

**JOURNEYS TO SELF-KNOWLEDGE:
A PARTICIPATORY STUDY OF TEACHERS AS SEXUALITY
EDUCATORS**

BY

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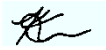
ABSTRACT

In the light of the HIV&AIDS epidemic in South Africa, sexuality education has become a vital responsibility for South African teachers. However, in many South African schools, there is a habit of silence where particular issues are off-limits and many teachers concede that they find it difficult to tackle sexuality-related topics. Hence, in this study, I engaged myself and a group of my fellow teachers of the Life Orientation learning area in a collaborative self-study inquiry to review who we are as sexual beings, how we understand sexuality and how this self-knowledge might affect our interaction with learners and our teaching of sexuality education. To take us on this collaborative journey of self-knowledge, we employed qualitative methods of storytelling, audio recording of conversations, reflective journaling, collage-making and letter-writing.

This study revealed that although, as teachers, we have been positioned as knowledge bearers and pedagogic experts, who are expected to be capable of making appropriate choices for teaching sexuality education, our own personal relationships with sexuality influence the different positions that we adopt as we interact with the content and the learners. Through our collaborative inquiry process, we began to recognise and shift the various positions that we held on sexuality. We came to appreciate and show that our positions are flexible, as when we were within a safe, interactive environment that both respected the positions we brought into the process and encouraged critical re-thinking of these positions, we began to reposition ourselves. Through the study, we also became more aware of how we were positioning others through our actions and our words. We came to a realisation that learners, colleagues and parents also bring their positions on issues and thus they too need to be understood within their own contexts, for the improvement of sexuality education in schools. The study revealed how the challenging of teacher positioning, when done in a supportive, interactive environment, can result in a repositioning of the self that brings us closer to becoming the teachers we wish to be, as we collectively influence change.

STATEMENT BY SUPERVISORS

This dissertation is submitted with my approval.



.....

Dr Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan

This dissertation is submitted with my approval.



.....

Prof Dennis Francis

DECLARATION

I, **Lungile Rejoice Masinga**, do hereby declare that:

- i) The research reported in this dissertation is my original work, except where otherwise indicated.
- ii) This dissertation has not been previously submitted by me for any degree at any other University.
- iii) The dissertation does not contain other person's data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
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 - a) Their words have been paraphrased, but the general information attributed to them has been referenced;
 - b) Where their exact words have been used, their writing has been placed inside quotation marks, and completely referenced.
- v) This dissertation does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from online facilities, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the dissertation and in the reference section.

Signature: -----

Date: -----

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/ ACRONYMS

LO - Life Orientation

DoE - Department of Education

DoHET – Department of Higher Education and Training

NCS – National Curriculum Statement

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CHAPTER ONE

UNDERSTANDING SEXUALITY AND OUR SEXUAL IDENTITIES: OUR JOURNEY BEGINS

1.1 Introduction

During my master's study of integrating sexuality education in my teaching practice in my grade six class (Masinga, 2007), I became aware that how we as teachers view ourselves as sexual beings play a central role in how we will be as teachers of sexuality education. Thus, my aim for my doctoral study was to engage in a process of collaborative inquiry with a group of my fellow teachers to explore: (1) how we see ourselves as sexual beings, and (2) how that self-knowledge might contribute to how we interpret and teach sexuality education and relate to our learners.

In this introductory chapter, I explain how this study was conceptualised. I begin by discussing my professional and personal motivation for the study. I then list the three key research questions that have guided me in this study and briefly indicate the two research methodologies that I have used in exploring these questions. Next, I consider the socio-educational context for the study, highlighting how, particularly in the light of the HIV&AIDS epidemic in South Africa, sexuality education has become a significant and challenging responsibility for schools and teachers. I then explain the theoretical perspectives that have informed this study. To conclude, I offer an overview of the chapters that comprise this thesis. It is important to note that I have chosen not to designate one particular chapter of the thesis as a literature review chapter. Instead, I have woven in my engagement with relevant literature throughout the thesis, with the aim of demonstrating how and when the work of published scholars has contributed to my thinking (Nash, 2000) "as part of a conversation in progress" (Badley, 2009, p. 107).

1.2 My professional motivation for the study

When one puts the words 'children', 'sex' and 'sexuality' in a sentence, one is very likely to meet with resistance from many angles (Aggleton, Ball, & Mane, 2000). Even the mere thought of learners in the intermediate and senior phases (grades 4 to 9) of schooling as sexual beings, who might be sexually active, brings frowns to the faces of many adults (parents, communities and teachers) who seem to be unwilling to see the realities that exist within their own communities and schools. Nonetheless, the high prevalence of HIV&AIDS

and other sexually transmitted diseases, as well as early teenage pregnancies, has forced a situation where the image that we might have of ‘innocent children’ and their sexuality needs to be reviewed and re-examined (Berger, Bernard, Carvalho, Munoz, & Clément, 2004; Francis, 2009). The danger posed by HIV&AIDS to young teenagers in South Africa has been seen in the numbers of the newly HIV infected teenagers: “In 2007, young people as young as 15-24 accounted for an estimated 45% of new HIV infections” (Shisana et al., 2009, p. 19). Furthermore, as Ponzett, Selman, Munro, Esmail and Adams (2009, pp. 93-103) highlight, “sexual activity among youth, especially unplanned, and unprotected behaviour, has significant repercussions for both physical and mental well-being, such as sexually transmitted infections” and “teenagers in contemporary society are not only more active, they are also engaging in activities involving greater risk-taking”. Additionally, issues of sexuality for most young people extend beyond deciding whether, when and how to have sex. Instead, they are engaged in an often perplexing process of coming to terms with what it means to be a sexual being and with the complex emotional and relational aspects of sexuality (Berger et al., 2004; Ponzett et al., 2009). However, for many adults, it appears to be difficult to accept that children and young teenagers are going through such stages and that some are even already sexually active by the age of 12 (Department of Education, 2000).

Hence, the response of the South African National Department of Education (DoE) with the introduction of the Life Orientation (LO) programme as a learning area in schools (see Department of Education, 2002). Life Orientation is one of the eight learning areas that were introduced to schools as part of Curriculum 2005, with sexuality matters being part of the content taught. As Croft (1992, p. 452) explains, “the rationale for intervention with preadolescents [such as the intermediate and senior phase learners] is that by waiting until adolescence some of the target population already may be engaging in negative risk-taking behaviours, thereby decreasing programme effectiveness.” Therefore, Piot et al. (2008) suggest that globally there should be:

a clear focus to ensure that all young people have the information they need before and while they are engaging in sex, especially in light of the high infection rates in young people, especially girls, and the early ages of sexual initiation—in many countries, 14–15 years is the median age of first sexual intercourse. (p. 849)

It is this clarity that the LO programme is aimed at achieving.

Sexuality education is meant to form a key part of the LO programme, where issues such as sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, love and other related topics are meant to be discussed by teachers with their learners. These issues are not only confined within the LO programme, but also appear within other learning areas such as Natural Science and Languages. With the introduction of LO in schools, sexuality education has become a particularly important responsibility for South African teachers, especially within the context of the HIV&AIDS epidemic. Furthermore, as research suggests that learners are more likely to discuss sexuality related issues with their teachers rather than their parents or peers, teachers have a professional obligation to talk about sexuality (Zisser & Francis, 2006). Through LO, educators are expected to “help the learners to find their way from here to there in the context of their sexuality, using a roadmap that ought to lead them successfully to becoming what they are not” (Chege, 2004, pp. 1-2): mature and responsible sexual beings that are in tune with their emotions and are skilled in handling life-changing situations and decision-making.

With the impact that HIV&AIDS has had on the lives of South African families and school communities, one would assume that by 2012 talking about sexuality matters should be second nature to us as a community of South Africans and even more so within the context of schools. One would also expect teachers to be willing and able to play the leading role in the success of the LO programme. However, this does not seem to be the case, as the silence around issues of sexuality seems to grow in deafening proportions, creating a gap between the child/teenager and an appropriate sexuality education that is meant to assist learners with making informed decisions regarding sexuality. In many South African schools, there is a habit of silence where particular issues are off-limits and many teachers still acknowledge that they find it hard to teach some of the topics covered within the LO programme (Helleve, Flisher, Onya, Mukoma, & Klepp, 2009; Morrell, 2003). Teachers and learners are often hesitant when it comes to talking about sexuality matters and appear to be either “unable or unwilling to reflect personally on issues of gender and sexuality” (Morrell, 2003, p. 42).

Hence, this thesis builds on the Master of Education (MEd) study that I completed in 2007, where I explored these issues with regard to my own teaching practice. In my MEd study, I used a self-study methodology to research and examine my own teaching of sexuality education across the Grade 6 curriculum (see Masinga, 2007; Masinga, 2009; Pithouse, Mitchell, & Masinga, 2009). Through self-study, I was able to increase my self-knowledge

and thus better understand my professional identity and teaching practice in relation to sexuality education. I also worked collaboratively with my Grade 6 learners to identify their immediate needs in relation to sexuality education and then used this information to inform my teaching practice. In the process, the Grade 6 learners became effective partners in their own learning.

One of the key findings of my MEd study was how imperative it is that, as teachers, we learn to understand our own background and its implications for how we will be as sexuality educators in our classrooms. It is that understanding that can bring our attention to our limitations and to the possibilities that are there for effective learning to take place. Hence, I concur with Morrell (2003, p. 44) that “a person who either feels unable to talk about certain subjects or emotions or is unaware of certain aspects of his or her history suffers from silence.” In my view, that silence affects both our personal growth and our development as teachers because, as Allen (2009) points out, teaching sexuality education means that teachers need to be at ease with the contentious topic of sexuality, as well as with their own sexual identities and experiences. According to Greenberg (1989, p. 228), “teachers who are not accepting of their own sexual thoughts and desires are liable to demonstrate their discomfort with various sexual topics and may transmit their guilt shame and/or embarrassment to their students.” Thus, we as teachers need to understand ourselves as we teach sexuality education to our learners (Chege, 2004).

In conceptualising this PhD study, I wanted to undertake a process of collaborative inquiry with a group of my fellow LO teachers to explore our own understandings of sexuality and our sexual identities, as well as how these understandings might affect how we interpret and teach sexuality education. Hence, I wanted us to examine how our personal histories might have affected the kind of teachers we have become as we have engaged with the curriculum of the day, in particular, with sexuality education (Samaras, Hicks & Berger, 2004). Because I agree with Kehily (2002, p. 215) that “teachers’ biographies and personal experiences play a significant part in shaping and giving meaning to the pedagogic styles they adopt”, I wanted us to engage in a journey of increased self-knowledge within the context of sexuality, thus leading to a process of self-introspection that could begin a process of changing what needs to be changed to become more effective teachers of sexuality education. My intention was that through a process of developing increased self-knowledge, we would work together to examine our own “motives, feelings, ego, fears and interests” (Allender, 2004, p. 17) in

relation to sexuality, which in my view, was imperative in understanding how we dealt with sexuality education. I hoped that we would then begin to identify areas within our own lives and our teaching that might be hindering our teaching of the LO programme, thus opening a conversation amongst teachers that would help to improve our teaching on issues of sexuality.

1.3 My personal motivation for the study

As an intermediate phase educator (grade 4 to 6), I feel that I have experienced all emotions known to humans. These are all brought about by my day to day interaction with the learners as I aim to achieve the task of imparting knowledge to every child that enters my classroom. None of these emotions, however, has had more impact than the feelings of despair and the need to cry that have accompanied the increase of the number of complex social issues that come before me as they are experienced by the learners. It has become apparent to me that our roles as teachers have taken a sharp turn to an area for which we are largely unprepared.

Not so long ago, I never would have imagined that at grade 6 level I would have not less than two learners that are HIV positive. Nor that I would be teaching learners that do not know what it means to have a mother or father or both. These learners have little idea of what adult intervention and care means, as they do not receive it at home. Neither did I envisage that my learners would know more about sexual issues than I had ever imagined when I was their age. I am concerned about my capacity to respond to these complex and challenging social and emotional issues in ways that will be *educative* and will thus enhance learning (Dewey, 1963), rather than being *mis-educative* or obstructing or distorting the development of further learning (Dewey, 1963).

Never during my teacher training had I envisaged that I would fear to give a task as simple as: *“Write a short autobiography passage where you highlight your experiences, be they are positive or negative in your life.”* Now I fear what I will receive from learners in the form of their writing. How do you not feel despair and read with a straight face and not break down and cry when a child writes to a message such as the following?

“I do not know what a mother or a father is. My life has always been in a home for children. I believe in GOD, so I know that one day I will have a mother. Every day I pray that GOD keeps me alive so that I will see that day. That is all I pray for every

morning, as I thank GOD for each day, I pray that my sickness does not take me while I still have so much to know. I do not feel sorry for myself, I am happy all the time because I know that there is that day and that GOD loves me. I do not have many experiences but what I dream I will experience one day.” (A grade 6 learner’s class work, 2010¹)

The harsh reality that I have to face every day is that I have no words to ‘make things better’ for the learners. Through the LO programme in schools, we are supposed to bring some kind of comfort and knowledge that will enable the learners to handle issues such as these. And the people that are charged with bringing that programme to life are us, the teachers. Consequently, this makes the LO programme my concern, as its success or lack of it falls on my shoulders.

When I ventured into my MEd study (Masinga, 2007), that responsibility was weighing heavily on me. Through my MEd research, as mentioned above, I sought to find solutions to dealing with that desperation and feeling of helplessness. I worked together with the learners of my grade 6 class, to find out about immediate ‘burning issues’ that they needed assistance in understanding, and how could I best provide opportunities for them to learn. Thus, I took an introspective journey through self-study into my own teaching while integrating sexuality education in other learning areas, with the aim of extending opportunities for learners to gain a sound understanding of issues concerning their own sexuality.

It was within that journey that it became apparent to me that, as a teacher, I had many ‘demons’ within my own personal self that affected the professional self (Masinga, 2007; Masinga, 2009). I realised that I still had a long journey to take to fully comprehend how my apprehensions about issues of sexuality had affected the kind of teacher I had become. Hence, what has influenced this doctoral study is my desire to share this journey with other teachers of LO, to see what is it about our histories as sexual beings that might hinder us from having effective contact with the learners in our classrooms in order to provide them with the necessary tools to handle the challenges that are brought on by their own journeys in this world as sexual beings.

¹ This piece of writing was reproduced with permission from the learner.

It is my view that this study will be significant to all those who are engaged in the field of education who have an interest in how they can better understand their task and find ways and means to improve their performance as teachers to provide an educative environment (Dewey, 1963) for the learners we teach. This study has the potential to influence pedagogy and teacher positioning (Francis & De Palma, forthcoming), as teachers look for new ways for self-improvement while learning better ways to deliver certain types of content effectively to the learners.

1.4. My research questions and methodological approach

The three key research questions that have guided me in this study are:

- 1. How can teachers better understand their own sexual identities?*
- 2. What are teachers' key experiences as sexuality educators?*
- 3. How might increased self-understanding influence how teachers interpret and teach sexuality education?*

I have drawn on two research methodologies in exploring these questions: *self-study in teaching and teacher education* (see, for example, Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009; Samaras, 2011) and *collaborative inquiry* (see, among others, Bray, 2002; Kasl & Yorks, 2002). My intention in combining these two methodological approaches was to facilitate my own journey as a researcher and as a participant and also to facilitate a collective journey of understanding for all the participants of this study. (I discuss my use of these two methodological approaches in detail in Chapter Two.)

1.5. Putting the study into socio-educational context

The end of the apartheid regime in the 1990s in South Africa coincided with an increasing public awareness of the prevalence and impact of HIV&AIDS. The newly elected government of democracy had to react fast to the call imposed by the epidemic. This was evident in the development of a new “*National policy on HIV/AIDS, for learners and educators in public schools, and students and educators in further education and training*” (Department of Education, 1999). It was also apparent in a speech that was made by Kader Asmal², when the new National Curriculum Statement was developed that included Life

² Kader Asmal was the Minister of Education at this time.

Orientation (LO). Asmal argued that sexuality education needed to be integrated into the ethos of schools and the official curriculum:

Sexuality education is essential at a time when our society is experiencing unacceptable levels of exploitation, violence, and sexual abuse of the young, a devastating HIV/AIDS epidemic, high incidence of pregnancy among school girls and high risk-taking behaviour among our young people. (As cited in Jones, 2001, p. 3)

Hence, within the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) of 2002, which was the prescribed curriculum for grade R to nine in South Africa, LO was presented as a guide that would prepare learners for life and its possibilities (Department of Education, 2002). LO was meant to arm learners with values, skills, and knowledge for positive living in a swiftly transforming society. The emphasis was also on empowering learners to negotiate safer sexual behaviour, as well as to understand matters of gender, sexuality, and sex.

In the context of the HIV&AIDS epidemic in South Africa (see Shisana et al., 2009), the responsibility of talking about matters such as sexuality has become a public responsibility, with educators being at the forefront of the battle. As Donovan (1998, p. 21) argues, “given the number and proximity to students, teachers are best placed to deliver sex, relationship, and HIV education.” Therefore, those who teach sexuality education form an integral part in the successes of the LO programme. However, these teachers must become at ease with sexuality-related language and content in order to teach well and thus deliver what is been intended by the Department of Education (Allen, 2009).

Unfortunately, however, accomplished sexuality educators appear to be mostly lacking in South African schools (Baxen & Breidlid, 2004; Francis, 2009; Francis, 2012; Helleve et al., 2009; Rooth, 2005). Jansen (2001) highlights this dilemma when he points to the problematic relationship between policy images of what a ‘good’ teacher should look like and the actual personal and professional identities of teachers. The Department of Education’s guide for teachers (2000), “*The HIV/AIDS emergency: Guidelines for educators*”, acknowledges that many teachers are not used to talking about sex with children and feel that this is in conflict with their culture. Ahmed et al. (2009) also found conflict between the messages that teachers were expected to teach and their own personal beliefs and values. Furthermore, according to Morrell, Moletsane, Epstein and Unterhalter (2002, p. 14), “for

various reasons, which include being parents themselves, teachers have also been found to shy away from discussing HIV&AIDS and sex in the classroom.” Hence, many teachers “experience both personal and cultural contradictions” when teaching sexuality related matters (Helleve et al., 2009, p. 197). Related to this is that the language of sexuality can pose problems as many teachers have trouble in speaking about sex, sexual intercourse, or sexual organs such as the penis or vagina (Department of Education, 2000). Similarly, Greenberg (2001, p. 228) writes that “emotion is often associated with sexual language and sexual content. Sexual words too often prevent a logical, thoughtful discourse because of the emotions they provoke” Consequently, as Helleve et al. (2009, p. 198) note, some South African “teachers [have] difficulties using their native language when they [are] teaching but [find] it less problematic if they [use] English instead.”

What has also contributed to an apparent reluctance to teach sexuality education in many schools is that the LO programme is often taught by educators who are not trained to teach LO and often have not chosen to teach LO (Francis, 2009; Helleve et al., 2009; Kehily, 1998; Rooth, 2005). In South Africa, teachers of the intermediate and senior phases do not usually specialise in particular subjects or learning areas. Hence, they teach learning areas that they have been allocated to due to balancing of workloads of the staff. Thus, the LO learning area often falls to any teacher to whom it happens to be allocated and there is a high turnover in staff teaching LO (Helleve et al., 2009; Rooth, 2005). This is often exacerbated by a lack of appropriate continuing professional development for teachers on issues of LO (Francis, 2009; Kehily, 1998). All these personal, cultural and professional factors can lead to sexuality education becoming part of the null curriculum in schools, that is, not being taught or not being adequately taught, despite being part of official curriculum policy (Eisner, 2002).

1.6 Theoretical perspectives that inform the study

Through this study, I aim to contribute to a research discussion that is already taking place about how sexuality as a social and cultural construct, developed within and response to our social and cultural contexts, shapes and informs teachers’ sexual identities and understandings, their practices of sexuality education and the positions that they adopt in relation to teaching sexuality education (see for, example, Francis, 2012; Francis & De Palma, forthcoming; Baxen & Breidlid, 2004; Molestane, 2011; Helleve et al., 2004; Tasker & Damanin, 1999) . Thus, my study has been informed by two main theoretical perspectives: a *social constructivist* lens and *positioning theory*.

