

A discourse of disconnect: young people from the Eastern Cape talk about the failure of adult communications to provide habitable sexual subject positions

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Face-to-face adult communication with young people about sexuality is, for the most part, assigned to two main groups of people: educators tasked with teaching school-based sexuality education that is provided as part of the compulsory Life Orientation (LO) learning area, and parents. In this paper, we report on a study conducted with Further Education and Training College students in an Eastern Cape town. Using a discursive psychology lens, we analysed data from, first, a written question on what participants remember being taught about sexuality in LO classes and, second, focus group discussions held with mixed and same-sex groups. Discussions were structured around the sexualities of high school learners and the LO sexuality education that participants received at high school. We highlight participants' common deployment of a 'discourse of disconnect' in their talk. In this discourse, the messages of 'risk' and 'responsibility' contained in adult face-to-face communications, by both parents and LO teachers, are depicted as being delivered through inadequate or non-relational styles of communication, and as largely irrelevant to participants' lives. Neither of these sources of communication was seen as understanding the realities of youth sexualities or as creating habitable or performable sexual subject positions. The dominance of this 'discourse of disconnect' has implications for how sexuality education and parent communication interventions are conducted.

Key words: sexuality education; parent communication; sexuality; youth; discourse analysis; subject positions

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Introduction

School-based sexuality education, provided as part of the compulsory Life Orientation (LO) learning area, is the most widely implemented sexuality intervention in South Africa. One of the stated goals of this intervention is to 'guide learners to make informed and *responsible* choices about their own health and well-being and the health and well-being of others' (Department of Basic Education, 2011: 9, emphasis added). Broad topics outlined by the Department of Basic Education (2011) in its curriculum statement for Grades 10 to 12 include puberty, STIs (incorporating HIV/AIDS), teenage pregnancies, violence, gender inequality, power relations, sexual abuse and harassment, gender 'differences' in terms of reproduction and roles in the community, behaviours that could lead to sexual intercourse, values and skills relating to decision making regarding sexuality, and peer pressure. Officially, LO should be offered for two hours per week, with the 'Development of the self in society' module that incorporates sexuality education taking up 8 to 11 hours over the year, depending on the grade (Department of Basic Education, 2011).

Other than sexuality education teachers, parents are a primary adult¹ source of information and values about sexuality, through both implicit and explicit communications (Wilbraham, 2008). In light of this, attempts have been made to help parents to engage in positive and frank discussions with their children through national programmes such as loveLife and Soul City (Wilbraham, 2008), as well as through more locally based interventions (Bell, Bhana, Petersen, McKay, Gibbons, Bannon & Amatya, 2008; Phetla, Busza, Hargreaves, Pronyk, Kim, Morison, Watts & Porter, 2008).

In this paper, we discuss how participants from a Further Education and Training college spoke about these two (potential) main adult sources of input. Focus group discussions were conducted in which high school learner sexualities and participants' past high school LO sexuality education were discussed. Participants' talk revealed what we have called a 'discourse of disconnect,' which coheres around a construction of: (a) sexuality education as conducted primarily in a non-relational manner and as futile in terms of changing behaviour; (b) parents as inadequate in communicating about, or responding to, sexual issues; (c) cultural barriers to, and personal discomfort concerning, communication about sex; and (d) negative consequences as a result of inadequate parental communication. As such, there appears to be a disconnection between what young people see as habitable and performable sexual subject positions and the responsible sexual subject position that many sexuality classes and parents attempt to create.

1. In this paper, we concentrate on the responses of participants to adult communication about sexuality. Peers also feature as a source of information and normalisation around particular sexual practices and relations. Peer pressure and peer normalisation are the subject of another paper based on this study (Macleod & Jearey-Graham, under review).

Sexuality education

School-based sexuality education is well entrenched in the Western world (although models differ significantly – Luker, 2006). In line with this trend, and in an attempt to intervene in the high levels of HIV infections, early reproduction and inequitable sexual practices, sexuality education modules were introduced throughout South Africa in the late 1990s as part of the LO learning area (Francis, 2011).

