






Feminine sexual desire and shame in the classroom: an educator's constructions of and investments in sexuality education

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ABSTRACT

Within the growing body of literature on sexuality education in South Africa, researchers have highlighted how teachers may face, or themselves be, barriers to the implementation of rights-based comprehensive sexuality education. Important issues with regard to educators are: firstly, the social and discursive space within which educators are located; and secondly, the complex emotional and psychic investments that educators take up within particular discourses and practices. This paper explores, through a psycho-social reading of an interview extract with a particular educator based in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, how discursive and psychic concerns are sutured within the complex subjectivity of the educator as the medium for sexual education in schools. Specifically, it highlights the numerous ways in which feminine sexuality and desire may be avoided, denied and silenced. Even when feminine desire is specifically evoked as in this case, it is done so in a way that ensures social and cultural respectability, thereby reproducing shame narratives that form and maintain traditional gender discourses. Our analysis demonstrates how engaging with educators as subjects with their own sexual history and psychic dynamics, and as individuals with raced, gendered and classed identities, is a potentially transformative perspective for effective sexuality education.

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Introduction

Research on the content and implementation of sexuality education in South Africa has highlighted multiple challenges (e.g. Francis 2013; Macleod, Moodley, and Saville Young 2015; Shefer and Macleod 2015). Key amongst these are the difficulties faced by educators, including lack of training and of support within schools (Helleve et al. 2009; Smith and Harrison 2013). Educator-centred barriers to rights-based comprehensive sexuality education include their conservative attitudes to youth sexualities and sexual diversity (Francis 2012; Iyer and Aggleton 2013). As a way forward, Reygan and Francis (2015) argue that sexuality education research needs to be more attentive to the role of educators' emotions in their engagement with the curriculum and with learners. In this paper we take up this challenge by focussing on the educator as a psychosocial subject,

here understood as a subject made up of psychic and social processes that are ‘always implicated in each other, as mutually constitutive, co-produced, or abstracted levels of a single dialectical process’ (Frosh 2014, 161). A psychosocial analysis of educators is interested in both ‘inner’ states of mind and the social processes with which these are continuously and irrevocably entwined (Saville Young and Frosh, *forthcoming*). Thus, both the personal histories of educators as well as their embeddedness within raced, classed and gendered social structures (Gillborn 2015) can be acknowledged.

We take up this psychosocial perspective as it applies to thinking about educators’ constructions of the sex education programmes they teach as well as their constructions of themselves as educators and young people as learners, using an interview with one particular educator as an exemplar of this approach. We are particularly interested in the psychic ‘payoffs’ of these constructions in the educator’s talk and in how a psychosocial analysis of the talk in the interview might contribute towards conceptualisations of teacher education, training and support in order to provide more effective sexuality education.

Sexuality education and educators in South Africa

Life Orientation is a mandatory teaching area formally introduced in South African schools during the late 1990s, and includes components on sexuality (Department of Education 2002a, 2002b). For the most part, the curriculum advocates a ‘responsible sexuality’ framework that is achieved through reference to a host of adolescent sexual and reproductive health difficulties such as unwanted teenage pregnancy, unsafe abortion, sexual abuse, rape, STDs and HIV (Klepp, Flisher, and Kaaya 2008; Shefer and Macleod 2015). Elsewhere, we have reported on an analysis of the LO manuals which, engage in a process of ‘responsibilisation’, a key (neo)liberal project that uses the rhetoric of youth-at-risk to incite youth into individualised management of the self (Macleod, Moodley, and Saville Young, 2015). Research shows, however, that these kinds of messages have little traction with learners (Jearey-Graham and Macleod 2015), while at the same time they gloss over the complexities of learner identities, life-worlds and experiences (Mthatyana and Vincent 2015).

There has been much written about educators’ shortcomings when teaching sexuality education through this kind of formal learning programme (Bhana 2015; DePalma and Francis 2014a; 2014b; Francis 2012, 2013; Francis and DePalma 2013; Helleve et al. 2009, 2011). Smith and Harrison (2013) note that one of the main barriers to teaching sexuality education in South African schools is the lack of training for educators who are not equipped with relevant skills and knowledge. Another common barrier, linked to the first, derives from the Christian and moralistic views on sex and sexuality that many educators maintain by, for example, encouraging learners to remain abstinent, which is in direct conflict with the content of the Life Orientation curriculum (Helleve et al. 2009).