During the collaborative self-study research process (as demonstrated in the following chapters) taking a *social constructivist* perspective assisted my participants and I in creating our own new understandings of sexuality based upon the interaction of what we already knew and believed about our own sexuality with our lived experiences of teaching sexuality education (Richardson, 1997). Within the South African context, as explained by Rabie and Lesch (2009), a social constructivist approach assisted us in discussing the historical, social, economical and religious contexts within which our sexualities have developed. Social constructivism acknowledges the value of active learning or meaning making (Richardson, 1997), which was what my study aimed to do as we took a journey into our own lives as sexual beings and as teachers of sexuality education in the LO programme. Social constructivism also addresses issues of social and individual identity development by acknowledging that “the development of an individual relies on social interactions” (Richardson, 1997, p. 8). Thus, a social constructivist perspective also assisted us as we attempted to understand our backgrounds in the context of our sexualities and the implications for how we have developed and are developing as sexual adults and sexuality educators in our classrooms. Furthermore, as clarified by Giles (2006), generally facets of human actions and experience are influenced by the culture in which they exist. Hence, social constructivism provided a lens through which we could view our social interactions as we shared the cultural meanings that we brought as sexual beings within the group and as individual participants (Richardson, 1997). Thus, a social constructivist perspective assisted our research process in serving as a “construction and deconstruction site of socially developed understandings” (Strong, 2005, p. 516).

Positioning theory emphasises that “how people are positioned in any situation depends both on the context and community values and on the personal characteristics of all the individuals concerned, their personal history, their preferences and their capabilities” (Barnes, 2004, p. 3). I understand positioning theory in terms of a triangle of interrelated *positions*, *storylines*, and *conversations* (Harré & van Langenhove, as cited in Francis & De Palma, forthcoming) and, as demonstrated in the following chapters, *positions*, *storylines*, and *conversations* form an integral part of my study. Positioning theory suggests that when a teacher takes on a particular *position* as her own, she generally views the world from that position and expresses and embodies that position through and in relation to the *storylines* that she lives out, shares, and makes sense of in *conversation* with others (Davies & Harre, 1990; Harré & van

Langenhove, as cited in Francis & De Palma, forthcoming). It is on this premise that positioning theory has been used as a theoretical lens in this study – for us as participants to engage in storytelling and conversation in order to gain further understanding of the positions we adopt in relation to the diverse personal and professional roles that we have taken on or been assigned, as well as how we have positioned others when dealing with the issues of sexuality. As Harre, Moghaddam, Cairnie, Rothbart and Sabat (2009, p. 5) explain, positioning theory “is concerned with revealing the explicit and implicit patterns of reasoning that are realized in the ways that people act towards others”. Hence, positioning theory has offered a way to understand and reconsider how we have approached issues of sexuality in our classrooms and how our social and cultural experiences have formed a foundation for those positions that we have taken or allocated to other people (Francis, 2012).

1.7. An overview of the thesis

1.7.1 Chapter One

In Chapter One, I have attempted to clarify how this study was conceptualised. I have explained how and why I wanted to undertake a process of collaborative inquiry with a group of my fellow LO teachers to open up our own understandings of and positions on sexuality and our sexual identities, as well as to explore how these understandings and positions might influence our teaching of sexuality education. I have shared my concerns about my capacity to respond in an educative manner to the complex and challenging social and emotional issues that my learners are facing and my concerns about sexuality education becoming part of the null curriculum (Eisner, 2002) in South African schools. I have also indicated the three key research questions that underpin this study, as well as the collaborative self-study research approach that I have used. Finally, I have explained how my study has been informed by two main theoretical perspectives: a *social constructivist* lens and *positioning theory*.

1.7.2 Chapter Two

This chapter focuses on the two methodologies that I have used in this study: *Self-study in teaching and teacher education* and *collaborative inquiry*. In this chapter, I reflect on my experiences while working with these methodologies and consider their suitability for the study. This chapter also describes the research setting and participants who took part in the collaborative self-study journey. I offer a detailed explanation of the data generation, interpretation and re-presentation processes. To conclude, I give a reflective view of the

journey that I took as a researcher participant in the study. Highlighted in the chapter is the significant value of participant input. I emphasise the importance of providing a conducive environment that offers a sense of comfort for the participants as they adjust to what is required of them. I also draw attention to the need for constant reflection on the part of the researcher to try to achieve a sense of balance between the researcher and participant roles.

1.7.3 Chapter Three

Chapter Three explores my first research question, “*How can teachers better understand their sexual identities?*” I demonstrate how, as participants, we discussed the differences in our understanding of sexuality and told stories of experiences that have influenced the development of our sexual identities and the different positions we have taken on sexuality as we have interacted with the world as teachers and as people. I show how storytelling, collage and conversation with trusted ‘friends’ enabled a process of personal and collective meaning-making centred on better understanding sexuality and our sexual identities. This chapter highlights how teacher conversation and storytelling can be valuable and challenging ways for teachers to develop in their personal and professional capacity – as they express and re-examine their views and experiences through collective participation.

1.7.4 Chapter Four

Chapter Four continues the depiction of our journey towards understanding the development of our sexual identities. In this chapter, I show how I undertook further analysis in my role as the researcher, looking for additional meaning and explanations for what we had experienced collectively. In the process, I identify and discuss five key issues for further interpretation and understanding: *an abusive environment as a source of influence; a heterosexuality laden environment; physical attributes as source of self-worth; an environment limiting sexual expression of women; the reaction: how we respond to our experiences influences identity.* My discussion of these issues gives further clarity to my enhanced understanding of how our cultural and social interactions and environments affect our development, understandings and positioning as sexual beings.

1.7.5 Chapter Five

Chapter Five address my second research question, “*What are the key experiences of teachers as teachers of sexuality education?*” I discuss participants’ views on what is expected from us as LO teachers by various role-players within the schooling system. I also

deliberate on what we as participants expressed as our limitations in teaching sexuality, particular in relation to ‘uncomfortable talk’. This then raises the question of, *“Whose role is it to teach sexuality education?”* Related to this, is a consideration of how LO tends to be viewed as the responsibility of female teachers. For me, the main learning of this chapter is how LO teachers seem to have been positioned by others and to have positioned themselves in ways they often find problematic and how a way forward for sexuality education needs to be collectively developed by all role-players in education.

1.7.6 Chapter Six

Chapter six is the concluding chapter that looks at the collaborative self study journey that has been travelled. This review of the study is interwoven within the third research question, *“How might increased self-understanding influence how teachers interpret and teach sexuality education”*, which brought the research back to who we are as teachers. We reflected on this question through reflective letter-writing (which will be discussed in Chapter Two). The insights shared in the letters are used at various points of this chapter, to exhibit growth and understanding of the implications that has been achieved by the participants. This chapter shows what we have identified and learned about how we as teachers have been positioned in various ways, and the positions we have also taken in relation to the task of teaching sexuality education.

1.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shared my professional and personal motivation for the research. I then outlined the research questions that underpin the study, and gave a brief introduction to the methodological approaches used for the study. I proceeded to put the study into socio-educational context and also discussed the theoretical perspectives that have informed the study. Lastly, I gave a general overview of the thesis, giving an idea of what each chapter represents for the study.

Chapter Two addresses the methodological aspects of the study. In this chapter, I offer my reflections on my experiences of working with two methodologies and explain their relevance to the study. I go on to explain the research paradigm that underpins this study. Next, I describe the research setting and participants. To follow, I explain the data generation, interpretation and re-presentation processes. Finally, I end by giving my reflective opinion on working within two methodologies and my own journey as a researcher participant.

CHAPTER TWO

OUR COLLABORATIVE SELF-STUDY RESEARCH JOURNEY

2.1 Introduction

In this study, I have aimed to engage myself and a group of my fellow teachers of the Life Orientation (LO) learning area in a collaborative inquiry. The intention for the study was for us to reflect on who we are as sexual beings and how we understand sexuality. I also wanted us to reflect on how our personal histories have affected the kinds of teachers we have become and how that self-knowledge might translate into the positions we take and how we teach sexuality education within the LO curriculum.

In the previous chapter, Chapter One, I discussed how this study was conceptualised, and gave my professional and personal motivation for the study. I then listed the three key research questions that assisted in guiding the study. I briefly gave insight into the two research methodologies that assisted in exploring the research questions. I then considered the socio-educational context for the study. I further discussed the theoretical perspectives underpinning the study. Lastly, I gave an overview of the chapters of this study.

In this chapter, I focus on the methodological aspects of the study and reflect on my experiences of working with two methodologies. I also explain the relevance of the methodological choices made for the study. I begin by explaining the research paradigm that underpins this study. Secondly, I discuss the two methodologies that I have used within this study, explaining their suitability for this study. Next, I describe the research setting and participants. To follow, I explain the data generation, interpretation and re-presentation processes. Finally, I conclude by giving my reflective thoughts on working within two methodologies and my own journey as a researcher participant.

To develop and demonstrate trustworthiness in my study, I have drawn on Feldman's (2003) recommendations for establishing trustworthiness in self-study research. Following Feldman's advice, in this chapter, I endeavour to give clear and detailed descriptions of what has counted as data in my study and how data was generated. To support my descriptions, I offer examples of

data that provide evidence of both my experiences and my participants' experiences. As per Feldman's suggestions, I also aim to provide comprehensive descriptions of how I worked collaboratively with my participants to generate and interpret this data. It should be noted that some parts of this chapter have been published in an article on methodological reflections on using memory-work in a participatory study of teachers as sexuality educators (Masinga, 2012).

2.2 The research methodologies

My study is situated within the qualitative paradigm. Working qualitatively has allowed me to achieve an in-depth understanding and detailed description of teachers of LO between grades four and nine, collaboratively looking at the group's experiences and understandings of sexuality and sexuality education. The qualitative paradigm has also assisted me in exploring how my fellow teachers and I give meaning to sexuality education and express our understanding of ourselves and our experiences and contexts (Yates, 1998).

In developing the overall research approach for my study, I drew on the research methodologies of *self-study in teaching and teacher education* and *collaborative inquiry*. My understanding of *self-study* is founded on literature (see, among others, Loughran, Hamilton, LaBoskey, & Russell, 2004; Mitchell, Weber, & O'Reilly-Scanlon, 2005; Lunenberg & Willemse, 2006; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009; Samaras, 2011) and my use of a self-study methodology in my Master's research (Masinga, 2007). I understand *self-study* to be a process through which an individual can engage others in collaborative processes of self-examination and self-evaluation. The aim of such engagement is gaining some understanding of a specific issue of concern in relation to practice. Self-study allows researchers to come to an understanding of why they do things the way they do and why they take particular positions within their practice. Through this introspective journey, the individual identifies issues of concern and aims to work out solutions for dealing with these issues, to bring about positive change. In the context of this study, this process involves my fellow teachers of Life Orientation and me specifically looking at our teaching of sexuality education.

In my understanding, *collaborative inquiry* (see, among others, Bray, 2002; Dyer & Loytonen, 2012; Kasl & Yorks, 2002; Millett & Tapper, 2012; Zelman, 2002), is when a group of

individuals with a common problem collaboratively work together to identify the important factors that cause this problem to be of concern. This view is shared by Kasl and Yorks (2010, p. 316), who explain that, “collaborative enquiry is a systematic process in which participants organise themselves into small groups to explore a question that all members find compelling.” For my study, the focus of our collaborative inquiry was our common interest as LO teachers teaching sexuality education. The aim of the study was to examine our personal experiences to create new meaning through action and reflection. Collaborative inquiry allows for personal and professional development of participants that has potential to lead to a process of healing and building of the self (Kasl & Yorks, 2010). Together, the participants design a programme of action with different activities that might assist them to shed some light on the issues under scrutiny. Through collective participation and reflection, they share their thoughts, experiences, beliefs and possible strategies that will bring them to a place where they might find understanding and solutions. They aim to find a way forward towards improving what they have initially identified as a concern (Kasl & Yorks, 2010).

What follows is an attempt to give further understanding to what self-study and collaborative inquiry involve as methodologies for research and why I decided to combine these two particular methodologies in this study.

2.2.1 Why self-study methodology?

This study is the extension of the journey that began in my Master’s, where I sought to understand my practice as a sexuality education teacher. For my PhD study, I aimed to engage not only the participants, but also myself, the researcher, in a journey of self-knowledge as teachers of sexuality, hence the use of self-study as one of the methodologies. As suggested by Samaras (2011), self-study requires that you work with a critical friend; for this study, each of the participants took on that role for the others. This facilitated my aims of cultivating a collaborative environment. As Samaras (2011) explains, although I am studying my practice, and myself there has to be another person or persons that join in that journey in order for me to receive feedback from others so that I can extend my individual understanding. Critical friends will further, “encourage and solicit respectful questioning and divergent views to obtain

alternative perspectives and work to help validate the quality and legitimacy of each other's claims" (Samaras, 2011, p. 10).

For purposes of my own professional growth, cooperation with others through collaborative engagement was important "since self-study is not done in isolation but rather requires collaboration for building new understanding through dialogue and validation of findings" (Samaras & Freese, 2009, p. 5). I felt that working with other teachers who shared the same professional concerns and the need for improvement within our own practices would allow my own self-study process to take place within a validating and challenging environment for me – an environment that would provide a sense of growth and understanding of the need to change and put past experiences into a new perspective.

Hence, my aim was for my participants and I to engage in open dialogue and to share our private reflections, seeking understanding of our classroom practice that would lead to its positive reconstruction as we aspired to bring positive experiences to the learners we teach. As Samaras (2011) explains, self-study can facilitate this kind of interaction: "Self-study builds on the necessity of a relationship between individual and collective cognition in teachers' professional development and the power of dialogue in building a learning community of engaged scholarship" (p. 5). As a practicing LO teacher, it became imperative that I relook at and reposition myself as a teacher in the classroom, thus rendering the learning process for my learners an educative one. I anticipated that a deeper understanding of my current teaching practice would bring me closer to the journey of finding what needed to take place for change to happen.

I required a methodology that would also productively generate ways that would allow me to connect my academic research with my own personal professional development (Lunenberg & Willemse, 2006). I aimed at making the connection between my academic growth and my role as a practising teacher. Thus, I hoped to turn my newly acquired academic knowledge into a productive tool for bringing change to classroom practice. It is important to note that while self-study research is self-focused, it is also improvement aimed (LaBoskey, 2004). This was vital to my study, since in my view, education must be about change rather than the preservation of the

status quo such as the silence around issues of sexuality. We cannot simply rely upon what we already know and practise concerning the LO programme.

However, I could not ignore that talking about lived experiences has not generally been part of the learning process for me as a teacher or within my own private life. This is evident in the manner in which I was educated at school during the apartheid era. The dominant pedagogical mode of teacher-centredness did not give room for expression on the part of the learners. Similarly, Kunene (2009) and Makhanya (2010) express that their schooling in the Bantu Education system during the apartheid era in South Africa was about learner submissiveness and conforming to authority rather than challenging and questioning. Bantu Education was the result of a vision of the apartheid government that aimed at maintaining racial segregation and hierarchy of whites and blacks in economic, social and educational structures (Christie & Collins, 1982). In my experience, as black learners during apartheid, we were treated as receivers of information and we were not given opportunities to develop the capacity to express ourselves. That also translated to how we were trained to teach before the changes that took place in South African curriculum policy with the introduction of a learner-centred approach (see, for example, DoE, 1997). These changes came about with the transformation that took place post-apartheid within education policy, where the new aim was to embody the vision and values of our society's newfound democratic freedom (Kunene, 2009). However, as teachers at that time, we had already been trained in a teacher-centred approach where teachers delivered content and were the conveyers of knowledge instead of facilitators of learners' construction of knowledge (Jansen, 2001; Kunene, 2009).

In my private life, I was raised in a time and place when the saying "children should be seen and not heard" was pervasive. Furthermore, as I discussed in my Master's study (Masinga, 2007), children were assumed to be asexual and thus not in need of engagement in sexuality matters. We never received any opportunities to express our thoughts and emotions about sexuality or other burning issues. Therefore, we learned to be silent and deal with issues on our own, since both in private and public, a podium for expression had not been provided.

These past habits of teacher-centredness seem to persist in the Department of Education (DoE) workshops that I attend that are intended for teacher professional development. The workshops generally seem to be content delivery driven. Teachers are informed on how they should be teaching and issues that might prove problematic are never discussed (Kunene 2009; Makhanya, 2010). When questions or concerns are raised by the teachers, this is viewed as complaining on the part of the teachers and the words, “It’s policy!” usually follow (also see Pithouse, 2001). In my view, this means that, as teachers, it becomes essential to provide ourselves with spaces and situations that will provide that room for discussion and reflection on our daily practices. Consequently, for my own growth, I believed that self-study could assist in that regard, because, as stated by Austin and Senese (2004, p. 1256), self-study “urges teachers to find their voices, to deepen and multiply their relationships, to improve their practices, and to discover their capacity as leaders of change.” Hence, drawing on the self-study research genre, I aimed to embark with my participants on an introspective journey of our own histories and practices in order to reflect on some of the issues that might hinder or enhance our ability to effectively teach sexuality education.

Due to the sensitive nature of the study of sexuality, I realised that this journey would require trust and finding courage within ourselves to be vulnerable as we talked and faced our own fears and actions as teachers as well as sexual beings (Lunenberg & Willemse, 2006). Therefore, to create an atmosphere of trust, every session began with a brief reminder of the ethical responsibility we had towards each other. I also opened myself up to being vulnerable in the presence of my participants by revealing my own insecurities and stories. In this way, I hoped that we would accommodate each contribution in a caring and sensitive manner that showed respect for each other’s feelings and different experiences.

I needed to find out who we were as teachers of LO and I believed that this is what self-study would allow me to do, as it is about who teachers *are* rather than only what they *do* when they are in the classroom (Samaras & Freese, 2009). Because what we do as teachers is interconnected with who we are as people (see also Masinga, 2009), this also involves many influences such as family, culture, peers, friends and other people that we happen to meet in life and who have an impact on us. Thus, in doing self-study, I sought opportunities for us to connect

to those other selves that have been of influence and to re-examine how they might have affected our present thoughts and actions as we reflected and engaged in dialogue.

Moreover, according to Samaras, Hicks and Berger (2004, p. 905), “the profession of teaching, historically, has struggled with the degree to which the personal experiences of the teacher can and should influence classroom practice.” Teachers in my view are not robotic tools of content delivery. They are functioning human beings with thoughts and opinions that affect how they will be and act as teachers. Hence, the importance of self-study in this research, as I believed that it would allow me to use my own experiences as a resource for the research and my own personal growth. I wanted to revisit and re-evaluate my beliefs and positioning, and those of my participants, as we focused on understanding the self both at professional and personal levels (Samaras & Freese, 2009). I anticipated that a self-study methodology would provide my participants and I with “a powerful mechanism” to “discern how [our] lives [impacted on our] ability to teach [sexuality]” (Samaras et al., 2004, p. 905). Through sharing reflective stories from our own pasts, I hoped that we would allow ourselves to go to places that might hold a key to understanding how what we had previously experienced in our lives had reflected itself in our present positioning as teachers.

2.2.2 Why collaborative inquiry?

The intentions of this study extended beyond my own learning and understanding of myself as a LO teacher, teaching the sexuality content of the learning area. I wanted to share this journey with other LO teachers, who had found themselves confronted with this enormous responsibility that had landed firmly into their laps and classroom. The inclusion of sexuality issues in the LO programme in South Africa did not happen through consultation with teachers (Francis, 2009; Helleve, Flisher, Onya, Mukoma, & Klepp, 2009). It became part of a package of what had to be taught, irrespective of teachers’ own capability or inclination to handle the responsibility that came with it. Hence, to facilitate this journey with others I needed a methodology that not only complimented self-study, but could bring together a group of individuals working in different contexts but sharing the same task or problem of engaging with sexuality on a personal and professional level. I found that within the methodology of collaborative inquiry.

Collaborative inquiry “is a systematic process [for learning from personal experience] consisting of repeated episodes of reflection and action through which a group of peers strives to answer a question of importance to them” (Bray, Lee, Smith, & Yorks, as cited in Kasl & Yorks, 2001, p. 4). I wanted us to systematically explore our daily practices as sexuality educators looking at how our personal experiences as sexual beings might have affected how we engage with and deliver the LO content to learners we teach. I wanted us to reflect on our own past actions, thoughts and feelings that have shaped our current positioning as sexual beings and teachers. I thought that this could be done through different interactive activities, such discussions, storytelling and collages, that would assist us in the journey we were embarking on together.

Our common goal would be to explore how we could become better teachers of sexuality education and how talking about our past experiences might help us realise this dream. As explained by Kasl and York (2010), I anticipated that participatory exploration of our personal experiences could allow us to gain a deeper understanding of these experiences. I wanted our experiences as participants to form a significant part of the process because of my recognition that teachers’ knowledge and perspectives would form an important base for the learning that was to occur. I felt that since our experiences were personal, collaborative inquiry would allow for some of the location of power of the process to lie within the hands of the participants (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995).

I anticipated that collaborative inquiry would allow my participants and me to do more than just identify problems and theorise about them, but also to work together towards change and developing ourselves as teachers of sexuality education. In this way, we could develop knowledge for action as we began changing what needed to change as sexuality teachers (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). The collaborative method is also context-sensitive as it allows the participants to have a say in where and how the conversation is to take place – thus taking some control in how they will experience the journey into a sensitive area. This was necessary for the context-specific nature of the issues that would emerge from our discussions. I realised that some of the issues and stories related would be very private and sensitive in nature. I hoped that within the collaborative environment such issues would find sanctuary in the knowledge that there was mutual understanding and respect for each other and we had a common goal. As collaborative

inquiry emphasises a ‘bottom-up’ approach (Cornwall et al., 1995), I also hoped that we would be in shared control of our journey and learning.