Despite the wide-spread nature of school-based sexuality education, the effectiveness of these programmes is not always clear. Evaluations can be problematic as teasing out the effects specific to these programmes (as opposed to other social influences) is a difficult task. Nevertheless, Kirby's (2011) review of 87 studies of comprehensive sexuality education programmes (i.e. programmes that promote more than abstinence as a protective factor) occurring both within and outside schools, from 16 countries, showed modest but positive effects in increasing protective factors and reducing risk factors for HIV.

Kirby's (2011) review outlines a number of key aspects of successful programmes. Pertinent to this study is the need for 'participatory teaching methods that actively involves students and help(s) them internalize and integrate information' (Kirby, 2011: 17), and the need to address perceived sexual norms and personal values. We shall return to these in the conclusion of this paper.

Evaluations of LO sexuality education modules in South Africa have been scant and lacking in rigour (Mukoma & Flisher, 2008). Those that do exist point to some positive outcomes with regard to improved knowledge, but there is no evidence of behavioural change (Mukoma & Flisher, 2008).

Apart from the evaluations of knowledge and behaviour changes resulting from sexuality education programmes, critical analysis of school-based sexuality education is growing both in South Africa (e.g. Francis, 2010; 2011; Macleod, 2009; 2011) and elsewhere (e.g. Abel & Fitzgerald, 2006; Allen, 2007a; 2007b; Fields, 2008; Luker, 2006). Pertinent to this paper are critiques concerning the primary emphasis on risk and responsibility and the didactic manner in which many classes are delivered.

With adolescence being constructed as a time of 'stormy transition' (Fields, 2008; Macleod, 2011), the unexamined assumption undergirding many sexuality education programmes is that youth sexuality needs to be disciplined, with the individual adolescent being taught how to exercise 'responsible' choices (Kelly, 2001; Macleod, 2011). Indeed, as indicated above, the Department of Basic Education (2011: 9) places 'responsible choices' at the heart of the LO curriculum. In line with the ABCD approach, responsible choices are understood as, optimally, abstaining from sex (A) and delaying sexual debut (D). If this is not possible, responsibility shifts to being faithful to one's partner (B) and using a condom (C). As such, attempts are made to 'responsibilise' individual young people (Kelly, 2001) with self-management around sexuality being the core theme, often with little acknowledgement of the societal,

gendered and structural factors that construct and constrain sexual behaviour and 'choices' (Macleod, 2009).

Responsibilisation is premised upon, and is presented alongside, constructions of youth-at-risk. Sexuality education programmes are largely dominated by motifs of risk associated with disease, danger and violence both in South Africa (Macleod, 2009) and further afield (Fields, 2008). This emphasis on the risks of youthful sex focuses attention on individual (mis)behaviour and the self-regulation in which young people need to engage in order to avoid these risks.

These 'risk' and 'responsibility' messages 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).

Parental communication about sex

Wilbraham (2008) discusses how the 'gold standard' of child-rearing practices, based on Western cultural models, includes open and frank discussion between parents and children about key life issues, including sexuality. Such discussions are understood to be a protective factor against HIV. However, research findings indicate that both in South Africa and other sub-Saharan countries, parental communication about sex is often authoritarian and uni-directional, and contains vague warnings about the dangers of sex or the need to avoid sex (Bastien, Kajula & Muhwezi, 2011; MacPhail & Campbell, 2001; Paruk, Petersen, Bhana, Bell & McKay, 2005),

Parents themselves have reported feeling confused about communicating with their children about sex for a variety of reasons: intergenerational communication about sex is seen as the responsibility of elders (not parents) (Paruk et al., 2005); it is feared that these discussions will awaken sexual curiosity and initiate sexual engagement (Paruk et al., 2005); and sexual intercourse, contraception, sexual harassment and molestation are seen as taboo subjects in families (Madu, Kropiunigg & Weckenmann, 2002).

As indicated by Wilbraham (2008: 102), parental communications about sex 'are not simple, rational, individual choices ... (but) are negotiated in complex, interactive contexts of multiple voices, positions and audiences.' For example, a sense of disempowerment among black parents living in impoverished settings means that they tend to resort to punitive parenting methods; parental absence from home due to employment or other reasons often restricts opportunities for communication; and any parental communication about sexuality that is instituted is usually restricted

to negative warnings to avoid sex (Paruk et al., 2005). These warnings are directed mostly at daughters rather than sons (Paruk et al., 2005).