Furthermore, studies show that contradictory gendered meanings and identities within the curriculum silence women’s agency and reinforce gendered norms and power relations (Kruger, Oakes, and Shefer 2015). Sexuality is presented through ‘danger’ and ‘damage’ discourses, with young women’s sexual desire and practices being denied (Shefer and Ngabaza 2015). Cautionary, negative and punitive messages regarding sexuality thereby reinforce, rather than challenge, normative gender roles (Shefer

et al. 2015). DePalma and Francis (2014a; 2014b) note educators' tendency to simplify the roles of victim and perpetrator – in light of high rates of sexual violence in South Africa – by vilifying young men and victimising young women, whilst also ignoring topics such as same-sex attraction and desires.

Method: a psychosocial conceptualisation of sexuality and sexuality education

Taking up Reygan and Francis' (2015) challenge to consider educators' emotions in relation to sexuality and sexuality education, we ask the following question in relation to our case study, Cynthia¹: what are this educator's emotional attachments to normative knowledge systems or discourses? This question is consistent with a psychosocial perspective which argues that our talk is always motivated; how we construct things serves both particular social and psychological functions. Johnson (2015) has taken up this emphasis on both the psychological and the social to engage with sexuality, arguing that such an approach allows for an engagement with both identity and subjectivity: how one's identity is 'made' and constructed from the outside (e.g. as a Life Orientation educator, middle-aged woman, tasked with teaching sexuality education within a particular social context), and the consequences of this, alongside the subjectivity involved in living this identity 'from the inside'. By engaging with these questions, we hope to emphasise the usefulness of interrogating aspects of social and psychic life when investigating sexuality, and education.

For the purposes of this paper we draw on an in depth interview with Cynthia, a school principal and educator from the Eastern Cape of South Africa who was interviewed about her experiences of teaching grade 10 learners the prescribed sexuality education programme. At an agreed upon time and place, Cynthia was interviewed in English on two separate occasions in her office at the school after teaching hours. The interviews were conducted as part of a wider project that compared and contrasted the gendered sexualities found in two mediums of sexual socialisation in the lives of adolescent learners i.e. Life Orientation sexuality education and contemporary popular music (Moodley 2016). The study received ethical clearance from the ethics committee of the Department of Psychology at Rhodes University, and guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality to participants. The interviews were conducted by the second author (DM), a young South African 'Indian' man who does not come from the Eastern Cape but was based there for his studies. The interviewer utilised Hollway and Jefferson's (2012) 'free association' narrative interview technique that encouraged the educator to say whatever comes to mind, based on her experiences of teaching the Life Orientation programme to learners. The aim was to elicit a rich narrative that could be read for processes of identity and subjectivity that might stimulate engagement with Cynthia as a psychosocial subject. Nevertheless, despite the emphasis given to free association, the interviewer is understood to be an active co-constructor of the data. The interview focused on four key areas related to teaching sexuality education that included: (1) the personal and local context in which educators are embedded; (2) the perceived outcomes of the sexuality education programme; (3) the approach to teaching; and (4) personal and systemic issues related to teaching sexuality education.

Frosh and Saville Young's (2010) approach to psychosocial analysis was adopted in this study, an approach that involves multiple readings of the text with an emphasis on reflexivity and deconstruction. This approach has a distinctly Lacanian flavour with an emphasis on using psychoanalysis as a process of reading the social in order to explore the patterns of emotional attachment that flow across it (see for example, Frosh 2007; Parker 2005). These readings can also be understood as manoeuvres or sequential processes that gradually move the analysis from a discursive reading to a more psychoanalytic interpretation of the interviewee's emotional investments in particular discourses and subject positions.