2.3 Research setting and participants

2.3.1 Selecting the participants

Initially, my intention was to engage seven teachers, including me, on a self-knowledge journey. The teachers who were to be the participants of the study were at the grade 5 to 9 level (intermediate and senior phase, in the GET [General Education and Training] band, teaching the LO learning area in their schools.

Due to the nature of the intermediate and senior phase curriculum in schools, the School Management Team of the school determines the allocation of duty loads and learning areas. That means that most educators do not choose to teach LO. This is borne out by the literature that is discussed at various stages throughout this thesis (see, for example, Francis, 2009; Helleve et al., 2009). Indeed, it emerged that only one of the research participants who took part in this study had chosen to teach LO. Likewise, for me, initially teaching LO was not a choice; instead, it was allocated to me as a new teacher who was given the learning areas that no one else was interested in. However, later on it became a learning area of choice for me, one that I always argue for to keep teaching (see Masinga, 2007).

As I began the process of writing the proposal that led to this thesis, I had informally been engaging in discussions with teachers that I intended to invite to participate in the research. They came from schools within the three main townships around the Durban area. These teachers were all black, Zulu speaking, female educators with no specific age group targeted. These eight educators and I had all gone through the Bantu Education system. Three of the participants trained in the former black teacher training colleges, while four trained in an ex-white college of education. The differences within these training colleges were along racial segregation lines. In black training colleges, teachers were trained for specific purposes to teach only in black schools and the white, Indian and coloured teachers were also trained accordingly in their designated

colleges. In addition, within the colleges, different pedagogical styles were taught that were in line with the agenda of the government of the day, which was to maintain apartheid ideologies through a system of racially segregated education (see Enslin, 1990; Kunene, 2009; Makhanya, 2010). All seven female teachers, including myself, have had postgraduate training in different universities and belong to some form of women's club within the townships. All participants in this study fell within the range of 30 to 40 years of ages. In Table 2.1. I list the participants' pseudonyms and other relevant personal and professional biographical details. Due to my role as a participant, as a researcher, I have also decided on giving myself a pseudonym. The intention was to allow equal opportunity for the contributions made by all participants and not have my own dominant.

PSEUDONYMS	Marital status	Number of children	Grades taught	Highest qualification
Mbali	Married	Three	Nine	Honours
Londi	Single	One	Eight and nine	Honours
Zama	Divorced	Two	Seven	Honours
Mandla	Single	One	Four	Diploma
Sihle	Single	None	Six	Diploma
Zoleka	Single	None	Six	Master's
Azande	Single	None	Nine and ten	Honours
Lunga	Married	None	Seven	Honours
Xoli	Single	One	Five	Honours

Table 2.1: Participants' personal and professional biographical details

We conducted the meetings in any language that each participant felt comfortable using. I felt that this was important to allow participants freedom of expression within comfortable circumstances. The issue of comfort for the participants was of importance to me. In my view, we needed to feel that we had some control over the environment that we were working in and language to me is one of those means (see Masinga, 2007). I believe when people have freedom of expression and choice of language to be used, they tend to give more and be more expressive of their opinions through words that best make sense to them. Hence, isiZulu

was the most frequently used language in the sessions. Despite some initial apprehension, I found that the use of isiZulu in the sessions did not cause significant difficulties for me when it came to translating our conversations into English. This was because in expressing and clarifying themselves, participants used mainly English terms. This made the task of comprehension and translation of meaning fairly straightforward for me as the researcher.

The participants being all females had a methodological implication. I was aware that working within sexuality education would mean dealing with issues of a sensitive nature and therefore some level of privacy for the participants was imperative. Hence, I believed that the use of collaborative inquiry, as it is context-sensitive, would allow us as females to bond over the issues of utmost importance to us. I also anticipated that it would allow us free expression that might otherwise have been jeopardised by the presence of male counterparts. Furthermore, through my own observation at a DoE workshop on LO for two clusters in the Durban area, there were only two males present, with one of the facilitators being male. This suggested to me that the issue of LO in most schools was viewed as a ‘female thing’. If that was the case, it seemed important to me that those seen as ‘appropriate’ for teaching the learning area should be the ones that I engage in this learning journey. Furthermore, as a female teacher and researcher of the LO programme who was also a participant, I felt that my own capabilities could not be disregarded. I was aware that I had yet to develop the ability to explore and engage in issues of sexuality with a group of men. Indeed, the self-study journey that I took in this research might have now brought me closer to understanding why this was so.

The recruitment of the six participants took place with me having a one-on-one meeting with each of them. At this meeting, initial explanations were made and we discussed how they would personally be involved in the research and its implications for them as participants. This also gave them a chance to ask any questions that they may have wanted to ask in private to ease their minds on some issues and procedures.

The next phase was the group meeting intended for introductions to each other. In that meeting, I gave a detailed description, outline and expectations of the research process. This gave the teachers a chance to assess each other and thus make a decision about whether they could work

together. We also addressed the issue of consent and ethical issues. The participants were assured of full confidentiality and that any data generated from the research would be used only with their approval and consent. They were also assured that they would have control over their participation, and that nothing was binding and they could pull out at any given moment if they felt uncomfortable and wished to do so. For ethical reasons, they were also required to sign a written consent form (see Appendix A).

During this meeting, six participants were confirmed; however, the study ended up with nine participants. This came about when, during the week after the first group meeting, one of the participants contacted me requesting that I also invite a fellow LO teacher who was a friend of hers and openly lesbian like herself. She felt it would be of interest for me to have her friend participate. I realised that she had a valid point and it did not escape me as well that she was also concerned with her own comfort. I realised that having a friend that was also lesbian in the group would provide her with that comfort. Since I knew the person concerned, I understood her perspective. However, before confirming, I had to call all the other participants to explain and to seek their consent. Later on, I received another call from a participant who too had a suggestion about including another LO teacher who was also a guidance teacher in her school. This teacher was at that time also studying for her master's degree in sexuality matters. I went through the same process of asking the other participants for their approval, which was given. I then made time to meet the two new participants to explain the study and the process we were about to engage in. Hence, the study ended up with nine teacher participants, including me as the ninth participant.

2.4.2 The setting for our meetings

The meetings that we held all took place at different venues. The introductory group meeting took place at the home of one of the participants that was located within the central part of town. That made finding and reaching the place possible for the participants. This was after many telephone conversations to make sure all were comfortable with the suggested place, which turned out to be a good idea, as some had issues with parking as they considered the safety for their cars and reaching the place on time. The next group meeting in which we discussed issues of concern for them and any further questions of clarity they might have thought of after the first

meeting took place in a hotel coffee shop. This location suited all, due to its centrality to all means of transport, which included parking at a walkable distance from the car. We conducted the rest of the meetings, which were the research sessions, at my house, which was accessible for all. We allocated people with cars to pick up fellow participants. I was highly appreciative of this assistance. I picked up one participant myself, as we were neighbours. The flexibility of the meeting places prior to the actual research sessions proved instrumental in attaining full participation. I felt that the lack of formality in a place such as the coffee shop provided the participants with a sense of neutrality that made the meeting relaxed and enjoyable for us. It should be noted that this was around the time when there was a teacher strike and I needed to be strategic in choosing an appealing venue to get them to choose to come to my sessions rather than to a rally that had been organised at that time. As closure and a thank you to the participants, we held a final dinner at one of the local restaurants that accommodated a little privacy for conversation.

During the course of arranging the entire process, I played the role of the organiser and facilitator of the 'how's and where's'. I played this role because I was the researcher and the 'owner' of the research process. I had to clarify these aspects of my role for the participants and to explain that when the sessions were in progress, I would assume the role of the participant. The relationship that I had with some participants was of long standing, dating back to our teacher training days. Others I knew as colleagues teaching in neighbouring schools and attending the same cluster and workshop meetings. I believe that pre-existing relationships that I had with the participants added to the generation of rich data for this study. As Tillman-Healy (2003) suggests, the relationships that we have or develop with our participants provide more reasons and ways to connect with each other. I felt that my relationship with the participants provided a space for them to understand that I cared about them and thus they trusted that I would value and respect their input (Tillman-Healy, 2003).

2.3.3 Provision for assistance

In preparing for the research sessions, I was aware that since the issues that would emerge from the research might be of a sensitive nature due to the research topic itself, they could evoke some stressful feelings for the participants (Pithouse-Morgan, Khau, Masinga & van de Ruit, 2012). I

therefore discussed with the participants how they could be assisted in this event. I had elicited the assistance of an NGO called *I Themba Lethu* (Our Hope). They have counsellors that work three times a week with the learners of my school. They also teach their HIV&AIDS programme in the school and have a youth club. I had also requested the assistance of the woman counsellor that works in the local police division of the trauma unit. She deals with sexual harassment, domestic violence and other related issues. She is also the consultant for my school in the event a child is found to be in need of her assistance. She also agreed to assist where necessary and was present on the day of the first group discussion to explain the kind of assistance that she could offer for each individual participant.

2. 4 Data generation and interpretation

<i>Research question</i>	<i>Data generation activities</i>	<i>Types of data</i>
<i>1. How can teachers better understand their own sexual identities?</i>	1. Participants wrote a story of their past experiences. 2. Participants created collages that portrayed / explored their sexuality. 3. Participants related specific incidents that may have influenced their sexuality. 4. Discussion of some of significant past experiences.	1. Written stories 2. Collages 3. Audio recorded conversations 4. Audio recorded conversations
<i>2. What are teachers' key experiences as sexuality educators?</i>	1. Participants kept reflective journals recording thoughts and memories sparked by sessions. They explored what these might mean to their present actions as teachers. 2. Group reflections and discussions.	1. Journal entries 2. Audio recorded conversations
<i>3. How might increased self-understanding influence how teachers interpret and teach sexuality education?</i>	1. Participants wrote a letter to a future self, explaining what they had learnt and would like to remember about themselves as sexuality educators 2. Open discussion on how the process had influenced our view of the subject and its teaching.	1. Letters 2. Audio recorded conversations

Table 2.2: Data generation

As indicated in Table 2.2., through a range of collaborative inquiry and self-study research activities, my fellow participants and I rediscovered and re-evaluated who we were as sexual beings and as sexuality educators. We also critically examined expectations of teachers and teaching within the LO policy. By means of collage-making (see Norris, Mbokazi, Rorke, Goba, & Mitchell, 2007; Seymour, 1995), storytelling and journal writing (see Connelly & Clandinin, 1994; Richardson, 2000), as triggering tools to incite conversation and topics, we identified issues for discussion and how we wanted them discussed. I also kept a research journal and wrote field notes for the duration of the research. The process of generating data commenced from the first school term to the third term of 2010, based on a schedule that we had collectively drawn up. During that time, my participants and I also engaged in collaborative analysis of the data generated through the above-mentioned strategies used to trigger and start conversations. This took place as we engaged in conversations to make meaning of what it was we were saying. We expressed our understandings through our conversations. We had reflections on sessions and moments where we expressed what we thought and felt about prior discussions. Audio-recording those conversations enabled me to include in this thesis the voices of the participants and their thoughts about what it was that they were experiencing in the sessions.

As Pinnegar and Hamilton explain (2009, p. 147), “data collection–data analysis–data interpretation [occurred] in a recursive process from the onset of [the] study.” As a key part of the collaborative inquiry process, my participants and I made collective meaning from the data as it was generated through the research process. In collaborative inquiry, co-researchers work together to recall, re-present, and examine data from their personal experience. The focus of the collaborative data generation and interpretation process is on “reflection, analysis, and meaning-making” (Kasl & Yorks, 2002, p. 6). This data analysis process involves the group reflecting “on patterns of meaning in the collective stories” (Kasl & Yorks, 2002, p. 7). As another phase of the data analysis, I as the researcher sought to find further meaning in our interpretations of the process as I engaged in my own reflective journey and wove my own researcher voice into the analysis. I also had a responsibility to report on what it was that I was discovering about our journey, as both researcher and participant. As part of my own growth and understanding, I needed to engage in the process of breaking down what we had learned and reconstructing it in ways that would assist me to gain more insight into what we had learned from the process

(Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). As discussed by Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009), I also needed to account for my own learning, in dialogue with that of the other participants.

2.4.1 Storytelling

In attempting to answer the first critical question, “*How can teachers better understand their own sexual identities?*” we employed storytelling as means of memory-work to re-experience and reflect together on our experiences. We started with the notion that “subjectively significant events, events which are remembered, and the way they are subsequently constructed play an important part in the construction of self” (Onyx & Small, 2001, p. 774) and we discussed the use of the stories in this study. As means to introduce storytelling, I started us on a walk down memory lane, to reminisce on the time when we were little girls. We talked about how stories have played a part in our lives as black people and also as women, growing up within a black Zulu culture that is rich in folk-stories that have been passed on from generation to generation.

Together, we reminisced about what happened when we received our first periods (menstruation). We discussed how our parents reacted and what they did (particularly our mothers). We spoke about how most of us were sent to our grandmothers for the ‘talk’. We all told of the stories that some of our grannies related to us, to teach and make us understand what was happening to our bodies and what it meant to how we related to the opposite sex. One example is the story related by Mbali where her mother sent her to her grandmother who happened to be part of the women that were responsible for taking the girls of the community to the yearly *Mhlanga*¹ ritual. To her grandmother, maintaining a girl’s virginity was very important and thus that was what she emphasised in the story. Her grandmother related how if Mbali kept herself a virgin she would one day be part of the royal family because the king would surely choose her to be his wife once she was of age. We laughed at the fact that her grandmother resorted to enticement for what could happen if she ‘kept herself’. It was interesting to us because we wondered if Mbali’s grandmother ever considered the age of the king and whether that was what Mbali wished for herself. To keep Mbali to her promise, her grandmother made sure Mbali attended every *Mhlanga* ritual as means to check if she was still ‘intact’. We

¹ *Umhlanga* is a yearly ritual where young Zulu girls are sent to be tested for virginity and to perform in the presence of the Zulu king. It is in this ritual that the king can also choose his next wife.

had some great moments of laughter and coming to a common understanding that, although some of the stories may have sounded ridiculous, the way they were told made us understand what message they intended to convey. However, we agreed that this was not to say that we remembered any of those teachings when we were faced with situations in which we had to make decisions about sexuality.

We discussed how stories played a role in the passing of educational messages in our black Zulu culture and how stories have been an integral part of our lives and history. We talked about how, through the stories that were told, we learned to understand the world, respect and people. We spoke of what role stories might play in today's world in educating young people and coming to understand life as we live it. My intention in this process was to bring the participants to an understanding of what role stories can play when one intends to relearn and try to understand the past and its meaning and to understand the world we live in. However, for the purposes of the research, it was our own life histories that became the source of the stories we were about to tell. I believed that storytelling was crucial to the process, to help us understand that as we live life through experiences, we are creating our own storylines through which, when re-examined, we might learn some valuable lessons for ourselves and for the people around us (Ritchie & Wilson, 2000). As Elbaz-Luwisch (2002) explains, storytelling can be a powerful tool in teacher development and professional growth. Storytelling can allow teachers to recall and engage with significant memories in ways that can lead to an enhanced understanding and improvement of present practice (Pithouse, 2011). I felt it was important for us as participants to discuss how we felt about putting our own lives into storied form. In my view, it is sometimes easier to talk about and relate to the story that is not your own as you are less emotionally involved. However, when it is your own story, your close involvement might make it difficult to reflect on it. To give participants a chance to come to some understanding of the implications of their stories, we first wrote the stories in our journals and engaged with our own inner selves and judges that we knew ourselves to be when it came to our own actions. I felt that it was important to allow us this private opportunity to reconnect with the emotions that might go with the story and to be able to begin to come to terms with them. However, many participants seemed to struggle with the story writing, as related by one of participants in one of our reflection discussions:

“It took me longer to complete. In fact, I completed the story the day before. Not that I have not been trying to write my story, it just felt, I don’t know guys, wrong. Revisiting the past, looking at my past experiences, felt like I was writing my own movie, me being the bad character. I have done things that were stupid in my life. Going to those stories now, just, it’s uncomfortable.” (Azande, 10 September 2010)

We discussed this feeling of discomfort and we talked about how we all related to what Azande was saying. Thus, we re-emphasised that we would tell only those stories we wanted to share, whereas those that we did not want to talk about, but were willing to write about, would remain in our journals for only the researcher (me) to read. That seemed to work for the participants; however, in the end we told all the stories due to what I believe was the positive atmosphere created every time we met. I believe that it was also due to the genuine feeling of caring and understanding that appeared to be always present in the sessions.

Something that became interesting about the teacher stories was that, when asked to relate their classroom experiences as teachers of LO, the issue of discomfort did not materialise. There seemed to be a sense of disassociation from the causes of the problems. There was a lot of outside blame that went with these stories. This included learner behaviour in the classroom when specific topics were discussed that rendered the teachers to lose control of the class or feel so embarrassed that they never touched on the topic again. As one of the participants recounted:

“I stood in front of that class frozen. You know I have never wanted to smack somebody so badly in my life mantombazane [girls]! You know that boy looked at me and asked me how many times I remember to use a condom or if I even use one. Of course, there was laughing in the class as he asked. Remember these are grade 9s and some are way older in their age to be in a grade 9 class. You know lezizingane [these children] that were not taught by their parents not to talk anyhow about such things.” (Lihle, 10 September 2010).

For the purposes of this study, we asked ourselves questions such as what had been significant events in our lives that in one way or the other might have influenced us. We needed to look

deeply into what underpinned our beliefs pertaining to sexuality. We asked ourselves, *“On what or on whom do we model our lives and beliefs resulting in our reactions towards certain issues we have to deal with in our lives and as teachers of LO?”* Through our conversations, we came to some realisations about the impact those events had had in our lives. We realised that we had in some ways blissfully glided on with life, not admitting we had unresolved issues that might one day need to come out to allow us to continue living in an awakened state.

To start us off on writing these stories while we were home. I sent each participant triggering reminders through sms (short message service) such as:

“Thought for the day: How did I come to know my sexuality?”

“Hey girls, what is that one thing that we will never forget that changed the way we look at ourselves as sexual beings? THINK HARDDER GIRLS! Night.”

These messages gave us an idea as to what we needed to think and write about. We could use the privacy of the home and the duration of the time that was between the sessions to write the stories. During that period, each participant battled with her own thoughts while she delved into her past life to look for that story that would best relate to the set task for that period.

The session that followed would see each participant that was willing to share her story, retelling the written story in an oral form while others listened to the story and made interjections through questions to better understand the story. This offered an opportunity for a “collective examination of the memories in which the memories are theorised and new meanings result” (Onyx & Small, 2001, p. 775). What ended up happening was that each story became the focal point for that duration of the session. As illustrated in Chapter Three, these stories dealt with issues such as how in our adult lives we experienced emotional and physical abuse through our relationships, be it in a marriage or an affair, and how these experiences changed how some of us acted and responded to the opposite sex when those relationships ended. The stories also covered other issues, such as the mother-daughter relationships we had with and their implications for how we saw our decisions and ourselves as sexual beings.

As Lapadat, et al. (2010, p. 78) explain, “The telling of one’s story is both a construction of self and a performance of self, in which the listener/reader/viewer is implicated as witness, audience, collaborator, and co-constructor.” Hence, as we reconstructed our own histories, we became the actors while the other participants became the listeners with views and opinions about what they were listening to. When working with stories through memory-work, personal experiences “are theorised as a cross-section or example of common (social) experiences” (Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, & Benton, 1992, p. 49). As Crawford et al. continue to explain:

What is of interest is not why person X’s father did such and such but why fathers do such things. The aim is to uncover the social meanings embodied by the actions described in the [individual accounts of personal experiences] and to uncover the processes whereby the meanings – both then and now – are arrived at. (p. 49)

Hence, a crucial reason for using stories was that I wanted to find a tool that would allow for the generation of themes for the study that would have evidence embedded within them, as they are stories that were told by us, the people who have lived through the experience (Steiner, 2007).

2.4.2 Audio recording of sessions

As we ventured through the research process, we recorded all sessions for the purpose of data storage and later reflection. There were times when what had been said was replayed and listened to, which played a crucial role in the discussions and clarification of what individuals intended to say. Recording the sessions also became my ‘third ear’, which became crucial for me. Being a participant in my own research left me wondering at some points about how much I was missing as I too become involved in the process of finding my own self in self-study within the research. I was able to replay the recording of the sessions after each meeting; in this way, I gained more insight into what was happening and further analysed the responses and the discussions that took place. I learned that changes in intonation as participants spoke also gave more clarity to the emotions that were involved that I may have missed during the session.