About the study

The research questions that animated this study were:

1. What discourses do young people from an FET college deploy when talking about the sexualities of high school learners and the sexuality education lessons they received when they were at high school?
2. What interpretative repertoires were drawn on in the deployment of these discourses?
3. What are the implications for various sexual subject positions in the deployment of these discourses?

In this paper, we talk to the discourse of disconnect that emerged in the data, animated by a number of interpretative resources.

As suggested by these questions, the theoretical foundation of this study is discursive psychology, in which prevailing meanings are seen as being simultaneously enabled and constrained through discursive resources (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Taylor & Littleton, 2006). In this paper, we understand 'discursive resources' as consisting of both broader discourses and more specific interpretative repertoires (equivalent to what Taylor and Littleton [2006: 35] call 'wider discursive resources' and 'local discursive resources'). Broad discourses refer to wide-ranging, commonly used systems of meaning which constitute objects of a particular type and create subject positions for people to occupy. Interpretative repertoires are more circumscribed 'culturally familiar ... line(s) of argument' (Wetherell, 1998: 401). Discourses are understood as being recited through the use of specific interpretative repertoires.

Discursive resources create subject positions, which are then available for speakers to take up, perform, or resist. The idea that subject positions are both 'conferred from above' in a top-down fashion by available discursive resources, and also agentively taken up or resisted in a bottom-up fashion, is commonplace in current narrative and discursive canons (e.g., Davies & Harré, 1990; Taylor & Littleton, 2006; Wetherell, 1998). Certain discursive resources (e.g. the discourse of disconnect found in our analysis) could provide possibilities for resisting subject positions that are conferred from above (e.g. the 'responsible' sexual subject).

Focus groups were chosen as the vehicle for data generation for several reasons: the interactive, social nature of focus group discussions provides insight into the co-construction of social realities (Frith, 2000); authors suggest that disclosures about sensitive topics such as sexuality are enhanced in a group in a non-threatening way (Frith, 2000; Kitzinger, 1995); and cultural divides could be bridged through group dynamics (e.g., group members explaining unfamiliar vocabulary and idioms, and

jointly interpreting or explaining the interviewer's questions) (Frith, 2000; Morgan, 2002). This latter aspect was particularly important in this project given the major differences between the first author (a middle-aged, white, English-speaking woman) who collected the data and the participants (young, black, isiXhosa-speaking men and women). Interestingly, participants indicated at the end of the discussions that this very difference appeared to have made it easier to talk about sex (there was no sense of comparison or judgement, and the usual cultural imperative in terms of addressing elders with respect did not apply).

Participants were recruited from the student body at an FET college in the Eastern Cape. FET students were decided on because, as slightly older people, they would be able to talk about the sexualities of high school learners with some degree of freedom, insight and reflexivity and, as such, could function as expert informants. Although there are limitations to this in that participants were not asked to talk to their immediate experiences, we felt that, as most were newly graduated from school, they would have sufficiently close experience to provide in-depth and trustworthy data. In addition, we avoided the ethical difficulties of directly asking school learners or minors to share personal stories about their own sexualities and LO lessons.

Students who had completed Grade 12 at school were recruited from the Higher Educational Programmes (level N4 and N5). The first author recruited participants by going into classes to explain the research in detail (including that we would not be asking them to divulge personal information). It was stressed that participation was voluntary and that participants could withdraw at any time during the discussions. All participants signed informed consent forms. Focus group discussions took place during free periods.

This FET college student body has a sex ratio of approximately three females to one male. Although we were able to improve on this ratio somewhat in the participant mix, male voices were still under-represented with 24 females and 14 males participating. The age range was 19 to 25 years with an average age of 21 years. All but three of the participants had attended former DET high schools (schools designated for black African learners during apartheid).

Six initial focus groups were conducted: two with both women and men (marked in the extracts below as Groups 1 and 2), two with women only (Groups 3 and 4), and two with men only (Groups 5 and 6). Focus group discussion questions were formulated around: first, nine 'post-secrets' containing a sexual theme generated by Grade 9 learners as part of a previous project;² second, participants' views on the sexual and gendered behaviours of high school learners; thirdly, their experiences of school-based sexuality education programmes; and, lastly, from where else they learnt about sex and gendered behaviours.