The first reading is for content and involves identifying the *discourses* within the text through which discursive subject positions are made available – discourses are here understood as shared, taken for granted coherent sets of meanings that work to position subjects in particular ways, sometimes leading to resistance through talk thereby challenging existing power relations and at other times maintaining and reinforcing the status quo. The second reading is for *structure*; looking at how the narrator's story is structured in such a way that prioritises certain meanings over others. This reading emphasises that how something is said influences how it should be interpreted. The third reading is interested in *interruptions* referring to inconsistencies or contradictions in the interviewee's seemingly coherent story that might point to active meaning making. This emphasis is particularly psychoanalytic in arguing that affective or unconscious material disrupts smooth 'egoic' speech. The fourth reading interrogates the *linguistic devices* within the text. This reading takes a closer look at recurring signifiers or metaphors in the text which serve to lull us into the illusion that we use language when rather what it is doing is using us to deflect and avoid other ways of meaning making. The final reading pays attention to the specific *intersubjective encounter* within which the narrative is produced. This reading is interested in the feelings evoked by this interaction in the interviewer and in what these might tell us about the particular affective function of this talk. The analysis embraces subjective knowing which is grounded in psychoanalytic thinking – 'I cannot come to know you unless it is through the impact of you on me'.

Throughout the analysis, there is an emphasis on interweaving psychological and social interpretations; in other words the analysis is interested in what is absent or 'unconscious' to the text, understanding this unconscious material as not located within a person but rather as produced by interpersonal processes between the interviewer and interviewee (Saville Young and Berry 2016) which are interwoven with the social contexts from which each of them come – social contexts which frequently deny social, cultural and communicational constraints producing a 'social unconscious' (Weinberg 2007). What follows below is a brief introduction to Cynthia, the educator in this case study, followed by a summary of the overall emphasis of her interviews. Following this, we introduce a particular extract from the first interview in order to take the reader through the five readings described above to produce a psychosocial analysis.

Cynthia: background and extract

Cynthia is a 51 year-old isiXhosa (home language) and English speaking black African educator. She is married and has two adult daughters. As a child, Cynthia's grandparents

raised her because her mother moved to a distant city in order to find work. Furthermore, her father was not fit enough to care for her because he had a drinking problem. Cynthia reported that she was brought up in a strong Christian home: her grandmother, in particular, was a 'very religious, strict and critical woman', whilst her grandfather was a 'kind and loving man'. Cynthia was not allowed to have boyfriends, nor was the subject of boys, dating or relationships tolerated by her grandmother. When Cynthia became pregnant at the age of 15, her grandmother was very upset and demanded that she leave the house. Cynthia mentioned that she felt very ashamed by this incident, and vowed she would make her grandmother proud by studying further. With the support of the father of her child, who she eventually married, she went back to school and obtained a degree in teaching. At the time of the interview she had been an educator for 21 years.

Cynthia has a long-standing history with teaching subjects such as Guidance, Bible Studies and Life Skills that were the foundations of, and collapsed into, the Life Orientation programme. She remarks, 'I ended up loving it. I just love Life Orientation.' According to Cynthia, her 'love' for the subject stemmed from the 'parent-child relationship' that she did not have when she was younger, but something she wanted to give learners. She explains, 'my mother was not there for me. I only saw my mother in 1970'. Her biological father 'couldn't take responsibility' because he was 'not a serious person'; 'he was a nobody' and 'was not working.' When she first 'went through the books of Life Orientation' it spoke of 'self-esteem' and 'believing in yourself.'; 'it brought memories' of '[her] upbringing', and allowed her to see '[her] mistakes... because there was nobody there for [her]'. Life Orientation 'opened doors for [her]' in order 'to share information with the learners' based on 'the mistakes that [she] made'. Life Orientation allowed her to 'come up with an approach that is going to save them [learners]... not to do the mistakes I did'.

Cynthia's words above are highly evocative in terms of the particular discourses that she draws on and in terms of her personal investment in the Life Orientation teaching programme. The extract below provides a good example of these discourses and personal investments at work which we proceed to analyse in depth below using the five readings. It is taken from the first interview with Cynthia and refers to her mother's subsequent marriage to her stepfather, Boet Paul.