As a participant researcher, I wanted all the participants’ voices to be heard and believed that mine did not have to lead all the time. As Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009) explain, in self-study all

voices of participants should not just be raised but heard. This was important for me to show that as a researcher participant I also cared about the development and learning of my fellow participants. Through listening to the recordings, I could keep myself in check and realise when my opinions might change the flow of the session, as the participants seemed to think my opinion mattered more, which I do not believe should be the case in a collaborative inquiry. I was also able to gain further insight into the entire process as I went back and listened to how we engaged with each other and the manner in which we responded to the situations that arose within the process of the sessions.

2.4.3 Reflective journal writing

“How often in humanness, do persons replay situations or events in their minds? Thinking back on what occurred; reviewing relational aspects of encounters, maybe even second guessing what was said or done” (Epp, 2008, p. 1380). It is within this premise that each participant kept a reflective journal. This provided moments of reflection and interpretations of all aspects of the experience gained from each session. Since the aim was for us to learn from the experience, keeping journals assisted us in making the session more educative (Dewey, 1963). It rang true to us as participants that “more learning is derived from reflecting on an experience than from the experience itself” (Taggart & Wilson, 2005, p. 77). This can be seen through such stories as Zama’s story of spousal verbal and physical abuse (see Chapter Three, p. 66). In this instance, Zama came to the realisation, after reflecting on a past event, of how her current actions and relationships with men have been changed. Her “*private hell*” (recorded conversation, 29 September, 2010), as she called this event in her story, was instrumental in the development of a revised self-identity she had created for herself and chosen to portray for all to see. Zama explained that it was truly in that private moment of remembering through journaling that she was able to learn about herself as she reflected on the past.

Through journaling, we learned that the process of reflecting is a difficult one, as it required us to bare our souls if we were to learn about and deal with the implications of what was being reflected on. It prompted moments of deep thinking as we battled to decide what we needed to

write about and how much of our souls we were willing to share and face in the presence of others who might not understand. As Zama reflected during a discussion:

“I first wrote it until I said to myself, ‘You know what, this is not true’ [laughter by fellow participants]. ‘All what I have written is not true. I am only reflecting the positive as if my life and experiences have been great.’ I had to do it all over again until I realised that now I was hurting as I had to bring my past back. The one I have told myself I am past it. As a result, I could not finish. I will have to go back to do it again although it is not easy. (10 September, 2010).

Through journaling, we gained the opportunity to be true to ourselves and how we chose to remember our pasts. Furthermore, we were able to ‘get hold of’ experiences that we had kept inside, be they positive or negative. Through collaboration as a group, we were able to express those experiences in ways that allowed the other participants to share in the feelings, the experiences and maybe the understanding of the implications of that which we had shared (Beveridge, 1997).

Furthermore, through journal writing, we came to understand how some of our memories were linked to, and interdependent with the emotions experienced during the time of the event. As explained by Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2012), realisations of that interdependence helped to us learn something about ourselves. This process was supported by the presence of trusted friends who could help us make sense of what we had experienced (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2012). For some of us, the pain we had felt during that time was easier to remember and relate than the event itself. Hence, the question asked by Onyx and Small, “Does the method [of memory-work] always have the potential to liberate?” (2001, p. 781). The answer for us had to be “no”, as we realised through listening to Mandla’s story (see Chapter Three), as he (she considers herself a man and wanted to be addressed as such) related how he is not yet able to allow himself to remember his early years as they were too painful to remember. As he related in our reflection time:

I wrote nothing about my early years. I could not do it. I started allowing myself to remember when I was a teenager. Everything early is too painful. Maybe I will go back

there later. Now that I am older, I am realising who I am. This is the real me. I must stop pretending to be what I am not. That is when trouble started for me again over my choices with my sexuality. I had family members calling meetings and I realised that was when I needed to be strong. (10 September, 2010)

Through sharing our written stories and reflections, we started to get a feel of how we had lived and acted as sexual beings and how we were maybe oblivious of those consequences in our present lives. We were ultimately able to find means through writing in a journal to find “a way of getting feedback from ourselves; in so doing, it “[enabled] us to experience in a full and open-ended way, the movement of our lives as a whole and the meaning that follows from reflecting on that movement” (Janesick, 1999, p. 509).

2.4.4 Collage-making

We used collages in the sessions with the aim of eliciting information from participants and starting conversations. Raht, smith and MacEntee (2009, p. 229) describe a collage as “a creative art-based method in which separate images are cut from magazines, newspapers and/or books and then glued together to create a new image.” What was interesting to me about the collage-making process was that it was not just about producing relevant data. It was also about engaging the interest of the participants in learning and reflecting. Collage-making was unfamiliar for the participants and the idea of learning and doing the unusual made the sessions interesting for all, while at the same time not losing the focus of the session. In this regard, collages allowed for moments where we were learning about ourselves in a manner that gave us an opportunity to see in a visual sense what it was that we were to gain new insight into (Markus, 2004). Collages required participants to engross themselves in deep thoughts to find what needed to be said through visual means and to find that image that gave a ‘visual view’ into our own being, as sexual beings and sexuality educators, allowing the learning from what we saw to take place. Furthermore, as explained by UNICEF (2001), collages also required no technical ability on our side other than holding a pair scissors properly; that assisted in removing the limitations that could be brought by the anxiety of other art-based methods such as drawing, which we all agreed we were no experts in. This is an issue discussed by Makhanya (2010), where she highlights how the educational background of participants in her study contributed to their lack of comfort and

expression of anxiety about arts-based methods – within the context of black South African teachers who were schooled under the Bantu Education system that did not favour any artistic expression for black people. Art as a subject was therefore not offered in the Bantu Education curriculum.

As mostly intermediate phase teachers (grade four to six), the participants did know what a collage was, even though they had not made collages themselves before. That was due to the inclusion of Arts and Culture into the curriculum of the intermediate and senior phase. At some point in our teaching experience, we all had taught this learning area. This made it easier for me to explain the task. However, it was relevance of collage-making to the topic of the research that warranted a discussion and explanation. Hence, we discussed why we keep photos and we related how they depict past memories for us and show parts of our lives that we wish to preserve and remember. We discussed how, because photos are visual, they quicken the recollection of memories and give us an ‘in your face’ image. We looked at how then a collage that we have created ourselves can give us the same kind of effect when we express our experiences as sexuality educators and as sexual beings. We discussed the resources that we would need for the creation of these collages. I explained to the participants that any use of personal artefacts in the collage-making was optional as the same message could be related using a magazine image that represented what we wished to say.

I explained that it was a homework type of activity that required us to take time to do it. The prompt for the first collage was, *“How can you put into a visual source the images of your experiences as a sexuality educator?”* We discussed that an image can be used to stand for an emotion that was experienced. We discussed the role of words in a collage and how they can further give clarity to what we wish to show and express. As Khanare (2009) explains, including words in a collage offers an opportunity to give more meaning to the collage.

I asked participants to journal the process of creating the collage and write about whatever thoughts or emotional processes they had to go through. For example, there were times when they battled with questions such as, *“Should I include this about me?”* I also asked them to look again at the collages a few days after construction and to reflect on how they felt about what they

had created. We shared these collages within the group and each creator explained her collage while the other participants engaged her in discussion and clarification. In the process, additional meaning was given to the collages and reflected upon. This done to consolidate the definitions that we had given earlier on what we thought sexuality meant to us (see Chapter Three, p. 51).

In the beginning, I had also thought of creating my own collage prior to the session as suggested by Khanare (2009, p. 97): “before the activity begins, a clear explanation for the process has to be provided and a ready-made example of a collage should be given to the participants.” However, in the end I opted for the opposite. I battled with the idea and I concluded that as an active participant in the journey, I too wanted to have the same experience that the other participants would have. I felt that this would allow me to be part of the process and keep me ‘in check’, by reminding me that I was a participant, sharing ‘command’ with the other participants. I also did not want to run the risk of setting the stage for the others’ creations that might lead to the re-creation of the same thing repeatedly. However, I did show an example on an unrelated topic based on what my sister liked doing. She was the one who created the sample collage for us to view, as a reminder of what we were intended to do for the activity.

We also needed a tool that would assist us to use objects to view and reflect our understanding of the world by giving meaning to what we saw (Robertson, 2004). This fitted well with two of my critical research questions: “*What are teachers’ key experiences as sexuality educators?*” and “*How might increased self-understanding influence how teachers interpret and teach sexuality education?*” I was aware that issues of sexuality are highly sensitive and exploration of these issues can be damaging if not handled with care and sensitivity. Therefore, I anticipated that collage creation would assist in allowing us to have a ‘private’ moment with ourselves and make those critical decisions as to how far we wanted to open up, as well as to find out what we were not yet ready to explore and share with other participants. Thus, we were able to reduce the possibility of an issue becoming unbearable for participants as they shared their work with others who would critique what they saw and make judgements that maybe the participant was not ready to face and deal with regarding her sexuality.

I asked each participant to create a collage using magazines or any form of image she deemed suitable for her to use to express what she needed to say through images. I felt that there needed to be an understanding that the process is not just a cut and paste process; there has to be meaning and relevance to the images we use to show that which we wish to express (Khanare, 2009). Thus, we asked ourselves questions such as, “*How has the process assisted us in the journey of self-knowledge?*” “*What lessons were learned?*” “*What have we realised about ourselves as teachers?*” Through the collage making, we were able to move ourselves from just talking about the issues and how we understood ourselves, to engaging in the action of portraying those thoughts creating a collage (Khanare, 2009). As explained above, I felt that the making of the collages would give control to each participant as to what they wished to express and leave out for whatever reasons best known to them. Hence, I asked participants to create collages at home and bring them to the sessions already completed. The idea behind that was again for provision of privacy for participants. For me, the idea of participants maintaining control over how they were to experience things was imperative. Doing collages at home provided a chance for each person to grapple in private with what she wanted to include in the collage without having to explain her choices to others.

2.4.5 Letter-writing

Writing a letter is a way of having a conversation through writing (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). I felt that we needed a tool that would permit ‘inner conversations’ to take place and letter-writing would provide an opportunity for us to get a rare opportunity to ‘remember well’ all that we wished had never happened or we were grateful for. I thought that letter-writing would also allow us to make meaning through sharing and reflecting on those experiences and give us the chance to place them into perspective so they would become learning experiences (Ciuffetelli, 2006).

Letter-writing as a reflective tool was introduced to me in one of the modules when I did my Honours degree. We were asked to write a letter to that one teacher in our school life that gave us a specific experience, be it positive or negative, that had an impact on us (this activity is described in Pithouse, 2011). It is this remembered experience that I related to the participants after I had explained why I wrote my letter. We again conversed on how have letters been used

in our lives as we grew up in an age that today's youth would term the 'dark ages', when there were no cell phones with Mixit and Facebook (social networks). Although the letters were discussed in the sessions, they were written in our own private spaces – for the same reasons that were explained under journal writing and collage creation in this section. The letter-writing was preceded by the discussion on letter-writing and its value. These letters were later shared in a following session.

A prominent memory we all shared was of love letters that we received from prospective boyfriends and those we wrote to 'dump' them. There was much laughter that took place as we related these memories; we then looked at how much of our thoughts and feelings were actually expressed in the letters and how they provided that private moment as you read them trying to feel the emotions that the author of the letter may have felt. We also discussed the physical pain of a beating from our parents, which we sometimes experienced when they discovered those letters and always seemed to read too much into them.

For the letters, as I had done with the collages, I opted not to read out a letter that I had written, as I did not want to influence the participants' letters. Moreover, as a participant, who wanted to be viewed as such by the other participants, I also wanted that first-hand experience that they would have. Letters allowed us to produce authentic stories of our experiences as teachers with critical educational issues that arose as we interacted with the LO programme, as well as our development as sexual beings (Ciuffetelli, 2010). Each letter was shared with the rest of the participants as we focused on "listening to another in order to hear oneself better" (Ciuffetelli, 2006, p. 201). As we listened to the letters, we were also able to build our capacity as teachers to use our own experiences as a frame of reference as we attempted to further understand the stories that other participants had to share (Ciuffetelli, 2010). This also assisted for the purposes of the research, as it assisted in the development or generation of possible themes for interpretation (Ciuffetelli, 2010).

The letter was used as a realisation and a healing tool for ourselves as we wrote to ourselves relating what we had now come to realise about ourselves. It was also a chance to forgive where needed, not only the other but also ourselves, for the decisions that we have made in our lives

that have proven to place us on a wrong path. It allowed us also to speak to the ‘teacher self’, where we informed ourselves about the journey we had undertaken in the study and how it had helped us to realise the kind of teacher we had been and that we wanted to become in the future. Thus, we were answering the third critical question of the study: *“How might increased self-understanding influence how teachers interpret and teach sexuality education?”*

2.5 Data re-presentation

The compilation of each story that is re-presented in Chapter Three was an interesting process for me as a researcher. As explained before, each participant contributed a story that she felt best explained her sexual identity and how that identity came into formation. Each was asked to write her story and present it orally to the rest of the group in a session. What became interesting was that the oral versions of the stories were more rich and detailed than the written. Therefore, as the researcher, I chose to use the oral presentation versions of the stories for inclusion in this thesis (see Chapter Three). I began by listening to the audio recording of each story as related by the participant and transcribed each as it was told, with the responses of the other participants included. I later went on to edit each story carefully, without adding my own thought or tone to the story, to make it a reasonable length for presentation. The editing of the stories involved leaving out parts of the story that I felt would have little effect on the understanding of the story. I later compared the oral stories to the written ones to make sure I had maintained the authentic nature of the story.

As with the oral stories, our conversations were transcribed verbatim from the audio recordings of the sessions. I used these as part of the data re-presentation to include the voices of the participants in the study and my interpretation of what it was we were experiencing in the session. As explained above, these transcripts also formed a significant part of the analysis that was done together in the sessions as we moved along with the process. This process involved making meaning from what it was we were finding out and also eliciting missing information to extend further the study (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009).

The letters that were written by the participants as we attempted to express what it was that we were experiencing and the meaning of it for our practice were also used in Chapter Six. In this chapter, extracts from each letter are re-presented to assist telling a collective story of what we have achieved through the process.

2.6 My reflective thoughts on our collaborative self-study

2.6.1 Which hat am I wearing now?

In this study, I worked with two methodologies, collaborative inquiry and self-study. When I conceptualised this methodological fusion in my head, it seemed feasible. In my understanding, both methodologies aimed at finding some solution to a specific problem in collaboration with others. Moreover, as explained earlier in this chapter, many other attributes made them compatible. However, there were many times during the study when I was not sure which ‘hat’ I was wearing or expected to be wearing during the sessions. At what moments was I to wear the researcher hat and when should I wear the hat of a full participant who was on equal footing with the rest of the other participants? These were my thoughts on the issue as I reflected in my journal:

Today was a bit tiring; I hope the next session will be better. I don't know how many times I had to halt and explain to the participants that my opinion was not that important! It's what we all agreed should happen that matters. My opinion should be considered in the same manner as that of the other participants. However, I am not sure what I should do when the researcher in me feels we are going way off track. When I try to bring the session on track through a statement or question am I manipulating the flow of the process to meet the needs of the researcher or is it the participant in me that is talking?
(10 August, 2010)

Wow! I just listened to the tape of yesterday's session. Boy did I talk a lot in this session. I think for most part of the session I forgot that I was the researcher. I really had strong opinions over a lot of things today. I wonder what damage that made to the process. I

need to listen to the tape later and work out how my talking a lot influenced things. I am a participant; I know that, I also know that I'm a very opinionated person in general. I wonder what was it about this session that got me all worked out! I need to work on this mother daughter issue, course I really think I have an issue to work out. However, it was nice to see I'm not the only one. (7 September, 2010)

As a participant, I needed to stay true to my own journey of my memories and my experiences as both a sexual woman and a teacher. On the other hand, when I was journaling, I needed to reflect on both my journey and what I observed and thought of the process and other participants' journeys. It was not an easy task. At some point, I realised I would never achieve the perfect balance. Hence, I spent most of the day after each session reflecting on the process and, later on my journey, I reflected again in my journal. This was crucial because, as a participant, the writing of field notes during a session was not always possible.

It also did not escape my attention that I too experienced my own 'emotional roller coaster' together with my fellow participants. I had not envisaged my own emotional absorption in the stories related by other participants. I had not anticipated that, as a researcher, I too would engage emotionally and empathise with the participants due to the stories I would hear. Thus, 'self-care' became an imperative tool for me as a researcher (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2012; Rager, 2005). For me, the immediate act of journaling after each session was very therapeutic as it helped me to put my experiences into perspective for me.

2.6.2 Whose turn is it to talk?

When does one say a person is talking too much? I wondered that often in the sessions. I knew from the beginning that I had one participant who spoke a great deal. She always seemed to find difficulty in listening to others or letting an opportunity to air her views pass by. I knew the type of strong character that she had. I worried for the other participants who were not familiar with her, that they might find her frankness and talkativeness unbecoming. I was also aware of the kind of input she would bring into the sessions and that, with her attitude she was bound to provoke heated responses from the participants, which would make for interesting conversations.

In a collaborative environment, equal opportunity for participation is crucial, and all opinions are to be valued and considered (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997). However, this was not easy to sustain when a particular participant seemed to do the opposite. In the first session, I really worried as from the start she seemed to set the pace and the tone of the session. However, as the session progressed, I realised it was beneficial for me as a researcher because of the type of data that was generated for that day. Her almost ‘out of line’ use of language (as the other participants seemed eager to let her know) lead to interesting debates. I also underestimated the ability of the other participants to hold their own. One particular participant had no problem in reminding her that she needed to listen and allow others to talk. My observation on the issue for that first session as written in my journal was:

Oh my! I knew Jez has the ability to say anything. I was also shocked when she volunteered to read her definition and the explicit use of words. I saw Zama’s eyes almost ready to pop out! I’m glad that she did, it seemed to get all talking except for one. That was expected, I know there is a lot that will be discussed that she will not take very well with her strong religious views. This is going to be interesting. (10 August, 2010).

2.6.3 Who decides when an issue is deemed sensitive?

Another area that I found interesting in the process of the study was the issue of sensitive topics. In research literature that I had read (see Hyden, 2008; Wagner, 2011), sexuality issues were identified as sensitive, thus needing extra care of the participants. I felt that this was even more so when dealing with memory, where participants would have to revisit certain parts of their past that might have been painful. However, as the sessions progressed, I started to wonder: What do sensitive issues mean and for whom is the issue sensitive? Is it for the person talking about the issue or the one listening and imagining that if it were them then it would be sensitive? What does it mean to some participants when I say, “I will put you in touch with someone who can provide you with the necessary emotional assistance if the need arises”?

In my understanding of what could make an issue sensitive, three of my participants had stories that could be termed especially sensitive. When one speaks of death, abuse, violence in relationships and so on, you cannot help thinking of the traumatic nature of those issues. My

assumption was that when a participant was retelling that kind of story she would experience a certain level of negative flashbacks that might be harmful to her current mental stability. However, that has appeared not to be the case for all participants in my study.

I found myself in the predicament that sometimes it is difficult to understand the complexities when trying to identify issues as sensitive. Indeed, through my own process I found that “what is sensitive to one person might not be the same for another” (Hyden, 2008, p. 122). Hyden makes the claim that “what is a sensitive topic and what is not is due mainly to the relationships between the teller and the listener” (p. 122). In our case, the nature of the environment that had been provided by collaborative participation, and the development of trust and care for all might have lessened the impact of the stories. There is also the nature of the “cultural and contextual circumstances and the personal views held by the people involved” (p. 122). Some of the stories shared by the participants seemed to fall within the ‘sensitive category’, such as when Mbali related her story of how her boyfriend shot her and her mother outside her family house (see Chapter Three, p. 69). The intensity and the details of the story, including the responses and questioning by other participants, would have made some break down. However, Mbali could not understand why we would think it would be difficult for her to relate the story. What we failed to realise was that for her, talking was what she saw as beginning of healing. As expressed by Hyden (2008, p. 123), “talk about a traumatic experience, has the potential to pose a threat and even has the potential to re-traumatise the traumatised, but such talk can just as well have the potential to heal.” What I have learned is that much depends on the environment in which the conversation is being conducted. The sessions were a safe haven for us all. What could have been the re-traumatisation of the narrator or the listeners instead became a healing opportunity for all.

2.7.4 Laughter and humour: Are we serious?

“Are these people for real?” I mean really! Can we for once focus on what we came here to do and maybe be able to get what needs to be done on time” (Personal journal, 6 September, 2010).

During the sessions, we laughed so hard that the researcher in me started to panic because each time we laughed time was consumed and getting back to the point was difficult. There were times when we laughed at a story that should have been making us cry or feel sad. What I noticed was that the tellers of these stories always seemed to lead in finding humour in the horrific stories they were relating. It was in my own private moments that I wrote in my journal:

It worries me that we laugh so hard. Today when Zama related her story of how her husband tried to kill her and her two daughters, she found humour in some of the things that took place. Her laughter, although I was grateful that it relaxed the atmosphere that was already beginning to take place as the other participants realised where her story was going, was of concern to me. During lunch time when I went inside the main house, my mother asked if we were getting any work done. She thought people who are working seriously do not laugh as much as we did.” (2 September, 2010).