2. These 'post-secrets' served as stimulus materials in a similar fashion to vignettes. They were generated as part of a writing project that was run by a university journalism and media studies department.

All participants were then invited to two mixed-gender follow-up groups (Groups 7 and 8). A total of 25 participants attended the two follow-up groups. The follow-up groups explored in more detail some of the themes that emerged from the initial groups. Furthermore, at the start of the follow-up interviews, participants were asked to write down what they remember being taught about sex and sexuality during LO classes in their high schools.

Discussions in both the initial and follow-up focus groups lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Although the research did not specifically ask about parental or peer communication, these topics came up frequently and spontaneously in the discussions (peer communication is the subject of a different paper based on this research).

Interviews were conducted by the first author in English. Although the participants' first language was isiXhosa, the medium of instruction of the FET college is English. Nevertheless, the voices of participants who were more fluent in English would have been favoured. Feedback from participants showed that, while using a second language made the conversations more difficult for some, others felt freer to speak about sex in English.

Ethical clearance for this project was given by the Research Projects and Ethics Review Committee (RPERC) of the Psychology Department at Rhodes University. Permission to recruit and conduct focus groups was obtained from the campus manager and the Higher Education Programmes deputy of the FET college. As indicated, informed consent procedures were followed with participants, including permission to audio- and video-tape the sessions (the latter to help identify speakers in the transcriptions). In addition, containment protocols were put in place in the event of distress, and one part of the consent form included the commitment not to divulge personal information of group members to others outside the group.

Audio recordings were initially transcribed by an independent assistant fluent in both isiXhosa and English. The transcriptions were checked by the first author against both the video and audio recordings. Pseudonyms were used throughout. All data were coded using a process of immersion, sorting and sifting as we sought for common linguistic patterns and themes that cohere around interpretative repertoires and discourses both across and within interviews (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Taylor & Littleton, 2006).

Background: participants' rendition of what is taught in sexuality education

At the start of the two follow-up groups, 24 participants answered the written question, *What were you taught about sex and sexuality during Life Orientation classes in your high school?* This question taps into what participants remember being taught, and speaks to the information that they retained from these classes. Nineteen

participants mentioned being taught about safe sex practices, usually around the ABCD (abstain, be faithful, condomise, delay sexual initiation) model. The risks or dangers of sex, specifically STIs and pregnancy, were, according to participants, spelt out clearly. With this as background, teachers then reportedly spent dedicated time teaching the participants how to either avoid sex or, as a last resort, to practice it 'safely'. Six participants (five of whom were women) mentioned being taught that 'sex is for marriage people' (Nobuhle) or that 'sex is not something you can do at an early age' (Phumeza). Thus, participants' memories of LO sexuality education place such interventions directly within the risk and responsibility model.

The discourse of disconnect

Participants frequently deployed what we have called a 'discourse of disconnect' when talking about adult-centred sexuality communications. This was evidenced both in how participants spoke about the manner in which sexuality education classes were delivered or parents spoke about sex, and in how the messages were taken up in participants' lives. The interpretative repertoires that build up a discourse of disconnect centre on: (1) non-relational instruction in sexuality education; (2) the futility of sexuality education in creating the responsible sexual subject; (3) the inadequacy of parents in communicating about sex; (4) barriers to parent-child sexual communication; and (5) negative consequences resulting from inadequate parental communication. These are discussed below. All names are pseudonyms.

'They all preached': An interpretative repertoire of non-relational instruction in sexuality education

Participants spoke of how the 'risk and responsibility' messages referred to above were delivered in non-relational ways. For example:

Group 5 (Men)

Researcher: What kind of things did they, did they teach you ((in sex education))?

Sipho: Aah, abstinence [Andile: STIs] they all preached abstinence /Researcher: mm/ja

Andile: And all that STIs, HIV

In this extract, the use of the word 'preached' constructs the teacher as a moral authority who instructed learners in the 'correct' way to conduct themselves sexually. Such instruction was reportedly delivered in the style of a sermon, where there was no discussion, debate or interaction and where the learner was expected to take on a passive and unquestioning position.

