt, or support existing and ever-changing youth constructions of gender and sexuality (Goldstein, 2018).

Thus, while there is also wide acknowledgement that IP may reproduce limiting and damaging stereotypes of binary gender and sexuality, such as women's sexual passivity and male hypersexuality and the 'male sexual drive' discourse (Hollway, 1995), it is also increasingly argued that young people will and are viewing and possibly contributing to online and virtual sexual material. In this respect, in some parts of the world there is a growing call for acknowledging the role of IP and other social media, such as sexting, in young people's lives and for the possibilities of 'porn literacy' education (e.g. Albury, 2013, 2014, 2018; Bhana, 2022; Byron *et al.*, 2021; Goldstein, 2020; Healy-Cullen *et al.* 2022) that refers to the 'development and implementation of strategies to support youth in navigating IP' (Healy-Cullen *et al.*, 2022, p. 197). While such work is clearly contested, given that porn literacy may be taken up in varying and contradictory ways in educational terrains, working with young people or providing opportunities towards supporting their agency in negotiating IP, is an important emerging field of pedagogical development and inquiry with respect to sexuality education, as evident from this burgeoning scholarship. In the South African context, Carboni and Bhana (2019, p. 386) have similarly pointed out the importance of online sexual material for young people's learning about sexuality and gender and therefore argue for 'far greater consideration in the South African Life Orientation curriculum' as well as in teacher training.

Taking inspiration from this scholarship, we would extend this thinking towards arguing the potential of the sexual education classroom for developing a critical set of lenses to engage not only with online sexual material but the diverse messages that young people are receiving in an increasingly dense information-based globalised social world. The development of critical thinking skills and the capacity to ask questions and dialogue as active knowledge makers and seekers, are arguably imperative in bolstering agency and confidence in negotiating sexual and general health and well-being. Such a possibility, we suggest, will only bear fruit in a context which begins with the acknowledgement, rather than the denial and obfuscation, of young people as sexual, sexually aware and knowledgeable.

Radical rethinking of pedagogical approaches

bell hooks's (1994, p. 12) iconic words that 'the classroom is the most radical space of possibility' continue to be salient in efforts to rethink sexuality education classes as well as educational orthodoxies in general. Key to the project of acknowledging young people's knowledges and experiences and centering them in the classroom, as argued above, is a radical revisioning of dominating pedagogical philosophies and practices in South African classrooms and across diverse contexts. For hooks, in line also with Freirian philosophies and echoing calls from many local South African scholars in educational settings, the classroom could, perhaps should, be a space for transgressive teaching. As hooks (1994, p. 7–9) so beautifully articulates, this requires 'movement beyond accepted boundaries' to dialogue, creativity, enjoyment and excitement, which most importantly means dismantling the authority of the teacher and subverting 'an absolute set agenda governing teaching practice'. We would argue that a key component of radicalising sexuality education in LO spaces is then to open up space for young people's voices, experiences and leadership in what is covered and spoken about. This would require more

active participatory engagements which do go beyond the didactic, transmission model. This intention is part of a global and local shift in thinking about pedagogical practice in the light of decolonial and other critical, feminist, queer and social justice perspectives on education, particularly taking shape in higher education (e.g. Bozalek, Braidotti, Shefer & Zembylas, 2018; Bozalek, Hölscher & Zembylas, 2020; Bozalek, Zembylas & Tronto, 2021; Leibowitz, Swartz, Bozalek, Carolissen, Nichols & Rohleder, 2012), as well as in efforts to reconceptualise primary and secondary school-based education and such calls within sexuality education itself (Carboni & Bhana, 2019; Jearey-Graham & Macleod, 2015; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). Yet, while such participatory and student-centred methodologies may be growing, they remain on the margins of mainstream education.