It was in that moment again as I wrote that entry in my journal that this realisation came to me:

People deal with issues differently. Laughter was the healing tool that was working its magic in all of us. Zama laughed at her story, not that there was real humour to what had happened to her. She however used it to make herself better able to get through the story. In telling the story, she was reliving it, she found a way that will make the memory less painful for her and also gave her the ability to have control over how the story will affect her. That’s what therapy does for the person, it helps us heal, and that she found in her laughter. (2 September, 2010).

During the session, I had offered Zama the use of the available resources such as a private session with the woman counsellor working in the trauma centre. However, she flatly refused, saying:

I am getting it now. You know I have not really told the full story to anybody before. I have always thought I would break down and cry when I did. But I'm fine. This is good for me. I needed to do this. What we are doing here is good. Besides, therapy is not my thing. (Recorded conversation, 2 September 2010)

It was then that I realised that collaborative memory-work as a tool of inquiry has the ability to give back new knowledge to the participants. Little did I realise the importance of those moments when the session seemed to be chaotic and not starting well. It was then that the participants' bond was re-emphasised as they caught up with each other and laughter seemed to be the order of the day. In our circumstance, humour became a means of reducing the levels of any form of anxiety we were experiencing as humour and laughter has the ability to be understood in different forms, and in our situation it became a protective force as we grappled with emotionally challenging issues (Mallett, 1995).

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explained my understanding of the two methodologies that I have used within this study: self-study and collaborative inquiry. I have described the research setting and the participants that contributed to the study. I have given a detailed account of the data generation process and the process of data interpretation and re-presentation. In addition, I have offered my reflective thoughts on the collaborative self-study process.

This chapter has provided insight into the challenges and opportunities that I experienced when working within self-study and collaborative inquiry as methodologies. The chapter highlights the significance of valuing participant input during the collaborative self-study research process. I have learned that, when conducting a study of this nature the comfort of the participants plays an important role as they adjust to the process and what will be required from them. Hence, constant consultation with the participants becomes crucial. Continual consultation further allows the

participants to assist in shaping the process of data generation and interpretation. Another important issue that this chapter draws attention to is my experience of being a researcher participant. I have realised that this dual positioning requires constant reflection on the part of the researcher in an attempt to achieve a balance between the roles. However, as demonstrated in the chapter, I have become aware that this task can perhaps never be fully realised. Nonetheless, I have found that engaging in a reflective process through journaling helped me to capture the essence of my journey as a researcher and to stay true to my own journey of self-realisation as a participant.

In the next chapter, Chapter Three, I show how we began to attempt to understand sexuality as teachers and as individuals by first asking ourselves what we understood sexuality to mean to us as individuals and as a group. I also show how we moved into exploring how our individual experiences in life have influenced the development of our sexual identities and the positions we have taken and been placed in with respect to sexuality. The chapter demonstrates how storytelling and conversation were used to facilitate this process of individual and collaborative meaning-making.

CHAPTER THREE

BEGINNING TO UNDERSTAND SEXUALITY AND OUR SEXUAL IDENTITIES

3.1 Introduction

In this study, the aim was to gain understanding of teachers as sexuality educators in terms of how we perceived ourselves as sexual beings, and how that self-knowledge might add to how we construe and teach sexuality education and relate to our learners. In the previous chapter, Chapter Two, I gave a methodological account of our collaborative self-study research process. I drew attention to the opportunities and complexities of this process and of my dual role as researcher and participant.

The first critical question that underpins this study is, “*How can teachers better understand their sexual identities?*” It is this question that I explore in Chapter Three. I begin the chapter by showing how we shared and discussed our different understandings of sexuality. I then demonstrate the conversational journey that we took through storytelling, as we each told stories about our individual experiences in life that have influenced the development of our sexual identities and the different positions we have taken on sexuality as we have interacted with the world as teachers and as people. The chapter portrays how storytelling and conversation enabled a process of personal and collective meaning-making centred on better understanding sexuality and our sexual identities. (This mean-making is then further developed in relation to relevant research literature in Chapter Four.)

3.2 Our journey begins: “Sexuality, do we even know what it means?”

In our first session, we asked ourselves, “*What is sexuality?*” This literally marked the beginning of our journey together as participants in this study. As we spoke, we realised that we had never before asked ourselves the question, “*Who am I as a sexual being?*” However, even though we had never asked ourselves this question before, we were confident that we knew the answer. We believed that we just needed to share our explanations with each other, to see how similar our understandings were. To achieve this, we each wrote down on a chart words or sentences that we thought best showed how we interpreted the term “sexuality”. The charts with the definitions were then pasted on the wall for all to see and comment on. It was of great interest to us to see how different we were in our understandings of sexuality. Figure 3.1 shows the definitions we wrote:

Zoleka: Your body, how you look, your thoughts and feelings.

Azande: Your understanding of yourself in terms of your behaviour. It could be sexually or emotionally and the way you carry yourself in relationships.

Mandla: It is about sex between same sex people or man and woman.

Mbali: It is sexual intercourse. Also the development between males and females where they understand about their sex. Looking at behaviour and going through puberty and being sexually active.

Zama: It involves sex (ual) intercourse. Meeting and mixing of the male and female. Involves bonking.

Sihle: It's about how a person looks like and it is also about sex between two people who love one another.

Figure 3.1: Our sexuality definitions

As we walked around the room reading the definitions, we each wrote comments or placed a question mark on the issues we wished the author of the definition to explain on her chart. The next act was for each of us in turn to hold up and read out her definition to the other participants. We also responded to the questions other participants had written on our definitions. Discussions emanated from our explanations, with the rest of the participants providing possible explanations of the words used in the definitions. Key words that dominated our definitions were SEX, PENETRATION, SAME SEX, MALE or FEMALE SEX, BODY IMAGE. However, even with these similarities, we could not agree on one definition.

This part of the session in which we expressed and discussed our definitions yielded some very insightful indicators for us, which assisted us in our journey. To illustrate this, in the following section I share a portion of the discussions and reflections that took place within the session:

3.2.1 Choice of words as a source of disagreement

Xoli: *“Here when I say ‘fuck’, I am saying when people have sex, you know doing the bitchy stuff. It’s all the things that you do to each other.”*

Mandla: *“You are really Jezebel!”*

Londi: *“I have a problem with your use of the word ‘fuck’, I am sorry. It is not necessary!”*

Xoli: *“Just because it makes you uncomfortable does not mean it cannot be used or said. Don’t use it, but allow me to express myself as I feel.”*

For me as a participant and a researcher, this conversation marked the beginning of what would be an on-going source of disagreement between us as participants. The last comment from Xoli, which was immediately regarded as out of line by some other participants, was a sign of our differences in opinions and our views of life in relation to how we were raised. The immediate referencing of her definition to a biblical character, Jezebel¹, for me pointed to the moralistic or religious manner in which some of the participants would respond to some of the issues related to sexuality. How we selected words to express ourselves appeared

¹ Jezebel is the name of a biblical woman described in the Old Testament (1 Kings Chapter 19) that over the years has been associated with women who exhibit promiscuous behaviour.

to me to be somehow linked with our backgrounds and identities. This also signalled the complex relationship we were beginning to experience together as participants. It also became apparent to me how our social upbringing and contexts influenced how we thought and how we related to each other. The reaction of the participants to Xoli's choice of expression made this apparent. Her choice of words such as "fuck" seemed to obscure the fact that it meant the same thing that others expressed in their own definitions, through the use of the more 'neutral' words, "sex" and "penetration".

As people reacted to the language with which Xoli chose to express herself, I started to 'get a feel' for how language would play a significant role in our communication with each other. Xoli's explicit choices of words lead to immediate rebuke from the others. Nevertheless, there was also some agreement with Xoli's manner of expression, as highlighted in the following extract from our discussion:

Zoleka: "I have to agree with Xoli. We are different with different ways of expressions, so let us allow ourselves the freedom to be true to who we are. Remember guys, there is no set way of doing this."

In responding to Xoli's choice of words, some participants attempted to explain that, in their view, there was more to sexuality than just 'bonking'. To illustrate:

Azande: "Do you really think like that though Xoli? Sexuality is not just about sex. It involves emotions and a lot more than you think. It is your whole understanding of yourself in terms of your behaviour. It could be sexually, emotionally, the way you carry yourself in relationships. Not just with men but all the people around you. The way you say it sounds like it is about a man and woman going at it."

Even the notion of love was challenged, as one can see from Xoli's statement:

"Who are we kidding about this love thing? You can have sex with anyone but you don't have to be in love with them."

However, not everyone agreed with Xoli, as Zama responded:

“That is you Xoli, not all of us share in that thought.”

3.2.2 Sexuality as defined through heterosexuality

Through sharing our definitions, we began to acknowledge and discuss the differences in how we perceived sexuality. For example, our socialisation as heterosexuals, as a dominant way of being, was questioned by some participants:

Lunga: *“It’s how a person carries themselves as well and behaves especially around the opposite sex, when you go out and socialise.”*

Mandla: *“Yours is narrow too, why only how I will behave around men? Are we saying it’s only the relationships we have with men that defines sexuality?”*

Londi: *“That is how we all were raised to think about sex, so there is nothing wrong with saying sex between man and woman. Remember, just because we know there are people who are in a same sex relationship does not mean we will now change the way we think.”*

Londi: *“Mine said ‘Male and female’. There is some penetration. That what sexuality means to me.”*

Sihle: *“Again! Why do you specify man and woman? I believe sexuality to be about sex between people who are in love with each other. I say love, ‘coz I believe you must be in love to have sex with someone. It could be with any person you love, not necessarily a man.”*

Mandla: *“Sihle is right. It could be sex with a man or same sex; it does not change the definition. Sexuality is about feelings that people have for each other that lead them to sex.”*

It was at this critical point that Mandla and Sihle began to clearly make their presence felt as out lesbian women.

3.2.3 The relationship between sex and sexuality

As we reflected on the session, we began to realise how different we all were in how we expressed ourselves through language. As indicated by the following exchange, the main similarity was that sex as an act played a significant role in how we thought of sexuality:

Azande: *"I believe we are confusing the terms. There is a difference between sex and sexuality. Sex is the act itself with intercourse and all. However, sexuality is all of that plus everything from puberty, developing body organs as we go through stages of changing."*

Mbali: *"Sexuality I guess is the umbrella word."*

Zoleka: *"You could say that."*

Because we are all teachers of sexuality education, I expected to see our understandings of sexuality being related back to the learners we teach. It seemed important to me that references to the learners should be at the forefront of our discussion. However, I felt that we were mostly looking at how *we as people perceived the meaning of sexuality, not how we as teachers understood sexuality*. We were reminded of this by Lunga's reasoning:

"Guys we need to remember that when teaching a child about sexuality you would not start with sex. You will start with the awareness of the body and other things."

Our cultural exposure came into the discussion when Xoli pointed out that:

"We all think like this because we were all socialised to think anything linked with sexuality is sex. Also the fact that we think sex is only penetration. That what most black men think. They do not understand; they believe they have to enter a woman to know that they are loved or own that woman. Some men cannot even climax without penetration because to them that is not sex."

At that point, I realised that *socialisation* and *culture* were going to play a significant role in how we eventually would come to understand and view sexuality. I also began to see how the gender roles within the communities that we were coming from came into view in our understandings of sexuality. The position of women relative to that of men was highlighted within our understandings of sexual roles in relationships. As Mbali explained:

“That’s why they [men] believe to show your love for them, there must be sex. To them it’s a disgrace if they fail to get to that place.”

During the discussion of the definitions, Xoli’s views (that would later on prove to be difficult for the other participants to comprehend) seemed to touch a nerve when she said:

“I still have a problem with Mandla when he said, ‘Only if you love someone.’ Sometimes, it’s because you crave to have sex with that person, you are not really in love with them. There is no shame in that, if that is what you feel like doing. The problem is that we make it look like it’s a shameful thing, when it’s not. As black people we are not open about things such as, ‘I can fuck a man because I want to’. Not that I want a relationship with that person, it’s the opposite. I just felt like I needed to have an orgasm today and he was available. The way we were socialised makes us ashamed to admit that. However, men of our society can indulge in such things and are not judged.”

This kind of talk yielded responses such as the one made by Mbali:

“As true as it may sound to you Xoli, sex is also about being responsible. I don’t see going around sleeping with men as being responsible. I am not judging you, but I find part of what you said disturbing. Just because men do it and it seems accepted, does not make it right.”

This was also supported by Lunga when she said:

“Even if we are speaking of equality with man that is one area I don’t envy men for. It is not what we, as women, should be aiming for either.”

Again, I later realised that how we responded to the statement made by Xoli was also related to our socialisation and our cultural backgrounds, as Azande explained:

“Maybe it is how we were socialised, because I cannot relate to what Xoli just said at all. I need to have some feelings for the men other than lust to sleep with him. I still

would not want an idea like that to be taught to our kids. That is a sure way of not having a chance in fighting AIDS and unnecessary pregnancies.”

It was at this point within the discussion that social issues such as HIV and teenage pregnancies came in. It was here that a line was drawn by some participants, who argued that, whichever way we wanted to understand sexuality, it must have an element of responsibility attached to it as we are, at the end of the day, teachers who have to assist learners with such issues. As Zoleka attempted to clarify:

“Let’s not forget that life is about choices. A person can choose to behave in a certain way and does not need to be judged. What I believe to be wrong is to make people see things the way that you do. True to the fact that we may not agree with Xoli, but we cannot say it is wrong. That is her personal view and may have nothing to do with the classroom.”

It however became a nagging issue in our discussion that thinking such as Xoli’s should not be encouraged as it brought into question how it would play out in the classroom if teachers thought and behaved as Xoli suggested. This was also the first sign of doubt that I noticed that we as teachers had about our abilities to teach sexuality education, as illustrated in Zama, Azande and Sihle’s statements:

Lunga: *“I wonder though how Xoli would respond to a child that has a question that addresses the same thing she is speaking of. Would that be the response?”*

Azande: *“I think we are a little lost in understanding sexuality. I’m listening to how we all seem to have a different view on sexuality and that makes me wonder how we can teach it then.”*

Zama: *“This is helping because I have never thought of so many things until today. Sexuality is complex and needs a person to be careful before they say they understand.”*

Londi: *“I’m glad we will be looking at definitions from writers; it will help us all come to a similar understanding so that we can relate to each other when we discuss. I am thinking of the content we cover in grade 9 and half of what is discussed there is nowhere in our definitions.”*

In this conversation, we agreed that we had never really before thought about what sexuality was, and therefore we were all working with whatever came to our minds at that time. We also agreed that we needed to be clear first on what we understood sexuality to be for us to continue on the journey.

Hence, to provide more understanding on what we understood sexuality to mean, we each made a collage where we attempted to visually express our understandings of sexuality. (I discuss the process of collage-making in detail in Chapter Two). The collages presented below (figures 3.2. to 3.5) are a few selected examples of the type of images that were constructed by some of the participants. For me, Mandla's collage (figure 3.2) reveals his understanding of who he is and the choices that he makes linked to the image he has of himself. Then there is Xoli (figure 3.3), with her strong sexual identity that she portrayed in her images as she placed sexual attraction as a strong component of her sexual identity. This is followed by Zoleka (figure 3.4), whose identity seems to be about image and valuing the physical self and education as means to controlling who she is. Lastly, there is the Londi's collage (figure 3.5), with the church taking centre stage in her understanding of who she is – family and marriage being what the church advocates and what she identifies with.



Figure 3.2: Mandla's collage of his understanding of sexuality

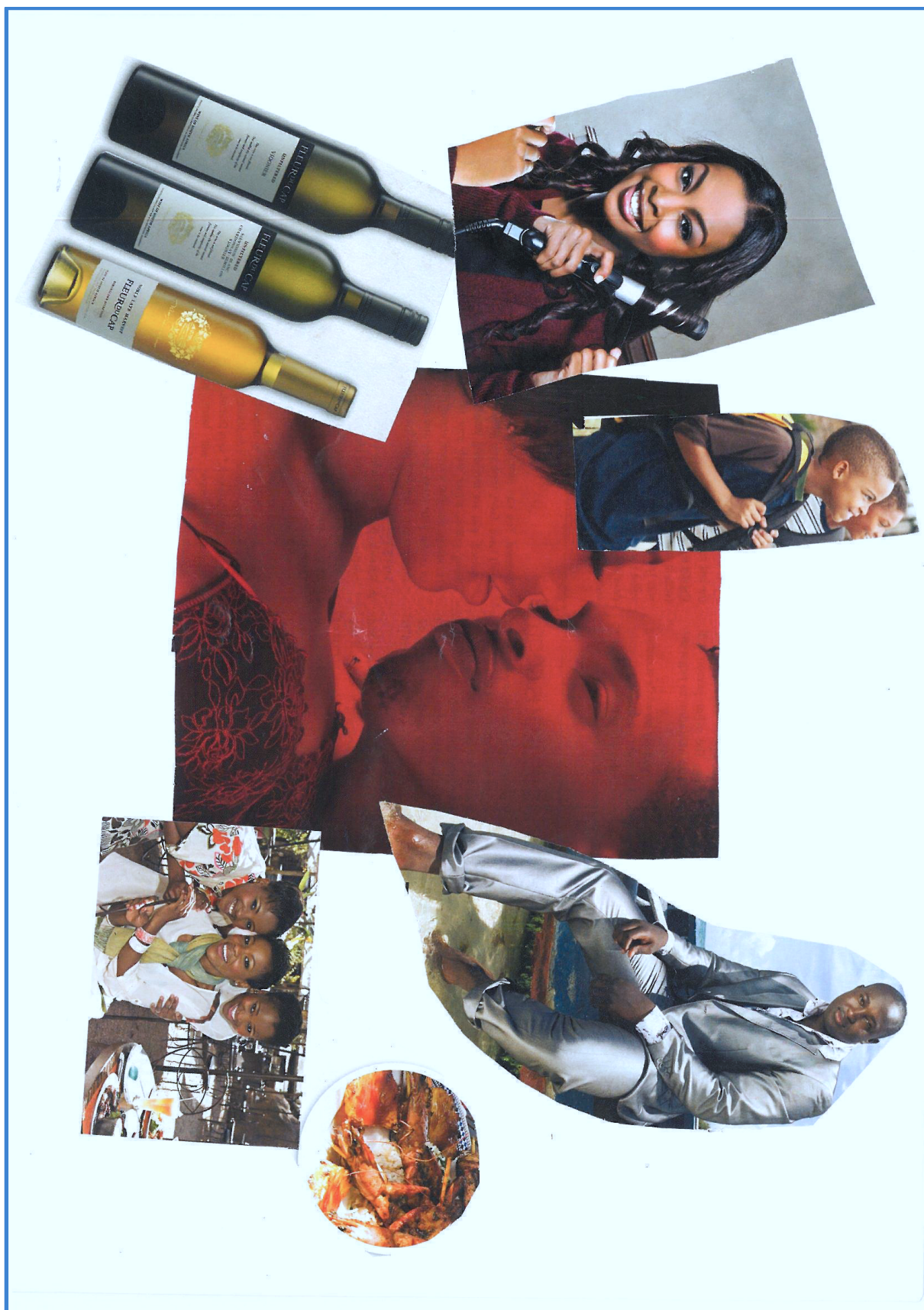


Figure 3.3: Xoli (Jezebel)'s collage of her understanding of sexuality



Figure 3.4: Zoleka's collage of her understanding of sexuality



Figure 3.5: Londi's collage of her understanding of sexuality

3.3 “Are we far off?” Looking at how others define sexuality

The above section (3.2.) gives insight into how we as participants thought about sexuality and also into how we were relating to each other. The next step for us was to look at how other people have defined sexuality. We looked at two definitions of sexuality that I had taken from different sources. I chose these definitions because they seemed to differ in their explanations and they seemed to be quite easy to understand. I asked the group to identify one definition that we felt gave us a broader view of sexuality and seemed to bring together all the issues we had discussed so far. The one chosen was to be our working definition of what sexuality meant to us as participants. The following are the two definitions of sexuality that I provided:

Definition One:

“As the individual capacity to respond to physical experiences which are capable of producing body-centred excitations that only subsequently become associated with cognitive 1. Individual capacity 2. Experiential 3. Body – oriented 4. Genetically oriented.” (Goettsch, 1989, p. 250)

Definition Two:

“...Part of the total person, including his or her sexual thoughts, emotions, experiences, relationships, learning, ideas, values and imaginings. There is the ethical component of sexuality which involves ideas, values and moral opinions about sex, [Gender] and sexuality. The other is the biological including human reproduction fertility control, sexual arousal and response physiological cycles and changes in physical appearances. The third aspect in the psychological which involves emotions, experiences, self-concepts, motivation, learned attitudes and learned behaviour.” (Planned Parenthood Association of South Africa, 1998, p. 45)

In our discussion, we rejected the first definition as being narrow and excluding some of the areas of human development that we felt were also missing from our own personal

definitions. The second definition was then adopted as the definition that seemed to encompass all issues that were covered in the Life Orientation (LO) programme and that we felt dealt with the different dimensions of a human being. It is this definition that took us forward into the journey through our own perceptions and growth as women and teachers of sexuality education.