A lack of relational engagement between the teacher and the learners is constructed as problematic in the extract below, as the participants indicate a desire for more in-depth discussions about sexuality:

Group 1(Mixed)

Bonani (m3): Yes, they just don't pay much attention [to talking about sex], they don't go deeper [Fezeka (w): go deeper] =

Researcher: They don't go deeper in class /Bonani: yes/ when you say they don't go deeper what do you mean?

Buyiswa (w): They just say if you sleep with a boy you will get pregnant or you will get AIDS /Fezeka (w): ja, ja/ =

Researcher: So, so what do you think they should be saying?

Fezeka (w): Like straight examples, straight talk it out the way it is /Woman: stories/ ja =

Researcher: So they should give stories=

Woman (unidentified): Ja stories and ask questions

These participants state that teachers just give the standard 'scare' messages about sex, rather than 'going deeper'. Participants agree they wanted classes in which there was varied input regarding sexuality, with real-life 'stories,' 'straight talk' and 'asking questions,' which engage learners on an interactive level. Furthermore, Fezeka's request for 'straight talk it out the way it is' questions the plausibility of the 'scare' messages, as such messages are not considered to be 'straight talk' about the realities and complexities of sexuality.

'We don't do it in outside life': An interpretative repertoire of the futility of sexuality education

Participants spoke about how the messages received in sexuality education classes had little bearing on their behaviour. The participant below talks about how discussions about responsible behaviour have had little impact:

Group 6 (Men)

Fikile: Hayi, ((no)) maybe you see now there's err a government policy whereby the kids need to know things at the early stages /R: mm/. But the rate of pregnancy does not drop /R: ok/ even now they give free condoms, they give education in schools and everything. But the rate of peer pressure does not drop it's still there. Pregnancy at school /R: mm/ they do get pregnant, it's been years talking about abstaining, using condoms and everything ... we do it as a subject, Life Orientation they taught us that. We just do it as any other subject /R: mm/ we write tests, don't do, which are the best ways to abstain /R: mm/. We studied them, we know it's in our mind /Lifa: ja/ but we don't do it in outside life /R:mm/.

3. In a mixed-sex group, participants' pseudonyms are followed by an indication of whether it is a man or woman speaking.

This participant constructs sexuality education as being disconnected from 'outside life'. Knowledge of safe sexual practices, learnt in the classroom and studied 'as any other subject,' does not translate into changed sexual behaviours as 'the rate of pregnancy' and 'the rate of peer pressure does not drop'. The facts learnt in the classroom are spoken of as largely irrelevant to their lives, particularly in the context of 'peer pressure'.

Participants spoke repeatedly in the group discussions of 'peer pressure' which, as discussed more fully in Jearey-Graham (2014), operates through emotional and physical inclusion or exclusion from the group, as well as through the peer normalisation of sex. We see in the extract below how peer and media normalisation of sex operate to counter messages received through sexuality education:

Group 3 (Women)

Researcher: How did you find your Sex Ed lessons in high school, how was it? ...

Phumeza: It was, it was helpful /R: ok/

Nandipha: Just for the knowledge because ((but)) we don't practice it /Phumeza: yes/

Later...

Lindelwa: To be honest I don't think u::m (.) the ((sexuality education)) lessons will be useful /R: ok/ u::m because of peer pressure (.) Ja because like always there will be like a person coming to you or like you will be over hearing or watching TV, things that happen. So obviously you will want to do that thing

Group 2 (Mixed)

Researcher: In the Sex Ed that you had in school, what kind of messages are you given there around sex?

Mcebisi (m): ABC

Menzi (m): That we must condomise, ABC

Researcher: Ok you must condomise, abstain be faithful condomise /YES/ do you think, do people follow that?

Nobuhle (w): No /no/, they just wanna have experience, you can't just sit back and do nothing

While many participants, including Phumeza, expressed appreciation for the knowledge that they received during sexuality education lessons, the goal of such lessons to 'responsibilise' learners was constructed as unrealistic. Peer or social representations of sex are seen as providing much more performable sexual subject positions for learners than sexuality education classes. In particular in the above extracts, these representations provide the platform through which the 'experience'

of sex can be explored ('you will want to do that thing;' 'they just wanna have experience'). See also Jearey-Graham (2014) in which it is shown how peer pressure and peer normalisation are associated with promoting gendered sexualities.