Extract 1²

- (1) Ermmm, you could see that she [mother] wanted to, to, to, to embrace me or (1) but because of
- (2) the husband (1)the husband is there, *mos*, and when I get the whole story now, the
- (3) husband knew nothing about us. That's another story. = /Mm, mm, mm/ = Because
- (4) when I was old enough, I approached the husband, Paul. He was Paulson Nkosi. I
- (5) asked him, but, *Boet* Paul, this is our mother. Did you know about us? He said,
- (6) Cynthia, I did not know that your mother had children. When I met her she did not
- (7) tell me about you.
- (8) **OK. So your mom kept it a secret from everyone?**
- (9) So who's to blame now? Can I blame (1) must I blame the husband? Because he did
- (10) not know; he's claiming he did not know about us.
- (11) **Was he a nice man to you?**
- (12) He was.
- (13) **Did he come across as a nice man?**

- (14) He was, because he was a priest. He was very nice.
- (15) **So a very respected man too.**
- (16) Very respected man.
- (17) **Did you ever manage to talk to your mother about this issue?**
- (18) Yes. Now, we are on good terms now. We're in very good terms now.
- (19) **What did she have to say, or what was her explanation when you wanted the**
- (20) **answers explained to you?**
- (21) The explanation that she's giving me was that, Cynthia, I could not stay with
- (22) Lwazi. Lwazi, that was my father's name.
- (23) **Your father?**
- (24) Yes. Because he was a drunkard, not working, and I was young (1) when I got
- (25) pregnant. So there was no way out. I had to go and look for work (1) and I could
- (26) not take you with me, especially uMalusi, your young brother. So I could not
- (27) take you with me. So I had to be on my own. But unfortunately the husband
- (28) passed away and now (1)
- (29) **Your mom is still alive?**
- (30) Yes, she is still alive. Very beautiful lady. She's now in Cape Town with one of
- (31) the daughters I'm telling you about, that she(1) her two daughters from this
- (32) marriage. The other one passed away and the young one is now a grown up. So
- (33) she's staying with her. So I always visit her in Cape Town. Even now, for the
- (34) holiday, I'll be going to Cape Town.
- (35) **It sounds like you have a lovely relationship with her.**
- (36) Yes. As I am saying, I managed to forgive her.
- (37) **I'm interested in, how come you were able to forgive her, but your brother**
- (38) **wasn't able to forgive her? How do you explain that?**
- (39) That's, that's the most difficult part because really, really, really I tried to put
- (40) sense to my brother. That no, man, just let go. Just forgive her. No, no, no, I won't.
- (41) **He didn't want to.**
- (42) He didn't want to.
- (43) **Why did he keep on talking about that?**
- (44) Because the problem is this. If you are a female (1) it's easy for you to, to grow up
- (45) and do some things, *nê*, on your own, and learn from other people.
- (46) **Are you talking about being female in your culture?**
- (47) In my culture. But if you are a male, there's a period where you need to go for
- (48) initiation. That's where you need your parents; your mother. She's got a role to
- (49) play, *nê*. She has got to be there for you. See to it that you are now a man. My
- (50) mother was never there for my brother. I had to go and work, buy him those
- (51) clothes, those casual things. I had to do everything. I had to go and work very
- (52) young. Then, another time, there was a time for him to take a wife. That's a
- (53) mother's job. I had to do it for him. See to it that he has got a wife, then when they
- (54) got their first child, I had to see to it that the layette (1) I had to do everything.
- (55) That's my mother's responsibility.
- (56) **Mm. So he was angry about that?**
- (57) Exactly.
- (58) **That you were put in that position?**
- (59) Eh. I mean, even with me, I had a child at 15 years. 1975. Why is that? It was
- (60) because there was nobody to guide me. Can you see now? There's nobody to say,
- (61) no, this is wrong, this is right. The grandparents are grandparents. They cannot do
- (62) everything for you but the mother, the role of the mother, is different from the role
- (63) of the grandmother. But because of Life Orientation, I managed to see the reasons
- (64) why she did this to me. Why I got pregnant. That's why even when I talk of a
- (65) child pregnancy, *nê*, I am talking from experience.
- (66) **It's from experience. OK.**
- (67) It's not something that I learned from the book. The pain of growing without a
- (68) mother, it's from my experience. So that's why I love Life Orientation.

Reading 1: discourses

In the above extract, Cynthia draws on a responsible sexuality and parenting discourse that is also found in the LO manuals, alongside a moralistic, religious discourse. The first discourse constructs a set of meanings about responsible parenting that positions herself and, in particular, her unplanned pregnancy, as the product of irresponsible parenting. This discourse is gendered in that Cynthia's mother is largely constructed as the example of an irresponsible parent. In addition, Cynthia's brother is constructed as needing their mother more than her because girls 'grow up and do some things, *nê*, on your own, and learn from other people' (44–45). The narrative clearly positions 'good' mothers, wives and girls as being responsible for getting a job, finding a husband, assisting brothers in the absence of a mother, thereby constructing this responsible parenting role as largely feminine and maternal. This construction echoes the literature (see above discussion) that points to the reinforcing of gender-based inequalities within sexuality education.