3.4 Our journey continued: Understanding our sexual identities through storytelling

Here, we enter into the deep-seated experiences of the participants as we journeyed into the past, looking for that specific story that best described our experiences and that might give insight into why we had taken specific positions with regards to our understanding of sexuality and its expression.

Through conversation and storytelling, we delved into how we could understand the different sexual identities we had taken on as individuals. This was in line with the first critical question for this study: *“How can teachers better understand their own sexual identities?”* This section presents stories that have been organised according to specific themes that connected certain participants’ stories. Through the storytelling, additional themes emerged as we discussed and reflected on each story. This assisted in giving clarity to the experiences and providing enlightenment for the storyteller. Our hope was that through telling and discussing our stories we could begin to understand the different paths we had taken in our journey of becoming women and teachers.

Moving from our starting point of understanding sexuality in its broader sense, we wanted to find out how our lived experiences might have contributed to our understandings of sexuality. In so doing, we wanted to find out how we could better understand our sexual identities as human beings and as teachers. As we began, we all reflected on how we had never really thought of ourselves as having a specific identity relating to our sexuality. When one spoke of identity to us, we thought of whom we were, where we came from, our home background and schooling. Nevertheless, we all agreed to begin the interesting journey we were about to embark on, as daunting as it appeared to be.

Perhaps because of our own cultural heritage as black Zulu women, oral storytelling became the most favoured means of relating our stories. (See Chapter Two for further discussion of storytelling as a data generation strategy.) We sought the comfort that storytelling seemed to

bring to us as participants, when we related stories that were otherwise not easy to tell. As we told these stories, we agreed that these may not have been the only events in our lives that had brought us to where we were, but that these particular stories appeared to epitomise our experiences. We employed storytelling as a means of collective memory-work through which we told our individual stories to each other and we listened and responded to each story as it was told, to assist with the memory and meaning of the story (see Balli, 2011; Kleinknecht & Beike, 2004).

As discussed in Chapter Two, we began with a discussion in which we assisted each other in remembering the role that stories have played in our lives. We agreed that through stories we had learned some valuable lessons about life and relationships. Reminiscing about our interaction with stories paved the way for the stories that we told of our past experiences.

In my view, our stories revealed that, in many respects, we are our past and unless we make peace with it or try to put it into perspective, we will never leave it. As Chege (2004) reminds us, professional behaviour “is not only determined by a pre-set organisational or institutional context but also by a person’s life history and experiences that are transformed accordingly as situations demand” (p. 2). Consequently, it is important for sexuality education teachers “to become reflective of their own autobiographical experiences of teaching and learning” (Samuel, 2003, p. 271). It was these experiences that we set out to unravel within the safe environment of the sessions during which we all had to face our separate “demons” (Masinga, 2007, p. 59) with the hope that through shared confrontation we could begin to understand what it all meant. We also hoped to begin to put it into context for ourselves and thus to understand the people we have become and might still become.

We also began to realise that the stories we were sharing showed our uniqueness as individuals with distinctive perspectives on life and its meaning. In the following section of the chapter, our shared stories are laid out, to show the differences and similarities across the stories as they were told and discussed. Through our reflections as participants, we came to realise that what was unique about our stories was the events told. However, there were underlying common themes that emerged that created a bond between some of the stories and story tellers. It is within those common themes that our stories will be told.

The individual stories within this section are re-presented using the participants' voices, as they were audio recorded within the session. However, to assist with relating the overall story of our journey, I also employ the voices of the other participants through extracts from the sessions. This is intended to show the dialogue that assisted us to arrive at certain understandings of the process. In the process of narrating our stories, I also include my researcher voice in some parts of the discussion. This is done to highlight what I thought of the process and what I was experiencing as both the researcher and a participant.

3.4.1 When love hurts

We begin this first tale by looking at the 'oldest story in the book', ABUSE. For me, the following two stories revealed how, in our life time, we are bound to meet a woman that has experienced abuse in one way or the other. In relation to this study, the question I asked myself as a researcher was, *"What implications do such experiences have for how a woman might later see herself as a sexual being and what implications might this have for how we will be as teachers of sexuality, where issues of abuse are an important component of the curriculum of sexuality?"*

From these stories, I learned that abuse is like a small dose of poison taken every day. As with taking poison, you often sooner or later die. When administered in small portions, abuse slowly leads to that final fateful day when the unthinkable happens. What you are about to read are stories of two women who took abuse in small doses, until for them, that final act came. Are they not lucky, that they lived to tell the tale? Meet Mbali and Zama. These two women have lived two very different lives, but they share a common experience: abuse from a man they loved and trusted. I want to have their voices tell their tales and allow their expressions of what took place take us back to that time when their worlds did not make sense.

Zama' story:

The big incident happened one day when I got home. I had bought some veggies which I forgot to take out from the car. Where I lived there was no proper parking, so I parked a bit away from the flat. When I needed to cook, eh... I remembered the veggies. I said to him, "I am going to the car to get something." He looked at me and said, "You are going nowhere." I said, "Ok, go and get it then." He said "No, we are all staying in the house today,

nobody is going anywhere." I just said, "Fine I will cook something else." Later, I asked him if he would eat that day. He said, "Yes." He had this thing of not eating and just looking at the food. I had started a habit of asking him as every time food was dished out for him, he would not eat.

But that day, he said, "Yes I will eat 'cause I'm eating for the last time today." As he said it, it did not record in my mind what it meant. I sat down to watch TV and Generations [a local soap opera] highlights came on and I laughed. He said, "What are you laughing at?" I said, "I am laughing at what I saw on TV." He said "You are laughing with your men." I was amazed. I would have understood if I was speaking on the phone with somebody, but I was laughing alone. I asked, "What men?" He said, "You are thinking about them. You are making a fool out of me! You start by giving me food; let the idiot eat while you are busy laughing." That went on for a while, then he started other things, such as, "Why did you use my phone yesterday, why didn't you ask for it?" I just said, "What is wrong?! Do you want to pack?!" "I will help you this time!" I went to the wardrobe and started pulling down his clothes. At that time, I was also very angry and shouting and pulling down clothes. He was pushing me and trying to throw me down. You know, that day I got a punch in the face that I have never received in my life. We lived on the 6th floor. He dragged me to the window trying to throw me out. I fought him and held on the frame of the window. He is a small built man and so I was able to struggle him to the floor.

Both my kids were in the other room. He said, "I am finishing everything today." He said, "I will start with you", meaning me. Then he pointed at the direction of my eldest daughter. "Then end with you" he said, pointing at the baby. "Then kill me, I will finish all today." When he said that, he pulled the footstool to reach to those, you know, those top shelves, I knew there was a gun on top as there was a safe. He pulled the stool and started climbing up. I started trying to push the stool as he climbed to stop him getting the gun and reaching for it until he managed to get his gun.

I think all this he had planned as the gun was set and loaded. He knew that he was going to do this. I jumped on him and there was a struggle; we fought pushing and pulling. I knew he was not a strong man. During that time my daughter, my eldest daughter was busy trying to open the door by breaking it with an iron. By the way, the keys to the flat and the car, he had already thrown them outside the window to the streets. Anyway, by that time the door was already open. I could not see that she had managed to open it and she ran out with her baby sister. At that time, he and I were still at it. I was trying to get hold of the gun; it went off three, four times, hitting the ceiling. We both were shocked; the gun flew to the floor and went under the sofa as we had made our way to the opening leading to the sitting room. He dived trying to get it out, the sofa was one of those low ones and it was heavy. As he was trying to reach for the gun, I saw the open door and I ran outside. My clothes were all torn and you could not tell what I was wearing with my bra all out. Outside, people were all over the place; people were shouting. Some went inside the house. They grabbed him and I ran to the nearest police station, with my clothes all tore up. I came close to you seeing me in '*Isol ezwe*' [a local Zulu newspaper].

Mbali's story:

When my eyes opened up to boys, they opened up on him. He loved me and I was everything to him, like a delicate egg that should never fall. I knew whatever I wanted I would receive, but do you know guys what followed every time? ... Hey... beatings. I received it all and the beatings that came after... oh.... After that he would buy from all the stores he knew I loved. Everything he thought I needed, I received. A person looking from far would be saying "Wow!" This went on until one day; I guess this is where my story begins.

At some point, I could see that he had already started to have other relationships and that girl made him crazy [meaning really into the girl]. You know you start thinking you are the one that rules when somebody treats you like a queen. When he started fooling around, that was the time when I needed him the most. I was already training at school and I needed money.

He had taught me that love is jealous and that lead to me starting to act crazy. I was keeping track of wherever he was and who he was with, until I got tired and accepted that he was no longer mine. He used to come every Friday to collect me for the weekend and brought me back to campus on Sunday. That no longer happened. I started to go home on Fridays; mind you, I was not used to public transport as I was always driven wherever I wanted to go. It was that decision to start doing things on my own like going home without him collecting me that lead to that fateful day.

It was not more than 10 minutes after getting home when his car came over. It had been a while since I had seen his car or him; mind you, I had been trying to get hold of him. Remember, as much as I knew and some part of me had given up on him, I still needed him and depended on him. He had taken over the role of not only being the father of my son, but my father as well. As he did everything for me, now he was not around. Now on this day, he showed up at my house, and to him I was supposed to be happy to see him. I couldn't bring myself to be happy; I just became cold. At the time he was with his friend whom he came over with. According to him, my cold attitude was due to me having a new boyfriend. He looked at me and said, "You now have a new boyfriend ...Ok...that is fine. We cannot talk here in your family house, let's go." Something told me, "Today, I am not going anywhere with him." I stood my ground and said, "No." Then the unimaginable happened right there in front of my family house with my son and my other siblings inside the house. All I remember is that I started to turn back into the house and the air was filled with gun shots. As I fell on the ground, I shouted for my mother. It was at that time that she was climbing out of a taxi coming back home. Apparently, she heard the shots and heard my screams calling for her. She came running shouting, "My daughter!" That was her crime. The gun shots went off again as he had turned on her and shot my mother too. "Can you imagine?" Her other kids were inside the house and they were not to see her as that day was to end with her in hospital fighting for her life.

You see her wounds were worse than mine. When he shot me, he was aiming for my spine, but I moved and he managed to shoot me in the leg at that time

before he realised I was not shot as he had aimed to do. That was when my mother's voice came through and he turned on her. You know, when it happened I did not even feel like I was shot, I thought he had aimed on the ground to scare me. Only when I realised I was lying on the floor bleeding and could not move, it came to me he was actually aiming at me! When my mother's voice came through I thought, "There comes my mom and all will be ok. She will help me," as inside the house no one seemed to see that I was the one being shot at and none of them came out! They must have thought the gun shots were coming from somewhere else. Since I was with the father of my son I was safe... Hmmmm.

It was later on that I realised that the psychopathic signs were there, but I chose to ignore them as my life depended so much on what he was able to provide for me. I had never told myself that anything was wrong, minus the beatings at times. I thought, you know, I should have known. One day a girl that he was seeing when we started going out came running through my father's family house while I was still living there. She claimed to be running away from him as he was beating her and was still waiting for her on the streets. Of course, we didn't believe her. I thought she must have heard that he and I were dating and wanted to cause problems. Of all houses, why did she choose to run into our house? We had to accompany her out of the house. You know, even when we saw him standing on the streets, I still thought she was lying.

Again, at one time when he came to visit me on campus, one of the students asked him for a lighter and he said he did not smoke and therefore he did not have a lighter. The boy, who looked a little drunk, started talking nonsense to him, so that even I got a little annoyed. He looked at the guy and said, "Go away because you will not like what will happen to you." The guy said, "What are you going to do to me?" You know he looked at him and said, "I will kill you." The guy went away without a word again. Idiot that I was, I was really happy because the guy was an annoying person and I knew after this he would not come near me again! He actually went out of his way not to have our paths crossing again. That should have been a sign but still...

There was again the time he came over to see me and found that we had been drinking on campus. That day he took me back to his house. He said since I liked to drink so much, he would buy me my own bottle to drink on my own. He sat me down and told me to drink all of it! It was 'Fish Eagle' whiskey; remember that was what was popular those days. He sat watching me drink, you know...hey...I had to tell myself that I had to finish that bottle. I also had to make sure that my mind stayed clear and knew all that was happening. I was half way through the bottle when he said, "Spread your legs." I fought him like a mad woman that day, I knew that he wanted to prove that alcohol made me loose and that was why I drank. If I had said "yes", I would have been beaten to death.

He started to give me permission to attend friends' parties; as soon as I got there he would come and park on the street for as long as I was in that party. If he saw I was ignoring his presence, he would send someone he saw on the street to get me. According to him, that was enough for the day. When I was at his house and he was going somewhere, he would make sure I had no money in my bag, so that I would remain in the house for as long as he was gone. So guys, the signs were there.

What I now still cannot explain was what happened after he had shot me and my mother. As I was in my hospital bed, I told myself it was over. It is what everybody expected me to do! However, inside I began to think, "This is the father of my son." I still loved him and needed him too. I thought of how I didn't want to have my son experience not having a father like I did. As I thought of it all, the flashbacks of that day would come back. Through it all, I managed to convince myself I still needed him. I even managed to convince my mother, who came closer to dying, to forgive him and all rituals necessary were performed by him to seek forgiveness.

When I came back on campus, everybody knew of what had happened. What made it worse was that my mother got shot too. So nobody expected to see me with him again, but I did see him. I even helped him to find ways to

come and see me on campus by telling him to come over in his mother's car so that my friends wouldn't see him. I was afraid that people were going to see how stupid I was. Bottom line, I loved him. I wanted to see him. I knew another person would have let him go, but me, I continued to see him. However, things had changed. I was more afraid of him, I was afraid for my life and he knew it. Every small argument that we would have I would ask him if he was going to shoot me again.

Soon, he went back to his old ways. I knew he was never going to change and I started to think, "Am I ever going to be happy again?" As we fought, every time, I would wonder, "If he shot me for no reason at all, what if one day I gave him a reason...What would he do?" I told myself this had to be over.

As explained in Chapter Two, as each of us related her story, the others interjected with questions and statements that provided clarification for us as listeners. The intention was to make sure that we understood all the elements that made the story what it turned out to be. It also assisted us in beginning to analyse as we engaged and reflected on each story; Zama and Mbali's stories were no exception. As can be imagined, the two stories left us emotionally drained and bewildered. After the initial shock of the stories, a flood of questions and explanations followed.

Our main objective for the storytelling was to look at how we could better understand our sexual identities. A significant feature of each story was our relationships with others. In the above stories, we identified the storytellers as the abused. Both of them had been abused within the sanctuary of a relationship that was supposed to have been based on love. We, however, saw the shift of positions of Zama and Mbali from being partners in their respective relationships to being the dominated and abused. We saw Mbali moving from the adored girlfriend and mother of a child, to the controlled kept woman. In Zama's story, we saw a wife with a husband who seemed not to find pleasure in being around his home and blaming his discomfort on his wife.

The lingering question we asked ourselves was: "*How do we miss the signs of abuse and the potential for a damaging situation that may occur?*" This was the question that burned in our minds as both stories were told. We could not make sense of how a man would one day wake

up and decide to kill his wife or girlfriend. Through interjections from other participants, we came to the realisation that, for both participants, the warning signs had been there. However, because of the role that each of these men played in Mbali and Zama's lives, the signs were ignored. With Zama, we saw a woman with a man that was both a husband and a father to her children. Through being asked, *"How was he before he started acting up?" (Londi)*, we learned that, for a long time the husband had been the sole provider for the family. He took care of Zama and the children while Zama was still trying to better herself by studying and later on trying to find employment. However, the newfound independence that came with Zama finding her feet and starting to contribute to the welfare of the family triggered something within her husband. She explained the changes in this way:

"He started saying he wanted to go home, meaning his family home. He would pack his things and go. I would ask why, following him around the house as he packed. He would go for one, two, three weeks. I would hurt, cry, until one day, I got used to him packing. One day he said, 'I am leaving.' I said, 'Fuck you, Go!'"

As for Mbali, it was the doting boyfriend that she came to know and need. However, that love and affection came with a price, as she related in her story:

"He loved me and I was everything to him, like a delicate egg that should never fall. I knew whatever I wanted I would receive, but do you know guys what followed every time? ... Hey... beatings. I received it all and the beatings that came after... oh.... After that he would buy from all the stores he knew I loved. Everything he thought I needed, I received. A person looking from far would be saying ... Wow!"

As we conversed and reflected on these stories, we concluded that both Mbali and Zama had to take some responsibility for the predicament that they had found themselves in. Although we had identified them as the abused, through discussion we came to realise that, for them to understand their past, they needed to understand the role they had played in these situations. We made it clear that we were not in any way detracting from what they had gone through. However, we seemed to want them to also realise that they did have opportunities to remove themselves from the situations that lead to the experiences of abuse:

Azande: *"When you saw the changes, why didn't you confront him about it?"*

Xoli: *"Some of the things you say you needed him for, you could have done without. You could have left him and still managed to continue with your studies."*

These were some of the questions and statements that we offered to prompt Zama and Mbali to reflect on their actions. As a collective, we agreed that for them to move forward and make peace with those particular events, they needed to take ownership of the experience and thus make educative (Dewey, 1963) meaning of the experience. We argued that while the abusers might never come with apologies or explanations for what they did, what was left was for Zama and Mbali might to find meaning for themselves and gain some control over the situation. To do that, we felt that they had to introspect on what they could have done differently. Thus, we asked:

Xoli: *"With all that you have said, you still did not see anything wrong with him?"*

Zoleka: *"When you found that used condom hanging in one of your cleaning detergents, why didn't you say something? Didn't you think he wanted you to see it and say something?"*

We realised that, for both storytellers, having these men as providers made them attach some form of loyalty and need to the men they were with. However, this still did not explain for us why they felt that these stories signified how they conceptualised their sexual understanding of themselves. *"How did all of this change your life?"* Xoli asked Zama, as we tried to find the relevance of her story to her sexual identity. Zama's immediate response was:

"To tell you the truth guys, I don't care about anything anymore. For those of you that know me, I'm sure you have noticed, every time when you see me I have a different 'John' [a term used for boyfriend] in my life. I don't trust men anymore. I want a relationship that has no drama. As soon as I sense drama about to start, I leave the guy. I feel it is about me now and I will not have anyone put me through that again. I don't know, maybe there is something that I am looking for and I am not getting from the men I meet."

From this, we realised that Zama's understanding of herself was now defined by that experience of abuse, which meant she was now reacting to prevent similar occurrences from taking place. Zama now identified men as users and abusers and she felt she should just take

what she needed from them and leave when things became too intense for her. That meant that her sexual identity was shaped by the nature of the relationship she now had with men in general. However, one major concern that was raised by the participants was the issue of her children. We seemed to want her to understand that the experiences she related were not just experienced by her only. There were children involved that also needed to be assisted in understanding and dealing with the experiences, so that they too could get the chance to put the events into perspective, thus allowing them the freedom to experience life on their own terms. As Lunga highlighted:

“My worry is that you have a daughter that was old enough to understand what was going on. Do you talk about it to her and don’t you think whatever you do now also affects her and her future self as well?”

Zoleka also asked:

“But do you talk with her about what she feels about the whole situation and what meaning she attaches to? I’m fearful that your choice of ‘dealing with it’ may not be the right way that will also help her. Seeing you now with different men may have some damaging implications for how she will see herself in future and relate to men as well.”

Zama’s reply to the questions was no surprise to me because of her refusal of assistance when I offered to put her in touch with a counsellor. I believed it would have been hard for her to realise what she needed to do for her daughter, when it had not occurred to her how much she also needed help for herself. Thus her response was:

“She is ok. She is a strong girl and she will ask me if she needs anything. We did talk a little about it but she appeared to understand.”

Mbali, on the other hand, chose marriage as a response to her experience of abuse. As she explained:

“I was careful with the choice of men that I ended up with. I looked for men that would not be able to control me. I wanted to dominate the relationship. I told myself

that no men would ever have possession of my existence or claim to have contributed to my achievements. I too have lost faith and trust in men and, to me, the one I settled with had all the elements of being safe.”