Sexuality education in and beyond the classroom

We have shown in earlier chapters the power of popular culture, social media and public responses to young people's sexuality and how they tend to be embedded in constraining and regulatory narratives about youth, sexuality, gender, family and so on. Education scholars have also highlighted the way in which schools are generally spaces which reinscribe dominant gender and sexual binaries and stereotypes (Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019; Shefer *et al.*, 2015b).

In this respect, a further important consideration in the larger task of reconceptualising the sexuality education curriculum and pedagogical practices is the imperative to extend reflexivity and knowledge about gender and sexuality throughout the curricula and institutional framework of the school. The ghettoisation of teaching and learning about sexuality to the LO classroom may have resulted in a lack of concern or sensitivity to such issues in other classrooms and the school in general. A good example of this is the negative response to young people who become

pregnant or parent in school (see chapter four), which is a clear and impactful educational message about age, gender, sexuality and familiar moralities that is articulated by the school and community, not the sexuality educator.

It is therefore imperative to not only consider sexuality and gender as a focus and engagement for the LO classroom but to acknowledge how subtle messages are provided in diverse classrooms, as well as through the school and community in general. Thus, we call for a form of 'mainstreaming' of gender and sexuality rather than isolating it and placing sole responsibility for this terrain of knowledge in the sexuality education classroom. It is important for the entire curriculum and all educators to be educated in, aware of and reflexive about issues of diversity and inclusion/exclusion related to gender, sexuality, age and other forms of social identity and power difference.

Further, it is increasingly evident that a key component of a social and gender justice approach throughout the curriculum would be the development of critical thinking to allow young people to make agentic decisions from a place of curiosity and knowledge. In this respect, the capacity to ask questions, rather than accept dominant 'truths' is arguably most important for the sexuality education classroom, and indeed throughout the curriculum. The generation of a critical lens in the LO classroom and throughout the curriculum may draw on a range of contemporary projects related to developing agency through pedagogical practices. One creative example is a recent proposal for 'critical literacies with queer intent' (Sandretto, 2018) or 'queer critical literacies' (Govender & Andrews, 2021) which builds on traditions of critical literacies and queer theory to promote a conceptual framework and a practice-based approach to teaching gender and sexuality, in particular diversities and non-normativities (Govender & Andrews, 2021). Govender and Andrews (2021) identify five forms of questioning that they operationalise within a pedagogical tool that they have

developed: questioning representation, reading practices, the policing of gender and sexuality, knowledge systems, and self. Such questioning arguably opens up dialogical engagement that may challenge dominant narratives and everyday practices of othering, exclusion and stigmatisation. The challenge of binarisms of all kinds and working with and through critical thinking and writing that troubles gender, sexualities and all forms of difference in the classroom should of course be a key project for sexualities education (and the entire curriculum), as a growing body of valuable research and praxis is elaborating (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009; Govender, 2019; Martino, 2022; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2018; Martino & Omercajic, 2021; Miller, 2015, 2016, 2018, 2020; Miller, Mayo & Lugg, 2019; Sandretto, 2018).

Creative collaborations for sexualities education

One way of taking sexualities education outside the classroom, or rather bringing other knowledges into the classroom, while also following hooks's call for a dynamic, creative space of possibility, is through inviting in art, performance, and other creative engagements with gender and sexuality. In this respect, we propose the value of collaborations with and thinking with alternative spaces of gender and sexual justice where young people are represented as or emerge as agentic and resist victim/perpetrator lenses or innocent/guilty binaries. Finding ways of bringing such material from popular and artistic modalities into the curriculum arguably may open up alternative imaginaries of sexualities and gender, while also taking the pressure off the educator and the curriculum to provide expert forms of knowledge. Watching a performance, for example, that asks questions about gender, sexuality, violence, health, and so on, may be more productive than providing rigid, unitary answers to these often-contested knowledges. Furthermore, and most importantly, thinking with art and performance or experimenting with these modalities in the classroom is an embodied, affective way of learning

that arguably shifts consciousness in more holistic ways than providing rational, disembodied information. It may also open up practices of listening to young people since, as articulated by young people (see chapter three), they often choose not to 'listen' to what they are being didactically told in the classroom.