Drawing on this responsible parenting discourse, Cynthia positions herself as the product of irresponsibility: towards the end of the narrative she describes herself as having suffered from having 'nobody to guide me' (60), disclosing her own unplanned pregnancy when she was 15 years old. With her mother absent she describes there being nobody to tell her 'this is wrong, this is right,' (61) leading to her own positioning as a sexually irresponsible subject as a result of 'not knowing'. It is significant here that responsibility is linked to knowledge in a fairly straightforward way – the underlying assumption is that if Cynthia's mother had provided her with information about what was right and what was wrong, she would not have fallen pregnant.

Alongside this responsible sexuality discourse, Cynthia also draws on a second religious and moralistic discourse, constructing a set of meanings about the righteous subject. This discourse allows Cynthia to reposition herself as having overcome her sexually irresponsible position. She lauds the role that Life Orientation played to help her 'see the reasons why she did this to me. Why I got pregnant' (63–64), and positions herself as using the knowledge Life Orientation provides to 'save' learners in the same way it saved her – by making them and her more responsible. This religious and moralistic discourse is clearly interwoven with the responsible sexuality discourse; the two discourses that Cynthia draws upon complement each other in that they both contribute to establishing a clear sense of right and wrong.

Reading 2: structure

Why then does Cynthia invest in these particular constructions of LO and in these particular ways of positioning herself as an LO educator? How can we think about these constructions and positionings from both a social *and* psychological perspective such that Cynthia's subjectivity is foregrounded? Our analysis now moves to looking more closely at the structure of Cynthia's narrative to begin engaging with these questions.

The opening sequence of the extract (1 to 7) begins with a revelation in which 'the whole story' (2) about her mother's absence is narrated. Thus, the first part of the narrative is dedicated to debunking the view that it was her stepfather who

prevented her mother from seeing her children. The ‘real’ story of his lack of knowledge about Cynthia and her brother leads to her asking: ‘who’s to blame now?’ (9). While the listener is urged to assign blame to Cynthia’s mother, the narrative goes on to detail her mother’s difficult circumstances including having a drunken partner and unemployment, suggesting the social context is possibly to blame. With this social context in the forefront, the story then moves to describe Cynthia’s ability to forgive her mother while her brother is unable to forgive her. What is most striking about the structure of the story is Cynthia’s startling revelation at the end; she gave birth to a child when she was 15 because ‘there was nobody to guide me’ (60). This disclosure is introduced ostensibly to emphasise how much mothers are needed by their children, even girl children, contradicting her earlier stance that it is especially boys that need their mothers. The inclusion of this sub-plot of her unplanned pregnancy right at the end, almost as an afterthought, suggests that it might be difficult for Cynthia to talk about, given her strict religious upbringing and her discursive construction of what is rather straightforwardly right and wrong. It is possible, we argue, that Cynthia’s discomfort with this sub-plot is related to the attention it draws to her premarital sexuality and to herself as a sexually desiring subject. Significantly, the narrative quickly moves back to being about her mother as an irresponsible parent as the extract ends with an emphasis on ‘the pain of growing up without a mother’ (67–68). Looking closely at the structure of the narrative highlights the absence of the discourse of desire and the subjugation of the narrative of her own sexual desire.