An interpretative repertoire of inadequate parental responses

Participants generally constructed their parents as responding inadequately to their sexuality through, first, providing either insufficient or moralistic information and, second, not accepting them as sexually active people. It is notable that participants mostly spoke about their mothers as inadequate in this regard (thus bringing a gendered aspect into the assumption of responsibility around parental communication). In addition, all the women who recited this particular repertoire revealed at some stage in the interviews that they had been pregnant while at school:

Group 1(Mixed)

Nokukhanya (w): My mother never told me about stuff like that ((menstruation)), they never knew that I was on the stage ((of puberty)) because I was young and naughty. ... So I told this other teacher who was giving me pads, so I got to my mother at home I was like, I was just showing her this. And always she used to just buy pads and give, she does not talk.

/Many voices/

Zanele (w): I was just told do not sleep with boys =

Buyiswa (w): When you're growing boobs ... /R: mm/ they say ubanangaba ((that)) you are a woman. Now that you are a woman, you must behave and then kengoku ((now)) you must stay out i-sexual activities uyabona ((you see)). They, they won't say ubana ((that)) (.) they don't advise you in a proper way /R: mm/ how to become a woman uyabona ((you see)) /R: mm/ with morals and values =

Nokukhanya talks of her mother's lack of communication as problematic. Both before and after her onset of menstruation, her mother did not talk about 'stuff like that' (she mitigates her mother's lack of knowledge or engagement with her growing physical maturity, however, by indicating that she was 'young and naughty'). In addition to a lack of communication, participants bemoaned the kind of communication they received. We see in the extracts above how participants indicate that they were enjoined not to have sex and to 'behave'. This, in the words of Buyiswa, is in contrast to advice given 'in a proper way'.

The inadequacy of parents' responses extended beyond inadequate or no talk about sexual matters, but also to their reactions to participants' having intimate partners.

Group 1(Mixed)

Buyiswa (w): I would like my parents to say to me ... you must introduce your man to your family uyabona ((you see)). Because if I come with my boyfriend, mother will (slap) me uyabona. /Women laugh/ she will say ubana ((that)) what's this ntoni ntoni ((and so on)) [Lihle (w): you are disrespecting] you're disrespectful /Woman: ja/ whereas we need their support /R: mm/ from them.

Group 1(Mixed)

Nokukhanya (w): They ((adults)) say now that you're having a boyfriend you lantoza ((how do I say it)) =

Fezeka (w): You become cheeky=

Bonani (m): Back to this cheeky /Researcher: alright/ if a girl has broken even a cup, 'It is because of this boyfriend of yours' /Women: mm/yes/laughter/ even to guys it is happening that thing /Women: mm/ that 'The reason why you do not look after goats or some sort of or after sheep, it is because now you have seen yourself a man.'

Buyiswa expresses a desire for her parents' acceptance and support of her as a sexually active woman through welcoming her boyfriend into the family home rather than slapping her. Participants refer not only to physical punishment, but to punitive messages: they are accused of being 'cheeky' and of no longer being responsible by breaking things and not looking after livestock.

An interpretative repertoire of barriers to parental communication

While parents were spoken of as communicating inadequately with young people, participants also mentioned barriers to communication, most notably 'culture' and their own personal discomfort. 'Culture,' in particular, was used as an explanation for difficulties in sexual communication between parents and children:

Group 4 (Women)

Zintle: And even me, I can't talk about my boyfriend to my mom because=

Andiswa: Especially our culture=

Zintle: She's gonna shout at me=

Andiswa: In our culture, it is rude=

Zintle: Ja it is rude to talk about your boyfriend to your mom or your dad or your sister...

Group 6 (Men)

Lelethu: And in our culture it's a disgrace to share feelings, t::o talk with your mother about boyfriends and girlfriend

'Culture' is used in these extracts as a discursive resource to explain why parents and children cannot talk about sex together. Seen as a static and homogenous social force, 'culture' is depicted by Andiswa and Lelethu as dictating what is rude or disgraceful. The notion of 'respect' was referred to often by participants, and has been noted in other research (Wood, Lambert & Jewkes, 2007). *Ukuhlonipha* (to respect) has, in general, been cited as a key component of isiXhosa culture (Bongela, 2001). It is interwoven complexly into a range of relations centred on gender, age and status. In this case, the disruption of respect (rudeness, cheekiness) is a generational one, in which speaking about sex, or becoming sexually intimate, marks an inappropriate up-take of adult status among those designated as not-adult. Lelethu extends the notion of respect to include shame. Not only is such talk disrespectful, it is also a 'disgrace'.