Indeed, there is increasing emphasis internationally and locally in working with alternative modalities of knowledge in the terrain of sexuality education, as there is more broadly within decolonial efforts in higher education. Quinlivan (2013, p. 79), experimenting with art for engaging with contested notions of IP in the sexualities education classroom, argues that it is 'of some use to draw on visual images such as paintings because they both provide connections to commodified images of sexuality, while also raising questions about those constructions'. Quinlivan (2013, p. 91, our emphasis) elaborates on the pedagogical value of thinking with and through art with young people:

While no easy fix, I have suggested that engaging with the arts may provide opportunities for more open-ended pedagogical encounters within which to consider issues such as the commodification of pleasure.

Engaging with art and creativity also opens up possibilities for addressing the missing discourse of sexual pleasure and desire through the dominant optics of 'risk' that have been shown to reproduce narrative of disempowerment, passivity and inevitability of victimhood that goes beyond sexual victimhood to larger intersectional gendered disempowerment. Such engagements may open spaces for what Fine and McClelland (2006) have termed 'thick desire', which foregrounds the importance of engaging with the complexities of the politics of pleasure, recognising how sexuality and gender are located within shifting social and political realms, as taken up by Quinlivan (2013, p. 80):

The notion of "thick desire" recognises that understandings of sexual desire and pleasure are produced within social and political contexts. In doing so, it raises the question of

how understandings of pleasure and desire are understood within sexuality education, and the extent to which the complex politics of pleasure can be critically engaged within ways that will enable young people to navigate them.

It is not only art but also more popular productions, including online artistic and performative work, that hold value in this way for sexuality education. It has been well noted that art and performance, both mainstream and in alternative civil society spaces, which disrupt normative gender, sexuality and other forms of inequality, are rich and proliferating in contemporary South Africa (Buikema, 2021; Gouws, 2017; Pather & Boule, 2019; Shefer, 2018, 2019; Xaba, 2017). As Shefer and Hearn (2022, p. 126) have argued:

Contemporary mobilization of young South Africans, both inside and outside the university, has engaged in novel ways with questions of materiality, embodiment and affect, across the intersecting spaces of art, activism and scholarship ... Such insertions of materiality, embodiment and affect in efforts to challenge erasure, marginalization, exclusion and violence, have facilitated alternative imaginaries beyond the focus on the negative, punitive and problematizing lens of consequence and responsabilization on young people and their sexual practices.

Feminist scholar Mbali Mazibuko (2022), reflecting on a proliferation of dance performances posted on Twitter and TikTok by young people in dialogue with the 'John Vuli Gate'

video¹⁸, illustrates an example of the power of contemporary performative dance and musical representations, in social media and elsewhere, that may transgress raced and gendered stereotypes to shift imaginaries around sexual agency. Through her reading of the John Vuli Gate video by a group of young women and the ensuing John Vuli Gate challenge on social media, Mazibuko (2022, p. 8) argues the value of such performances for challenging the continued negative and problematic representations of black women's sexualities and agency in postcolonial, racist and patriarchal societies:

Popular culture plays a crucial role in the representation, evolution and development of femininities that advocate for the joy and pleasure of women as well as the erotic ... Returning to cultural articulations of pleasure through dancing in ways that are now colonised as provocative is an important part of African women's self-expression. Agency is complicated but it does not stop existing because of the violent and oppressive context it grows out from. Claiming the erotic, singing and dancing can be read as a political practice and critical resistance against shame.