Reading 3: interruptions

Building on this ‘covering over’ of sexual desire in Cynthia’s talk, our analysis now moves to inconsistencies or contradictions in the seemingly coherent story to start to interrogate more substantially the affective aspects of the narrative. A contradiction that we would like to draw attention to in the narrative lies in Cynthia’s initial denial of girls’ need for their mothers (44–45) followed by the disclosure of her own unplanned pregnancy which is constructed as due to there being nobody, specifically her mother, to guide her. This contradiction may point to some ambivalence around Cynthia’s need for her mother, possibly fuelled by angry feelings towards her mother that do not fit the narrative of being ‘on good terms, very good terms now’ (18). This is clearly a classic psychoanalytic reading that also attributes Cynthia’s description of her brother’s anger to her less conscious self. From this reading, Cynthia’s mother is positioned as blameworthy, but ambivalently so. The construction of her mother as culpable is resisted in order for Cynthia to adopt the forgiving and saviour subject positions; reflexively positioning herself as a righteous subject is at odds with a subject that blames others. Rather the emphasis is on how she saves learners from having unplanned pregnancies by teaching them to be sexually responsible. This flight from being in a position to blame her mother is arguably fueled by the fear of counterblame – for being a sexually desiring teenage subject – a position that is inconsistent with and indeed repressed by the dominant discourses that she draws on to position her identity and which we have described above.

Related to this, is a further absence in the narrative – Cynthia never does provide the listener with reasons for her mother’s failure to disclose having already had two children to her new husband. Looking closely at the narrative, Cynthia describes her mother’s reasons for not being able to take her children with her: ‘[their father] was a drunkard, not working, and I was young... when I got pregnant. So there was no way out. I had to go and look for work... and I could not take you with me, especially uMalusi, your young brother. So I could not take you with me. So I had to be on my own’ (24–27). The narrative here focuses on the reasons why she left her children with her parents, and not on the reasons for not disclosing their existence. What remains silent in Cynthia’s personal narrative of her own pregnancy – her sexual desire – also remains silent in Cynthia’s mother’s talk. Significantly, we learn from the story that it is not ‘Boet’ Paul who requires her mother’s silence about the presence of ‘other’ children, but rather it is her mother’s self-enforced silence, a silence that is reinforced by its absence or covering over in Cynthia’s narrative.

Reading 4: linguistic devices

We argue that silence around sexual desire, and particularly feminine sexual desire, indicates that shame is a central affect, albeit an unspoken one, in this extract and indeed in the field of sexuality. Johnson (2015, 211), for example, argues for the transformative potential of shame for the field: ‘Shame, disgust and the social order have been consistently posited as crucial elements in sexual development’. This theme has been taken up in the South African literature. Morrell, Bhana, and Shefer (2012) for show how sexuality education classrooms may be sites for shaming young pregnant or parenting learners for transgressing feminine ideals, while Kruger, Oakes, and Shefer (2015) argue that through the infusion of fear, shame, and moral transgression into sexuality education discussions, young women are taught that they alone have the power and responsibility to abstain from sexual activity.

Exploring the linguistic devices in the extract emphasises the centrality of shame in Cynthia’s narrative. Firstly, we are interested in Cynthia’s use of rhetorical questions in the first part of the extract: ‘who’s to blame now?’ (9) and, ‘must I blame the husband?’ (9) These questions invite the listener to understand her position as someone searching for answers about her mother’s absence and conjuring up an inclination to blame another. Significantly, authors who have researched shame as an affect and emotion, point to blame, rage and hostility as strong corollaries to shame (Schoore 1994). Returning to Cynthia’s narrative, in a flight from blame, the strong religious emphasis on atonement of those who have shamed is taken up very quickly by Cynthia, as described above, in order to be on good terms with her mother. Nevertheless, Clough (2014) argues that from a religious standpoint, particularly a Christian one, atonement has come to stand for penance, sacrifice and suffering as echoed in Cynthia’s mother’s silence discussed previously. To what extent is this penance further echoed in Cynthia’s role as the Life Orientation teacher consistent with her positioning of herself as a saviour to learners?

The second linguistic feature of Cynthia’s narrative we want to explore is the rhythmic nature of her description of taking responsibility for her brother, in her mother’s absence: ‘I had to go and work’, (50) ‘I had to do everything’, (51) ‘I had to go and

work very young', (51 – 52) 'I had to do it for him', (53) 'I had to see to it that the layette', (54) and 'I had to do everything' (54). The repetition of 'I had to' reflects the relentlessness of her role possibly reflecting a rage consistent with the blame so frequently associated with shame. It also resonates as a penance, mirroring a repetitive prayer that Cynthia was possibly performing for her own shame, not only in relation to her mother's.