Zama and Mbali’s stories showed us how abuse brings about fear and resentment. We realised that it forces a person to have a different perspective on life and that leads to a change in how one sees oneself. Zama’s and Mbali’s journeys were marked by men who introduced control and intimidation into their lives and thus into how they viewed men. They, in turn, re-evaluated and changed who they were and how they chose to express themselves in life. The questions this raised for us as a group were: *“Was there ever a time when they felt they understood who they were?” “Could they say they were fully in control over their sexual identity before they met these men?”*

These questions brought out very interesting revelations for Zama and Mbali and for the rest of us as well. We realised that there was never a time when they had full control to develop a sexual identity that was constructed under no influential dynamics, such as family influence. As we dug deeper into Zama’s life, we found she had never had an opportunity to come to know herself as her life had always been under the control of someone else. As she explained:

“When I got pregnant with my first daughter, I was not even asked if I wanted to marry him. I was told his family had come to pay inhlawulo². When I came back after being sent to my relatives’ home, I was told a bride’s price had been paid. I was not even consulted on the matter. I was very young and I could not say anything.”

From this, we realised that, as Zulu women, we come from a cultural background that does not generally encourage girls to grow a concept of self-realisation. This awareness came after we had identified similarities in how we were treated as girls as compared to our male siblings. For example, we were expected to maintain our virginity as part of upholding the family name (an expectation that was not extended to the boys). We agreed that we were open to manipulation by others as we had few opportunities for self-discovery, since we were

² This is a Zulu traditional practice of a fine paid by the man to the woman’s family as an apology for impregnating an unwedded woman. The woman’s virginity is regarded as her family’s possession until she marries.

subjected to constant supervision by parents, family members and the community, where any adult person had the right to discipline you for anything they perceived as wrongdoing on your part. Although this community involvement was also extended to the boys, when it came to sexuality related matters, it appeared everybody turned a blind eye to the boys' behaviour. We became aware that we had identified ourselves according to how we were treated by significant people in our lives. In essence, our Zulu culture's treatment of girls' sexuality was different from that of boys. We felt that we were groomed for attracting a husband by being virginal and also for being a 'good wife' while bearing responsible children. Through this discussion, it became apparent to me that such differential positioning and treatment of boys and girls, men and women is one of the silences in our schools (as discussed in Chapter One), because parents, teachers and learners are guarded, unable or unwilling to reflect personally on issues of gender and sexuality. As discussed in Chapter one, research indicates that this disengagement on such issues seriously undermine the teaching and learning of sexuality education and, specifically, HIV & AIDS prevention initiatives (see Jewkes, 2002; Morrell, 2003).

3.4.2 When all I can be is me (our sexual expressions)

The road that we have travelled may have been similar, but the obstacles met along the way were different. These are stories of Mandla and Sihle³, whose sexual journey was marked by self-deprivation and family influence. In the beginning, the lives of these two participants were tainted with confusion and secrecy as the world set out to impose its expectations as to who they were meant to be, and never accepted who they really were. Today, these participants identify themselves as openly lesbian and living what they truly believe to be their authentic selves. However, it has not always been that way, and it does not mean that all has suddenly made sense and the world is alright. Their stories are told by Mandla, narrating the journey that he and Sihle both travelled to get where they are now.

Mandla and Sihle's story:

The father of my child was never the deciding factor for my current sexual preferences. I need to explain this to show you where I was at when I met and befriended Sihle. When Sihle came to work at my school, we were not that close. However, I used to drive a Venture car [a large car] and would give

³ It should be noted that both participants insisted on being identified as male. Hence the pseudonyms used are male Zulu names.

some of the teachers a lift to town every day, including him. One day, after I had given them a lift, when the others got out of the car, he remained and said, "Listen, today I am going with you." You see, at that time, he had not really come out, although she later became the first one to do so.

We started to move around a lot together after that day and we became close. One day when we were in town sitting and having a few drinks, he said to me, "Friend, I have something to tell you about me." I said to him, "Come out with it. We may have the same kind of story to tell!" At that time, I had already started to notice a few familiar things about him. Although we had never discussed it or said anything about it, we were a lot similar. When we would walk around town together, I would point out a certain girl, appreciating her, and he would respond in a way that was similar to my thoughts!

That day, when we were sitting on the benches near the beach in town while I waited to collect my mother, he first said to me, "I have had a relationship with some guy...it did not work out...and I couldn't do it." I immediately understood what he meant! We started to relate our experiences with men that were meant to mean something to us, but we were just not relating at all. As we sat on that bench, we looked at each other and we knew what we had to admit to ourselves.

As clear as it was to us who we were, it became clear to me that there was no way that I was ever going to come out. The people at home were going to freak out and that was the last thing I wanted to do! Sihle said that was what he knew was going to happen with his family as well; they would not accept it. We were stuck. We continued to sit and talk about our separate growing up experiences, looking at our actions and situations we both had experienced that validated for us why we were sure of whom we were.

After that day, Sihle changed before my eyes. At work, we both wore dresses and skirts, you know, female stuff. After our day at the beach, he moved out of his family house into a flat in town. By that time he had found himself a

girlfriend. As for me, I was still the Mandla that everybody thought they knew. I couldn't bring myself to do it. As for Sihle, he never said anything to anyone; he just became who he felt he was and people saw whatever they wanted to see.

The whispering and gossiping started at school. Teachers would approach me! Isn't that funny, they wanted to know what was wrong with him. At that time, he had started wearing only men's clothes to work and the other teachers did not understand. Being his friend, they felt I was the one that had to talk to him to tell him how inappropriate he was being! Mind you, at that time, I was still looking like the Mandla they knew with skirts and all! So they suspected nothing with me. He changed not just the clothes, even his hairstyle, anything that said 'girl' he changed. They were quick to pick it up.

As the negative talking and comments continued, it became clear to me that that was how they were going to react if I ever came out. I was not sure if I was ready for that. Sihle continued to be himself until one day a teacher approached him and asked him directly to explain himself. Other than me, that teacher was the one to whom he actually took his time to explain himself. The others continued to come to me to gossip about him. Little did they know I was the wrong person to be talking to. That made me hesitate more to come out.

It got worse for Sihle when his family started on him. They called a family meeting that was intended to make him see what was wrong with what he was doing. At that time, everybody in the township knew about him and who he had "become" as they said. That included my mother! Boy, did she hate him when she found out and saw him for herself. She made it clear that she never wanted to see me with him ever again! She accused me, "How could you! Everybody in the township says you are having a relationship with that girl!" I knew that was what was being said around. I explained it to her that no, I was not in a relationship with him. However, we were very good friends, a fact she knew very well. She didn't want to hear of it: "No no, Mandla everybody is saying it. How could you put me into such shame? Even in the

church, people are telling me they see you with that girl! They see you in that girl's house." By then, Sihle had returned from living in town and was renting a house in the township.

When my mother saw that I didn't stop hanging around him, she came up with every possible thing that would keep me with her everyday all the time. I knew what she was doing; she was trying to keep me busy so I didn't have time for him. It got to a point where I had to tell her to stop it. I could not spend so much time with her. She is my mother and I love her, but this had to stop. Somehow, she found a way to blame Sihle for it and by that time she truly hated him. By the way, Sihle was longer referred to by her name, but was now called, "That girl." Little did my mother know that the reason I was spending so much time in his house, was that I now had a girlfriend that lived around his place.

From then, my mother was on my case a lot and it was getting to be too much for me. I was already changing so much in a way that I had not planned. She was quick to notice the changes, which made her worse. It finally came to me that I couldn't do this anymore. I had no peace and I was truly unhappy. I had to come out; I needed to come out. At that time, my mother made it her task to remind me about the father of my child and that this thing of copying bad habits from people was going to hurt me in the end. You know, I finally sat her down and started to remind her that she was there when I was growing up. I reminded her that not once, but plenty of times she had asked me what it was with me and girls, how I felt about girls. I told her, "I couldn't explain it to you, but you saw and chose to ignore it. "You kept asking, wanting me to be the one to say it. I couldn't do it. I was young and afraid that, you would beat me." I told her, "You saw all that I did, but you continued to ignore it. I never wanted any girls' clothing or anything relating to girls. You're the one who went out and bought all that stuff that I never used." Her response was, "I don't need this." I told her that by 'this' she meant me. If she did not need 'this' as she put it, it meant she did not need me. I told her I would move out of her house. I would visit her if she wanted me to.

It was 2007 in December that I decided to say it out loud to her, "Mother, I am a lesbian." I even introduced the girl I was seeing at that time. She couldn't deal with it for a long time and her hate for Sihle got worse with time, as she believed it was all his influence. In 2009, I decided to put an end to this nonsense and called a family meeting, with everybody that I felt was important to me. That also included my mother's friend, who also happened to be my school principal. I also felt it was important to include Sihle in that meeting, a fact that my mother was not happy about. I was tired; I mean tired in every way possible. I told them, "Today I want all of you to hear me well and hear it all from me. I know that through the years some of you have heard it wrong from my mother. I need to make it clear that my life is my own and I make a claim of every decision that affects it. This is me, I am Gay and there is nothing else but that. I was not influenced by anybody, and if mom would admit it, I have always been this way." I told them, "When mother suspected she went as far as to push a man on me which lead to my having a child right now." In that moment, I didn't care what I was saying; I needed to say all of it. It was not important what they ended up thinking. All I knew was that I knew my truth and, if they had a problem with it, I really didn't care anymore.

These days, my mother tries very hard to play along. The problem now is that she has taken it upon herself to choose which girl is right for me. That has become our main reason for fighting, as I tell her to stay out of my business. I told her not to interfere in my relationships. Through her interference I found myself having a live in girlfriend! Can you imagine!

In the school front, some couldn't take it well and I understood with their religious beliefs. I expected it. It helped me as well that Sihle came out first. The trouble also started when we both wore men's clothes to school. We were called to a meeting to address the issue of a dress code which it was felt we were breaking. We made it clear that the clothes were not going anywhere. We had stated who we were and, according to the dress code, they were talking about, we were in line. They needed to get used to it and they did, eventually.

In Mandla and Sihle's story, we meet two individuals who did not appear to be in any doubt as to who they were and how they identified themselves as sexual beings. One would think their journey should have been easy; however, from the story that has been related, it appears that that was not always the case. From their story, we learned how our identities are not always only about what we know about ourselves. We realised that how others position us also has an impact on how we will experience our sexuality. When looking at their story, we saw two women who identify themselves as lesbians and who also wanted to be identified as men. However, with cultural influences, the church, and family expectations, that was not to be an easy task for them. Mandla and Sihle's story illustrated for us how family, religious and cultural influences play a significant role in how we view ourselves. We realised that, when we put others first before our own feelings to appear to be what is seen as 'normal', we lose control over the right to make our own choices, irrespective of what others think or feel.

We saw how both Mandla and Sihle tried to conform to the expectations placed on them based on the anatomy that they were born with that identified them as female. We saw the struggle they both experienced as they tried to conform to that identity that in some instances placed them in damaging experiences:

"When I met the father of my child, I was with my mother. You see my mother and his parents knew each other. There was a joke that was made that him and I should hook up. We all laughed. The next thing I knew he was calling and being serious. On the other hand, my mother was on me on how she would love to have him as my boyfriend and potential son-in-law. At the time, I was living as a woman, but I knew in my heart that mother suspected something. That is why she needed this relationship to work."
(Mandla)

Although Mandla knew in his heart who he was, the pressure of his mother wanting to secure him in a relationship that she thought was suitable for him proved too strong. As a consequence, Mandla is a mother of a daughter. He said:

"If it was not for my mother I would not have fallen pregnant. I love my daughter very much. However the position that I was in when I had her I regret more than anything."

In conforming to the image that had been imposed upon them, we saw Mandla and Sihle both playing roles that had been decided by others. When Sihle was asked about his life prior to the ‘coming out’, this is what he related:

“I grew up like all of you, wearing the dresses and I was even in a relationship with a man. A lot happened in my life that still hurts me to this day. Things that I do not talk about and do not wish to share right now. Mandla is my friend, but I have not even related those experiences to him. Maybe one day I will.”

Sihle explained that when growing up, he knew what was expected of him and he went along with it. He could not disappoint his family. So Sihle and Mandla played the role of being heterosexual, as that was what family and society dictated. This meant that the sexual identity they portrayed was not who they truly felt they were.

For us, Sihle and Mandla’s story was a powerful illustration of how, when one attempts to disentangle oneself from what is socially known and expected, one can meet with resistance and rejection. This was the negative journey they both had travelled to arrive at a place where they could live out what they now see as their true authentic selves. As Mandla told their story, this was how it was understood and reflected upon by us as participants.

However, it should be noted that, in responding to this story, we seemed not to express our personal thoughts when it came to issues of homosexuality. It appeared to me that there was an unspoken agreement that was maintained by the listeners not to ‘go there’. As a researcher participant, I could not get the other participants to truly open up and there was silence on the issue. I could tell this by the ambiguous responses that were given by the other participants. Interestingly, however, most participants had no problem sharing their true feelings in private settings where Mandla and Sihle were not around to hear, and these were not positive comments. Most of us had known both Mandla and Sihle on a personal basis. Those pre-existing relationships and also the fact that within the sessions we had developed a sense of respect and protection for each other, made it clear to me that no one was going to step out of that supportive role in the group setting. As I reflected in my journal:

“Wow! Can people put on a face! I know for a fact that some of the ladies who did not know Mandla and Sihle were not at all in agreement with what they called their ‘choice of life’. I think people made a conscious decision to not be negative or different from what others had to say.” (20 September, 2010)

Moreover, based on the questions asked and the statements made by some of the participants, it became evident that some of us felt an alliance with Mandla and Sihle’s parents. Irrespective of the place where this alliance emanated from, it became clear that some of us felt that it was crucial for both Mandla and Sihle to come to understand their relatives’ perspectives. It was clear as the story was being told that there was still a lot of anger and resentment that they both attached to how their families had rejected what they saw as their true identity which, to them, was rejection of their selves.

As we exchanged thoughts and feelings about the story, we reflected that our parents come from a different generation that has different expectations and ways of living. We realised that they see their job as parents to raise us, based on how they were raised and what was expected from us by society. To them, being the opposite of that means they have failed. They view it in terms of how it reflects on and affects them. This is illustrated by Mandla’s mother’s comment:

“No no, Mandla...everybody is saying it...how could you put me into such shame! Even in the church, people are telling me they see you with that girl! They see you in that girl’s house.”

From this, we realised that for Mandla’s mother, the issue was how others would think and that made her insensitive to what Mandla was going through. Later, when listening to the audio tape of the session, I also realised that this had to do with the Zulu, Christian society that both Mandla and Sihle were raised in being dominantly based on heterosexual ideology (as discussed further in Chapter Four).

3.4.3 I am more than the physical me

It seems to be true, that in life, we are hurt by both what people say and do not say to us. Our view of who we think we are gets clouded by what we perceive ourselves to be, based on those words. We dwell on what was said because it seems to make sense to us. Therefore,

when it is negative and comes from people we trust more than anyone else in the world, we believe it to be true. The results can be damaging to the recipient and can also build one's character, as we try to be more than what people expect from us. It all depends on the inner strength of the individuals, as they battle to be the best they know they can be irrespective of whether they were expected to or not. Meet Zoleka, a participant who had to fight to find inner happiness and self-acceptance, to be the person she believes herself to be today.

Zoleka's story:

Over time, I have created a very sheltered life for myself. How I have turned out to be, whether positive or not, has been my own effort. In my life, I have not had the kinds of shattering experiences we have been listening to since we started hearing these stories. However, for me, the outcome has been equally trying and painful. In my early years, I believe that my identity was based solely on physical appearance. I was born a big baby and, as you can see, I never looked back. All my life, I have been what is considered 'fat'. Hence, I truly believed for a long time that there was something wrong with me. I thought I needed to have all that I thought was wrong with me fixed, before I could be a normal girl. I knew that this was not only in my head, as I received a lot of affirmation from people that I loved and trusted that they knew what they were talking about and had my best interests at heart.

You see, I am the first born in my family, not only that, I am the first granddaughter on both sides of the family. I grew up in a family where everybody was thin. My mother was and still is a very thin woman who will never be fat for as long as she lives. When she had me, I don't think she was prepared for a child that was big. So, I believe that she made a lot of emotional mistakes with me. I don't believe she ever lost an opportunity to remind me of who I could be if I could just put more effort into losing the weight. Now, it did not help my case that as soon as I was born my grandmother and my uncle's girlfriend each gave birth to a daughter. That meant that all three of us were born the same year. I was the oldest by a couple of months. Yes, as some of you know them, they were thin little girls!

That marked the beginning of my journey as a fat girl who needed to lose weight to fit in. Name the type of diet available, I have tried it and failed at it. All before I was twenty one! Let me tell you...In the beginning my mother was my diet pills: "Walk fast! People will think you are lazy because of your weight." "Don't eat that!" "Suck in your tummy!" "If I have to shop for your dresses again I swear I will kill myself! "Ooh how lucky you are you can find something to fit your daughter, as for me; mine is trying out a few. We have been to all shops and there have nothing that fits her!" Those are just a few of my memories of being helped to 'deal with it'. Now, in this period of my life, my mother's disappointed voice was my diet. As I grew up and started to talk back a little, she promoted herself to 'the looks'. You know the saying, 'if looks could kill!" I could feel her watching me every time I so much as opened a fridge or sat down to eat while the others were playing. I mean, how I dare get hungry before the thin ones did!

When the eye eventually stopped working as I got used to it, my mother discovered the wonderful world called diet pills. I knew them all; as soon as she felt I was old enough to take them I did. I even started to suggest some every time I heard of some wonderful pill that did the job fast! Now I was old enough not to need the eye or the words, or any suggestion (not that it was never again offered); I was doing it all by myself. I had by now seen what I was told I needed to see. I became my worst enemy. I saved some of my pocket money to try out whatever that I thought would help. That marked my existence for very long time.

With this you can imagine what my thoughts were when it came to boys. As soon as we reached a certain age, my age mates started to experiment with boys and relationships. Not me; I never allowed any boy to come near me. It's only now that I see that I rejected them first before they had the opportunity to reject me. I became a very tough girl who took no nonsense from nobody. At school, I developed a lot of friendships with boys just as friends. I was ok with that; I truly believed I was. I didn't want to engage in all the things that my peers were getting into. It did not help that they started to have babies and were going through things they had no business experiencing because

of their age. That sealed it for me; I was on the right track. By then, I didn't think the issue was my weight; I was making good decisions for my life that kept me safe.

Soon, I developed a keen interest in school and placed all my energy and focus on school. I had a plan for my life and it did not include boys or man as it turned out. I was what was termed the 'good girl'. As you can imagine, I had no emotional relationship with my mother. She had no clue what was up with me; she only knew her daughter was finally being good at something! As I am sure you have guessed, I 'sucked' at anything that was physical. When my three other siblings came along, I disappeared for her, not in a good way.

In my life, I have known the saddest and loneliest times and all that time I have never been physically on my own. It was during those times that I knew that my happiness lay only in my hands. I believed that there was no one on this earth that would ever bring me more than what I could provide for myself. As I sit here, I can firmly say I emotionally and otherwise brought myself to where I am now. Guys, I do not want to take away from my parents that they never did anything for me. I had a roof over my head. I had the financial resources to see me through school. However, what I did not have is that bond with your parents that sees you through the toughest times of your life. I am what I believe I need to make me ok with the world.

In our discussion, we agreed that, to understand Zoleka's story, one needs to first understand the bond and the emotional expectations attached to our parents: the unwavering trust we have in them to always have our best interests at heart. Furthermore, one needs to also understand the bond and expectations that we have as women towards the relationship we hold with our mothers in particular. Hence, we realised that Zoleka's view of who she thought she was from a young age was predominantly influenced by the relationship she had with her mother.

The understanding that we placed on Zoleka's story was that her identity was formed through a narrow view of identity that placed physical appearance as the basis for the understanding of the self. Therefore, as participants, we agreed that it was apparent that the self-concept that

Zoleka held of herself for all these years was not an authentic understanding of the self. In our view, whatever manner she came to be who she is now, was a direct response and reaction to her environment.

Although, according to her, Zoleka's view of herself at some point stopped being influenced by her physical appearance, we attempted to make her understand that she did not actually change her view, but rather, she developed a means of escape to deal with her situation. In doing so, she formed an identity that we felt was not authentic. She created an identity of a strong woman who needed no one, a woman with academic interest that took over her life and left no room for relationships, particularly with the opposite sex. As we listened, all of these came across and were expressed to her as camouflages for the deep feelings that she had and was not dealing with.

Hence, our conclusion was that she was yet to get to know who she is. To do that, she needed to deal with her past and also put her relationship with her mother into perspective that would allow her to move forward and begin to find her true self. However, her mother is a permanent fixture in her life and appears to have not changed. When asked, *"How is your relationship with your mother now?"* (Lunga), Zoleka responded:

"It is the same and maybe even worse. There is a bond between her and my two sisters that leaves no room for any kind of bonding for us to take place. I do not think she will ever be able to ever put me first or acknowledge my feelings over anything. So, the more she does that, the further apart we grow."

With that in mind, we concluded that her growth will only come from her finding peace and moving forward and never expecting change from her mother.