As Macleod and Durrheim (2002) explain, 'culture' is inhabited, particularly in South Africa, by notions of 'race'. References in these extracts to 'our culture' are made within a particular racialised context in which the group participants are signified as racially and culturally distinct from the facilitator. In this context, isiXhosa or 'black' culture is 'yoked into the explanatory framework of a problematised phenomenon' (Macleod & Durrheim, 2002: 781) which, in this case, is a lack of inter-generational sexual communication. This occurred even when troubled by the facilitator, as evidenced below:

Group 6 (Men)

Researcher: Do you think, do you think most parents are able to talk with their children about sex quite comfortably?

Fikile: Not in our culture /R: not in your culture/

Lifa: Ja they always shout /LAUGHTER/

Lonwabo: You don't even think about telling your mom /Man: ja/ about girlfriends /R: mm/

Researcher: It's the same in the white culture, the the, my children, I've got teenage children and they don't want to talk to me about sex /LAUGHTER/

Fikile: Why, why we're saying ah, our culture is different because the, mostly we see it on TV /R: mm/ and then like white people talk to their daughters about boyfriends and all that /Men: MM/ Man: teach her/ that's why we saying it, in our culture /R: mm hmm/

Researcher: No I, and when I was a teenager I didn't want to talk to my mom, I was too embarrassed /LAUGHTER/

The facilitator attempts to trouble the negative positioning of 'our culture' by letting the participants know that difficulties in parent-child sexual communication also occur in 'white culture' (thereby introducing 'race'). The participants resist this formulation using evidence from TV programmes about how it works in 'white culture'. This evidence serves not only to bolster the negative positioning of 'our

culture,' but also provides a normative framework for (racialised) familial functioning. As noted in other research (e.g. Macleod, Sigcau & Luwaca, 2011), when 'culture' is used as a discursive resource to justify particular normative frameworks, the fluid, dynamic and contested nature of 'culture' is glossed over.

Participants also spoke of personal discomfort in discussing intimate relationships and sex with parents:

Group 5 (Men)

Sipho: In my case, when when, the first time my mom asked me if I had a girlfriend I said (.) 'Mom (.) why are you asking me that' /LAUGHTER/=

Andile: (I was) also like that=

Sipho: She was saying 'Answer the question' I was like 'Mom why are you asking me that,' I didn't answer, I just left

...

Sipho: Aahh discussing this sort of thing with my parents it's it's, I don't see it (.) I, it doesn't feel right /R: mm/ it doesn't feel right=

Sizamile: Uncomfortable=

Sipho: Ja even today (.) if I have a girlfriend, I don't tell my parents /R: mm/ if they ask, I deny it

In this extract, we see how personal discomfort serves as a barrier to communication. With regard to being approached by his mother, Sipho talks about avoiding any conversation about girlfriends, with Andile affirming this as a response that he also had. Sipho indicates that it 'doesn't feel right' while Sizamile agrees that it is 'uncomfortable'. This leads to Sipho's denying having a girlfriend or avoiding the conversation. Thus, personal discomfort acted together with 'culture' as discursive resources to justify why young people avoided conversations with their parents about sexual matters.

An interpretative repertoire of negative consequences resulting from inadequate parental communication

Some participants told stories of how inadequate parental communication about sex led to 'sexual mistakes,' as in the extract below:

Group 1(Mixed)

Zanele (w): I think it begins at home (.) it's the parents that have to talk to their kids /R: mm/ because I personally have experience with that because nobody um 'This and this about sex, whatever, boys.' They just told me 'Don't do this and don't do that,' so I developed a rebellious attitude /R: mm/ and I wanted to find out, what is it that they say I mustn't do and why /R: mm/. S::o and that

can lead to like, consequences /R: mm/ and it did in my case because I became pregnant in high school so ja /R: mm/.