Arguably, working with media and artistic installations, whether online or in an art gallery that may also bring energy, vitality and joy to the classroom and raise debate, is a rich resource for engaging constructive dialogues about gender

¹⁸ The John Vuli Gate song was performed by Mapara A Jazz duo Mano Nephawe and Leonard Malatji, featuring Colano and Ntosh Gazi (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2NHplvs2xU>). The song was inspired by a scene from Tsotsi, an Oscar-winning South African film, which features a scene with Nambitha Mpumlwana calling on John to open the gate before someone hijacks her. Since its release in 2020, the performance has gone viral with many uploads across South Africa and other African countries of dance and song performances in dialogue with the song. While this is contested, most claim that the 'John Vuli Gate challenge' has its roots in a video of five women dancing to the song at a petrol station (https://twitter.com/1st_ninjar/status/1316275579986087936), which was shared on social media and went viral. See also: <https://briefly.co.za/83945-interesting-facts-videos-john-vuli-gate-challenge.html>. As Mazibuko (2022, p. 3) puts it, 'as a result of this viral video, a dance challenge under the hashtag #JohnVuliGate, which was used interchangeably with #NasiStocko, began to fill the timelines of TikTok and Twitter users (Maphosa 2020; Mabhiza 2020)'.

and sexuality and their entanglements with other forms of power and inequality (see also the work of Khan & Marnell, 2022, amongst a growing body of work in this respect).

Concluding thoughts

This book emerges from our own research work and that of many others that critically engage with sexuality education and larger educational messages directed at young people in contemporary global and local contexts. Located primarily in South Africa and concerns for gender and sexual justice in the post-apartheid decades, and in conversation with scholars and educators who are critically reflecting on local sexuality education curriculum, teachings and experiences, we have surfaced some central concerns emerging in our own and others' research. We have also, primarily in this last chapter, focused on the possibilities of sexuality education and schools in general for promoting intersectional gender and sexual justice and well-being.

As mentioned earlier, well known international feminist scholar on sexuality education, Louisa Allen (2020, 2021), makes a strong call for 'breathing life' into sexuality education and also shares rich examples of pedagogical practices that may open up such vitality. Such a call resonates strongly with the particular challenges in South African sexuality education contexts and the arguments we have made here. Allen (2020, p. 2) deploys the imagery and metaphor of breath, even more poignant in the context of the global pandemic over the last two years and the brutal death of George Floyd in 2020. It resonates powerfully with the call for embodiment and affect that we have raised here, and which decolonial activists in South Africa have raised, particularly since Fallist activism's beginning in 2015. Allen (2020, p. 2) argues for 're-invigorating this subject as *sensuous event*' which means 'paying pedagogical attention to the present, while facing uncertainty'. At the same time the metaphor of 'breathing life' asks us to re-energise, re-awaken, revitalise that which not only has been ineffective and lacking vitality, but which might have actively

deadened learning, empowerment and agency. There are currently many inspiring moments of young people resisting, transgressing and disrupting everyday normativities and injustices. As scholars, as educators, as policy makers, we need to be listening and hearing, and finding ways of contributing with the knowledge and resources available, for young people's own journeys of living a better life, for themselves and for others. Further, framing pedagogies in an ethics of care and relationality, which honours the entanglements of our breath with each other's, is especially important in an increasingly globalised neoliberal capitalist consumerist world which is bolstered by the individualised and pathologising framework of sexuality education.

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This book asks nuanced questions about how we might go about talking to young people about “sex” in ways that acknowledge their identities and experiences with an alertness to complexity and critical thinking. With longstanding experience and a wealth of expertise in the field of critical feminist thinking around gender and sexualities, the authors offer a remarkable commentary on possibilities and potential pitfalls for sexuality education in the post-apartheid South African schooling milieu. More than a simple summation, this book provides a situated contextualisation of sexuality education for young people and offers a rich series of recommendations that are grounded in research findings as a means to mitigate the current challenges confronting young South African people and their sexualities. With a careful and textured exploration of these issues through a feminist lens, the authors do much to centralise the voices and experiences of those intended to benefit from sexuality education in South Africa: young people themselves. This text will be of interest and a valuable resource to scholars, policymakers and practitioners working in this space, challenging the status quo and inviting us to (re)imagine what it means to support young people in the development of full and healthy sexual identities and experiences.



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