Reading 5: intersubjective encounter

We now turn to exploring the relationship between Cynthia and the interviewer, in order to move the analysis beyond an individualistic interpretation towards an interpretation that embraces the notion that what we say is influenced by who we say it to, where we say it and for what purposes. In other words, attending to the performance of the text within the research relationship draws attention to the active negotiation of meaning specifically in relation to the interview/er's role in the unfolding of events. What does this performance say about the meaning of the story?

Throughout the interview there was an over-riding sense that Cynthia was very anxious about being interviewed. She avoided and delayed the interview on a number of occasions. The following extract comes from the interviewer's field notes:

Extract 2

It took a long time to actually interview Mrs Mazibuko. I recall her asking at some point, 'So have you come to do what it is you wanted?' I was very puzzled by this and replied that I was waiting for her – for over half an hour. I also said that I would be alright to continue to wait for her because I could see that she was very busy. However, she remarked that if I was waiting for her then she 'will just cut out everyone else' and sit with me. I was left wondering, then, why I had waited so long.

What is particularly interesting about extract 2 is that it describes a process of being kept waiting, only for this sense making (of being kept waiting) to be denied and indeed counteracted. The second author's sense regarding this waiting was to attribute it to anxiety, not uncommon for research participants despite having consented to the interview. Nevertheless, for Cynthia, we argue this anxiety takes on a particular significance in light of the personal disclosure in the extract we are analysing – she is both an Life Orientation teacher and was a pregnant teenager. We have argued above that the structure of her narrative points to anxiety around this disclosure. However, the denial of a felt reality (of being deliberately kept waiting) so prominent in extract 2 might also be read out as the dominant feeling surrounding extract 1 – namely, the denial of Cynthia's mother's silence, the denial of Cynthia's mother's sexuality and, indeed, the denial of her own sexuality. There is a dominant pattern here of making things what we want them to be. From a Lacanian perspective, language itself is central to this societal imperative to make things what we want them to be; we are born into a language which ensures from the outset that we are split subjects. We are alienated from ourselves because the language with which we are obliged to make ourselves understood is not our own, it is reproduced and reconstructed historically, culturally and socially and is therefore Other (Saville Young and Frosh 2010). Mollon (2005, 167–168) understands sexuality

itself in this way – from the moment we are born, our sexuality is severed from the ‘linguistic self’:

Sexuality is frightening for human beings because its biological imperative threatens the symbolic nature of our sociocultural world and personal identity.... Because sexuality is threatening... it is repressed or banished from discourse.

We argue that both extract 1 and 2 are good examples of this Other at work: the former covering over or banishing sexual desire and shoring up silence regarding, particularly feminine, sexuality; and the latter covering over any anxiety, possibly related to shame, regarding participating in the research.

The second affective quality to the researcher-participant interaction that is noteworthy is that Cynthia is much older than the second author, in fact she is old enough to be his mother. This invoked the second author’s own fantasies around a mother figure as caring, protective and loving. In many ways, Cynthia’s interview narrative supported this construction of herself. However, the second author could not shake the felt sense that there was something controlling about the way in which she cared for people. Her control could be felt in the interview; her responses were measured and well thought-out. She was very much in control of the direction of the talk. However, as the interview progressed her control gradually diminished; she went on to share a great deal of personal information about the struggles that she had been through. She spoke about overcoming these personal challenges with a sense of pride and accomplishment, turning narratives of helplessness and vulnerability into narratives of affirmation and recognition of all the struggles she had been through. In many ways, extract 1 is an exemplar of this genre throughout the interview. We argue that the interactional quality that is being captured here is precisely the *imaginary* in action, to use a Lacanian term again: it is our tendency to view language as a way to really express ourselves, only to find that the language we are required to use is indeed Other, interwoven as it is with dominant ways of saying. We therefore want to resist being duped into a sense that Cynthia was increasingly able to ‘let go’ of control and allow her true feelings to come through; rather we want to maintain that in her desire for respectability, possibly fuelled by individual and collective shame, she adopts a discourse that is not her own but which will nevertheless, provide her with an acceptable identity as a successful educator, loving daughter and sister. In short, we are arguing that despite her very personal narrative and disclosures, and DM’s line of questioning, Cynthia’s narrative reproduces the tendency to keep feminine sexual desire out of discourse. In doing so, the talk facilitates feminine sexuality’s association with shame, which is further ‘associated with aspects of the self that cannot be communicated’ (Mollon 2005, 174).