Zanele indicates that the injunctions she received from parents did not provide a habitable subject position that spoke to the experiential aspects of sex. Thus, to make up for this lack, she developed 'a rebellious attitude' in which she explored sex and which, in the end, led to 'consequences,' in this case pregnancy.

The participant below muses about how the inadequacy of parental communication led to her pregnancy. Unlike the participant above, however, this participant locates responsibility for the communicative disconnection with herself and her father, as well as on the gap left by her mother's death:

Group 1(Mixed)

Nokukhanya (w): I think if I had told my mom before she passed away that I have a boyfriend, maybe things would have been better ... when she passed away that's when they found out at home that I'm pregnant. But maybe if she knew before she died, maybe I told her that I had a boyfriend maybe she was going to advise me, 'Go to the clinic.' But now, how could I say to my dad that I have boyfriend it's not possible mos ((just)) because obviously he would like hit me.

This participant provides a gendered picture in terms of the inadequacy of parental responses, with the father engaging in punitive actions and the mother, possibly, understanding and helping. A punitive father and her personal discomfort at approaching her mother, however, meant that parental communications did not proffer a space of protection against an unplanned pregnancy.

Conclusion

This paper analysed how FET college students spoke about the sexuality education classes they received at school, and their parents' (lack of) engagement with them about sexuality. We have highlighted how participants deployed a 'discourse of disconnect' in which the responsabilisation contained in adult-centred communications concerning sexuality was seen as being delivered through inadequate or non-relational styles of communication, and as largely irrelevant to participants' lives. We have shown how, through the deployment of a discourse of disconnect, participants constructed the risk averse, 'responsible' sexual subject (which is the mainstay of sexuality education and parental communication) as a non-performable and non-habitable subject position. The messages of risk and responsibility that permeated adult talk on sex find, in the participants' rendition, little traction with young people.

The analysis shows that sexuality education classes were remembered as spaces in which 'risk' and 'responsibility' motifs featured strongly, with risk centring on STIs and pregnancy, and responsibility centring on abstinence, safe sex, sex within

marriage, and delayed sex. These classes were spoken of as being conducted in a primarily non-relational manner and, as such, there was a disconnection between young people and the responsible sexual subject position that such classes attempted to create. Furthermore, parental messages around sexuality (mostly from mothers) were generally constructed as being restricted to negative warnings, meaning that parents were also not creating habitable or performable sexual subject positions for their children. 'Cultural' and personal discomfort barriers to parental communication serve as justifications for young people not engaging in these conversations with their parents.

Participants constructed the 'risk' and 'responsibility' messages contained in sexuality education and parental communication as inadequate representations of the realities of youth sexuality. Peer and social representations of sexuality that speak to the experiential nature of sex were seen as more influential. As indicated by other researchers (e.g. Allen, 2007b; Francis, 2011), an emphasis on risk that evades discussions of sexual desire and pleasure is unlikely to resonate with learners' own preferred self-conceptualisation as desiring sexual subjects, leading to a disengagement from sexuality education lessons.

To avoid this kind of disengagement or disconnection, attention needs to be paid to Kirby's (2011) recommendation, referred to at the beginning of this paper, that successful sexuality education programmes are based on participatory methods that actively involve students and that address sexual norms and personal values. Preliminary suggestions based on the data presented in this paper are that: LO sexuality education classes and the programmes encouraging parent-child sexual communication would benefit from greater engagement with young people's own constructions of desired sexualities, as well as their uptake of social and peer representations of appropriate youth sexualities; LO programmes should provide in-depth interactional dialogue in which students' own stories and experiences of sex are heard; and, if teachers and parents accept young people as sexual subjects, this would allow fuller and more meaningful discussions of issues concerning sexuality, and potentially overcome what young people see as cultural and personal discomfort barriers to communication about sex.

In line with these possibilities, it must be noted that, while a discourse of disconnect was strongly deployed in the discussions, there were (minimal) examples of exceptions. Two participants spoke of their school LO sexuality education classes as encouraging the open sharing of views and feelings in which a variety of sexual subject positions were entertained and learners were seen as knowledgeable and active. One woman spoke of her mother's communication about sex as open and frank. These exceptions indicate that there are possibilities in terms of overcoming the dominant discourse of disconnect through interventions which encourage active and agentic discursive engagement about sexual subject positions between youth and adults.

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