Conclusion

In this paper, our aim has been to demonstrate a reading of text about sexuality education that engages both with social and psychological processes, not as separate entities but rather as always, already intertwined. The aim was to use this psychosocial approach to interrogate how one particular educator constructs sexualities and teaching sexuality education in conversation with a researcher, and the possible emotional investments underpinning these constructions. As outlined at the beginning of this

paper, research on sexuality education consistently highlights problems with delivery and implementation of educational material, which requires engagement with educators' identities and subjectivities – with how they construct their role in relation to sexuality education 'from the outside' and with how they experience this role 'from the inside', to borrow Johnson's (2015) emphasis.

Cycling through the various readings of the text presented here, we have argued that Cynthia draws on dominant discourses of responsible sexuality, underpinned by the centrality of access to knowledge, and moral decision making, underpinned by religious faith, establishing a sense of right and wrong in a personal narrative about the 'pain of growing up without a mother' (67–68). This narrative provides the rationale for Cynthia to be a sexuality educator: 'It's from my experience. So, that's why I love Life Orientation' (68). Throughout the analysis we engaged both with the discourses Cynthia draws upon 'from the outside', and with the various psychological 'payoffs' that employing these discourses affords. We situate these psychological 'payoffs' not 'in' Cynthia but rather within the interpersonal exchange between the second author and Cynthia, within a very particular socio-cultural context. Our reading highlights the numerous ways in which the interview talk enables feminine sexuality and desire to be avoided, denied and silenced. Even when feminine sexuality is specifically evoked by the research context, it is done so in a way that ensures social and cultural respectability, thereby reproducing shame narratives that form and maintain gendered discourses.

Teaching Life Orientation needs to be recognised as an affective and social endeavour that will not necessarily be improved by giving educators more skills and knowledge. An emphasis on improving skills and knowledge fails to recognise the extent to which educators invest emotionally in their role as educators and in the content they reproduce and the dynamics they facilitate in the classroom. Our analysis of one particular educator's talk about Life Orientation and her role in teaching the subject supports the view that teaching and indeed learning are not purely cognitive endeavours but are social and affective in character (see Hinshelwood 2009). Because of this, the extent to which learning and teaching are mediated by educators' (and learners') uniquely personal biographies, which are themselves located within a sociocultural context, needs to be taken more seriously. The analysis presented here demonstrates the value of understanding and interrogating one particular educator's construction of Life Orientation and her role as an educator at the social, interpersonal and intrapersonal levels. From this perspective, the site of change for sexuality education, therefore needs to be at the level of the emotional engagement of educators, to support Reygan and Francis (2015) call.

Our argument does not intend to undermine the importance of thinking about the content of what educators teach learners in school about sexuality, but what it emphasises is that knowledge, skills or the 'right' curriculum are necessary but perhaps not sufficient in changing the way sexuality education is implemented. We argue for educators to be supported through educator training and peer support in exploring their own very personal relationships to the sexuality curriculum that reinforces silence, for a great diversity of reasons – conscious and unconscious, social and psychological. This silence is particularly and consistently deafening around feminine sexuality and desire, as is the associated shame. Teaching teachers how to teach, is not what is being

argued for here. Rather, we are arguing for peer support in which educators are encouraged to be curious about their own particular stance towards sexuality education, and the extent to which this stance is both made up 'from the outside' and invested in 'from the inside'. Johnson (2015, 212) argues that 'shame is amplified by the cultural requirement to hide shame, rather than acknowledge it'. Acknowledging teaching (and learning) sexuality education as affective processes is crucial given that is likely to evoke a range of emotions, including shame, particularly in relation to feminine sexual desire, as seen in the analysis of this case study. Creating the appropriate space in which shame can be acknowledged without silently being reinforced, is the challenge.

Notes

1. A pseudonym.
2. Transcription conventions are adapted from Parker (1992). When clarifying something, square brackets are used; when there are noises, words of assents and others, slashes are used; the absence of a gap between one speaker and another are indicated with = at the end of one and the beginning of the next utterance; pauses in speech are indicated with seconds in round brackets, eg. (2) for two seconds, and a full stop for pauses less than a second (.); an extended sound is indicated with colon marks, ye::s; emphasis in speech is indicated by underlining those parts of the text.

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