To achieve that, we attempted to help her to evaluate her mother through different lenses by questions such as, *"How was your mother's relationship with her mother? Does she talk about it?"* (Londi). We learned that her grandmother was a hard woman that seemed to have not had a good relationship with her own daughter. Thus, Zoleka's mother seemed to be repeating the same trend that had been started by her own mother. Also, we tried to bring to Zoleka's attention to where her mother's state of mind may have been when she had her, by reminding her that:

“Remember, Zoleka, your mother was very young when she had you. She may have not had an idea as to how to be a mother and the only close image she had was that of her own mother. She resorted to superficial reasoning to deal with you.”(Azande)

This was an attempt to assist Zoleka with a different way of looking at her mother. However, we did not intend to justify her mother's actions, but we felt that for Zoleka to deal with it, she needed to step out of her current view and look at the issues differently. As Sihle and Mandla's story also showed us, when we seek to appear 'normal', whatever that means, we lose ourselves in the process. Hence, we came to the conclusion that, for Zoleka, her sexual identity was yet to be formed and understood by her. We felt that she has sheltered herself from experiencing life to its fullest and that meant that she had not yet truly taken the journey for herself.

3.4.4 Their experiences made me who I am

We all want to believe that we are who we are because we have decided to be that way. Little do we know how much of who we are has already been decided by the experiences and the exposure we have had in our lives. Those in turn influence the daily decisions we make as to who we want to be and how we want people to view us. Meet Azande, as she relates to us how her daily experiences as a daughter, watching her parents live their lives, have shaped her life and the decisions she has made for herself and her wellbeing:

Azande's story:

I firmly believe that my parents contributed, more than I want to believe, in all my failures and nature of the relationships I have had. My father, he has never had one girlfriend at a time... or even one wife at a time. He married my mother and in between he had a girlfriend, who produced a child that was born between me and my brother. Then there is another child that was born between my brother and my younger sister from the same woman. He later married another woman as a second wife. When I was growing up, my mother never spared me from my father's relationships. She was very open and made sure I knew all about his relationships.

The one time that I will never forget, when all became real for me, was the day my father came home with a male friend of his and a woman. We were told that the lady friend was from Johannesburg and worked as domestic worker. She was the girlfriend of the male friend. Since she had no place to visit here in Durban, they had decided to come with her. We saw that she had brought some overnight things and she even came with cakes that she had baked. What we didn't understand was why the lady was staying over at our house and not leaving with the man when he left. If she was his girlfriend, why wasn't he taking her to his family house? We were then told that the man lived with his family and it was a small house that was already full of people and there was no space for a visitor, so the lady was to stay over at our house for the weekend.

What was amazing to us as children was that we could see what was going on and our mother showed no sign of being aware of what was going on in her house. I believe it's because we were outsiders in the situation. We could be objective in what we saw. You know, when something is happening to you, sometimes it's hard to see until somebody tells you. Mother later on found out that the lady that once came over to spend the weekend at our house, the one she treated as a guest, was actually our father's girlfriend.

As I was growing up, I knew that my father had married a woman that was a widow with two kids. They hooked up after the husband died. What was surprising to me, and still is,...is that one of her children, if he could walk in here you would swear he was my biological brother. However, until today, father has never said to us, "This is your brother." We are told he is a step-brother by marriage and he calls himself by the late man's surname. The problem, I believe, is that when the woman had the boy she was married to the dead husband and, if he is my brother, it will mean he is my father's first born child out of all his children and not me. I'm sure you can see that my father was a very complicated man who loved women.

My father later on left wife number two for another woman and he had two more kids with her. By that time, I was now grown and was at college and not

living at home. I came home and found that in an outside building that we had at home we now had a lady tenant who had a child and she lived with a maid that looked after the child. The tenant abused the maid so much that, as a family, we had to intervene. When that happened, my father suggested that he knew of somebody who needed a maid and he would take her there.

Later on, the girl came over our house to say thank you to my mother for helping her. She went on to say how very nice it was at this new home and what made it better was that my father was also living at that house! Imagine the shock we had. He actually took her to a woman he was also keeping, who had a child by him! It was actually his child that needed a nanny! What was funny was that the girl thought we knew all of this. She didn't think she was telling us something that we had no clue about. So, that is kind of what I had to grow up around. You know, when I view men, I see cheaters.

What is worse is that my first serious boyfriend did the same thing to me. He had girlfriends all over the place. That relationship lasted for a long time, about four or five years. I cannot explain why I allowed it to go that long. He even had a girlfriend around the area where I lived that he later moved in with and I had to see them all the time. That relationship proved to me that my initial thoughts on relationships and men were right. There were so many mistakes that both my father and mother had made and I have not been aware that I have lived my life safeguarding myself from those mistakes. It now feels like I am spending my life correcting those mistakes. When I get into a relationship, I never have high hopes for it. I always expect that soon it will end and it always does. I have to say in my life, I have never seen a relationship that works.

Right now I am a child of God and I now live my life as dictated by the rules of the church and of God.

In our discussions, we agreed that when growing up we learned from our parents, starting from the things they said to the things they did. For us, this became crucial in understanding the Azande's childhood experiences and their impact on how she eventually learned to

understand herself as a sexual being. In Azande's story, we saw a family that was influenced by the strong character of the father, who to all intents, seemed to have placed his children in the position of learning distrust. His actions and treatment of women in general, created an environment that positioned men as users and abusers.

Azande's story portrays her father as a careless, insensitive, unfaithful, womanising person, who had no respect or sense of loyalty in his relationship with the women in his life. We agreed this had created an image of men that Azande was now using now as a reflective mirror to judge other men. On the other hand, her mother appeared to us as an ignorant participant in the family, thus creating another image of women as pleasers. We did not know if this ignorance was intentional on her part to protect her children and marriage, or if it was truly inexplicable ignorance. As participants, we felt that it was this perception of her father's and mother's actions that lead to the self that Azande portrayed in her adult life.

It appeared to us, that for Azande to move forward, she needed to put her parents' relationship into context in order to release her from its clutches and allow her to experience life without its influence. We felt that she needed to acknowledge her feelings towards her mother, which were affecting her as she tried not to repeat her mother's mistakes. Hence, we made statements such as:

"There are many reasons why your mother may have appeared to turn a blind eye. She may have been trying to save you from the outcome that could have happened, had she openly acknowledged that she was aware what your father was up to. Think about it, what do you think would have happened had your mother made known that the woman he brought into her home was your father's girlfriend?" (Mandla)

"She could have been trying to also protect herself by not acknowledging what she saw as being what it was. We do that sometimes as people, where we choose ignorance over truth or reality. It sometimes feels safe when we feel disempowered in situations. Remember you do not know what was their relationship behind their bedroom door, which made her choose silence." (Zoleka)

Our intention was to make Azande see that there are many ways she could view her mother, which would not make her appear weak, even though her mother had made Azande feel as if

she wanted her to carry the burden with her. This is illustrated by Azande's statement, *"When growing up, my mother never spared me from my father's relationship."* We argued that, in her mother's mind, she may have thought she was helping Azande by preparing her not to go through what she went through by telling her about everything. This may not have been the right decision, but her mother may have not understood that she was damaging Azande's perceptions of relationships and thus affecting the image she would create for herself to express her sexual identity.

We realised that Azande was now using the past as her lens on the future and making decisions based on what she assumed relationships would eventually look like. She was measuring her relationships based on the past and that led to an immediate reaction that was always intended to protect her. This was evident in her statement:

"When I get into a relationship, I never have high hopes for it. I always expect that soon it will end and it always does."

In our view, Azande's narrow views on life and relationships made her see what she wanted to see. She only saw what would validate her view that there are no relationships that work. As she clearly explained, *"I have never seen a relationship that works."* To help her see how she could be more open-minded in her thinking, we drew her attention to the fact that we are not responsible for our parents' mistakes. We are not our parents and therefore we are not necessarily going to be like them. Her father was not the image that defined all men. We told her that even if she were to meet a man like him, she would have the power to let that person loose and move on. As with Zoleka's story, Azande's story revealed to us how life is about experiences that are trial and error and, unless we live it, we will never really know who we truly are. That is why it also became of concern to us as participants when Azande ended her story by saying:

"Right now I am a child of God and I now live my life as dictated by the rules of church and that of God."

We clarified that we were not questioning her belief in God; however, we argued that if used as a shield for not dealing with life, it could become a problematic issue. For example, Xoli explained:

“I have a feeling that you are using the church so that you don’t have to deal with life. To me, I think you need to have a long talk with your mother and try to get some kind of peace for yourself that will allow you to let people in.”

As participants, we concluded our discussion of Azande’s story by alerting her to reassess her commitment to the church and to try not to hide from the past, but rather deal with it. We saw the person she thought she was as an image created to protect herself from the past repeating itself through her. We advised her that she needed to find herself through new experiences and to know that life is not really about perfection. We agreed that although negative things do happen, it is how we choose to deal with them that can assist us to create positive images of ourselves.

3.4.5 Religion as a sexual guide

It is hard to have convictions in life that most people do not understand. It is even harder when they emanate from your strong religious beliefs that have been planted in you by your parents. This is a way of living that seems to make little sense to those people who think that some people use religion to hide from reality and having to face life’s challenges. However, what if that strong belief is what protected you from the worst thing that could have happened to you? Meet Londi, a woman with strong religious convictions who, in her own words, was saved only by the strict church rules about relationships. This is what she had to say.

Londi’s story:

In 2007, I was in a relationship with Malusi. We were very happy in the relationship. With me as a Christian, there were things that we needed to go through first and there were things that I did not do. Because of these things, our relationship moved faster. Maybe that also contributed to us rushing because we also wanted to sleep with each other; which couldn’t happen if we were unmarried; as a Christian, you cannot sleep together until you are married.

We talked about it. He said he was ready and prepared for us to get married. I said to him, “Let’s allow for a year to pass getting to know each other and our families to get to know each other as well,” and he agreed. He understood my

situation and everything about my family Christian wise. Then in 2008, he went to my family, to do everything⁴. Then the wedding date was set for September, but unfortunately he got sick. The date was set... We were to be married on the 20th of September and he died on the 11th of September.

You see what happened was, he got sick; his sickness... eh... it was very quick and fast. There was one week left for us... You see, in my church, when you are to marry, you are made to stand up in church and are introduced to the church. He got seriously ill; he had a headache. I was phoned by his family and I came over. I saw that he was sick and we took him to hospital. When we got there, he was complaining about a terrible headache. They checked him out. He had that headache...you know that headache... Meningitis. When they found it, he was told to stay in hospital, to which he said, "No." He was given treatment and he went home. After a while I found out he was also taking pills for TB [Tuberculosis]. So, it was now the headache and TB. It was hard, because now the days were drawing near to our wedding day; we should have been ready and now he was sick.

That was when I suggested to him that since he had TB and now the headacheseeh... "What I hear is that all these diseases, I think they go with HIV." I spoke to him to test and he said "Yes". We went for the test together and he tested positive. Now we had to deal with that and accept the situation as it was, but unfortunately he did not make it. Soon he got too sick and was in hospital where he died days before the day we were to marry. You know, when it happened, I did not say I was going to leave him. I stayed and supported him through his sickness. I would go to hospital to visit him every day. As a family, we had to sit down and talk about the whole thing. You, see I was open with them, including his family. You know, after he found out, we spoke about whether he had known before, but I will never know the truth.

⁴ In our black Zulu culture the man pays a bridal price called *ilobolo* to the woman's parents. This is a traditional act that symbolises the joining of the two families and the handing over of the woman to her new husband's home, which renders her no longer a member of her family but her husband's.

When he died, it was all very painful...You know...for me. I had told myself that I was getting married; Everything was ready, invitations sent out, everything. It was difficult to get out of that mind-set and accept that I was now single again. So, it took me some time.

I'm still dealing with it. I still have that fear that, "What if it happens again?" You know, you love somebody and then something happens to them. It was at that point that I was grateful for the rules of the church that strongly discouraged sexual relations before marriage. Had I been intimate with him, I don't know what the story would be right now for me. It is very trying, but my strong religious beliefs guide me as to my sexual understanding of who I am. I am guided by the word of God and the teachings of the church such as no sex before marriage. I know it is difficult, but in the end we are protected.

Londi's story seemed to be a little tricky for us to discuss. Losing someone through death is never an easy thing to talk about. The immediate reaction was sympathy from the other participants for the one who had lost a loved one. The fact that issues of HIV&AIDS came into the picture seemed to make it even more difficult for the participants to voice their genuine opinions on the matter, as they treaded carefully around the issues. I believe this was due to the fact that HIV&AIDS has, in one way or the other, affected each of us. That made us aware of its impact on a person's life. Also in my view, there is a silence that has been created around issues linked to the virus, where people suffer in silence, and that makes people more cautious of what they say about the issue. However, we had to deal with it as it seemed to have stopped Londi from positive living. This was evident in her statement, "*I still have that fear that, what if it happens again?*" What this meant to us was that she was now afraid of the unknown. We then interjected that it might affect her future understanding of herself, but it did not create the person or the identity that she held.

The role of the church was also questioned by the participants as we tried to understand and also make her understand the kind of influence the church has had on her life and how she had turned out to be. Her own words when speaking about relationships with men were, "*It is very trying, but my strong religion, I am guided by the word of God. I know it is difficult but we are protected.*" That raised concerns for us as we attempted to show her that she is in many ways a creation of her parents and her religion. This disquiet was expressed by Xoli:

“The fact that you say it is difficult, for me it shows that there is something in you, the real you that wants to express itself differently from the teachings of the church. If it was your true self it would not be difficult.”

Similarities also began to emerge between Londi’s story and some of the experiences of the other participants. Her story reminded us of Mbali and Zama’s stories, where they too conformed to the expectations of the people around them. This rendered them unable to develop identities that felt comfortable for them. We realised that, like Mbali and Zama, Londi also needed to find opportunities that would allow her to create her own life outside the church rules or her parents’ expectations. We felt that, in doing so, she might find that she is genuinely comfortable with the person she now is. On the other hand, she might also find that there is more to who she is as a person and that her identity and beliefs will change. In addition, another similarity that I observed was between Londi’s story and Zoleka’s story. In both stories, I saw how they made choices that would prevent them from living in case they might get hurt. Thus, for Londi too, I felt that her lesson was to start living and to realise there are lessons to be learned in living and making what may appear to others as mistakes. Once we have gone through life, who we emerge as is what we could term, in my view, our authentic self.

3.4.6 Jezebel, the real me!

Meet Xoli, a self-proclaimed Jezebel. Allow her voice to take you through what she believes is a life she would not have if she had had a say in her upbringing.

Xoli’s story:

You know, I now realise that I have always been *utikiline* [Jezebel] when I look back at my behaviour while growing up. I believe now, what made me not get out of hand was the fact that I was the only girl amongst older boys at home. They always protected and controlled everything that I did. However, given an opportunity... shuh... Whenever they were not around, I did all sorts of things that were not right. Whenever I found an opportunity, Jezebel came out in full force! Looking back now, I realise that I turned out the way I did

because of that control they had, which saved and protected me. The other biggest factor was that I was a pastor's daughter. I had a certain responsibility towards his image, so I could not be myself around people who knew him and my family. I had to be the good daughter. That's why when I was far from home, I just let loose!

Now, in my grown up stage, I have things that I believe in that some people may use to judge me on. Such as, I see no problem in having sex with someone without having emotional attachment to the person. It may be that he is around at the time when I need someone, which does not mean that the next morning I would want him to stick around.

When I am in a relationship, no matter how I believe myself to be in love with that person, it has never stopped me from appreciating other men. I get bored, no matter the feelings I have for the person. Spending a weekend with someone is a nightmare for me. By the time Sunday comes along, I am ready to kill someone because he is driving me crazy. I will be sweeping the floor a hundred times as a sign that I need him out! I know now that I am bitchy in nature. Even in the longest relationship that I had with the father of my son, I managed to have maybe five other relationships while still with him. I would take any chance, such as when we would fight, to be with someone else. I have things about me that make me a good girl due to the way I was socialised in some aspects of relationships. However, as for cheating, I have never been in a position where I didn't do it.

With the father of my child, I knew he came with changes in my life. It is now that I see that from him I learned that I know how to love just a little bit too much. I also learned that love has the ability to hurt. This is why I think I continued to believe that I needed to have someone on the side to keep me in check. I have my way of looking at life and, yes, I have been judged by people. I have been judged and assumed to be something else by people I have come across. That means nothing to me, as it does not change the fact that I know who I am. I know what I want and I'm not willing to change.

It became evident for me when I re-evaluated and reflected on the stories and our conclusions about the stories, that with Xoli we met our biggest challenger. She challenged our perceptions of the female sexual identity, which has us as women abiding by the social norms that expect a ‘good girl’ image from us. By ‘good girl’ I mean one who lives by her family’s expectations, as illustrated in Xoli’s story. I realise that how we viewed and judged Xoli was based on our own backgrounds and the norms and values that had been instilled in us. Because of a very biased view that we all initially took, of Jezebel as promiscuous and uncultured, we missed the possibility that Xoli was perhaps the only person in our group who truly understood and accepted her sexual identity.

Like Mandla and Sihle, Xoli too allowed people around her to dictate how she was to express her sexuality as a woman and a Zulu African. Nonetheless, as she stated in her story, although her brothers controlled and monitored her life, she never missed an opportunity to ‘misbehave’. This was a concept that some of the participants struggled to understand since we in one way or the other seemed to have fallen into the pattern of conforming, making Xoli appear different. Hence, Xoli’s story did not evoke pity or understanding among participants, but brought out judgement and a need for conformity.

As Xoli explained how she responded and reacted to men in particular, I found that the participants’ fixed views on what constituted a ‘good’ sexual identity came forth. For me, as the researcher, eliciting understanding or empathy from the participants was a task not to be achieved. There was an element of Xoli being seen as childish in her behaviour, as one of the participants said, *“No, grow up now! You cannot continue to be like this!”* (Mbali). This statement was met with full agreement from the other participants. I deduced that the labelling as ‘childish’ emanated from an assumption that following what is expected of you makes you a reasoning individual that exhibits adult thinking.

However, as we conversed, there was an element of a growing understanding as one participant said:

“Guys, we sound like we are judging her. If she had been a man, would you still tell her to grow up?” (Zoleka)

And Azande asked:

“How different is she from Zama? Didn’t Zama say she now moves from one man to the other? I think Xoli is being true to herself and not reacting to any influence or circumstances in her life. I too don’t relate to what she says, but I can see where she is coming from.”

The immediate reaction of the other participants was to introduce another element that has affected how people view and express their sexuality, the issue of HIV&AIDS. It was quickly noted that Xoli’s actions had potentially dangerous consequences as they could place her in danger of contracting HIV. Our conversation emphasised that the free expression of sexuality was now being constrained by fear of the virus. This was quickly brought upfront as a concern for Xoli to re-evaluate herself. Our response to her story was now about avoiding the virus. In my view, this reinforced a lingering notion that women have a certain moral standard to uphold regarding sexuality.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, through sharing participants’ definitions of and conversations about sexuality, I have presented a discussion that shows our evolving understandings of sexuality. Through relating stories told by participants, along with our subsequent conversations, I have illustrated how we came to see how our past experiences, gained as we interacted with significant people in our lives, had played an integral role in how we had constructed, and were continuing to construct, our sexual identities. The chapter reveals how, through dialogue with trusted ‘friends’, we can gain new understandings of and new perspectives on what our lived experiences mean for us, as well as how we can learn from them and start to change what needs to be changed. Moreover, what this chapter highlighted for me was the importance of teacher conversations and storytelling, in favourable surroundings that promote participation and mutual understanding, as a means of personal and professional development that can allow teachers to understand and reconsider how our social and cultural experiences have influenced those positions that we have taken or assigned to other people.

In the next chapter, Chapter Four, I expand on the issues raised by the stories and conversations that are presented in Chapter Three. Drawing on relevant literature, I engage in

additional interpretation of the stories and conversations to offer further insight into what it was that we were learning and might still learn from our collaborative self-study process.

CHAPTER FOUR

UNDERSTANDING HOW SOCIALISATION AND CULTURE SURROUND US AND INFLUENCE HOW WE COME TO SEE OURSELVES

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this collaborative self-study inquiry was to explore how we as teachers could better understand ourselves as sexual beings and how that self-knowledge might have an impact our teaching of sexuality education. In Chapter Three, I portrayed how, through conversations, collage-making and storytelling, we participants began the journey of attempting to understand sexuality and our own sexual identities. I showed, through dialogue, we ‘unpacked’ each story related by our fellow participants as we looking for its meaning in relation to the sexual identity of the storyteller. Through this process, we reached an initial understanding of how we viewed ourselves and related to the people around us as we expressed our sexual identities.

Chapter Four is a continuation of my portrayal of our journey towards understanding the development of our sexual identities. From the stories and the discussions which were part of a process of collective analysis of the data, I later identified five key issues for further interpretation and understanding. My intention in identifying these issues was to give further clarity to my discoveries from the study and also to relate these discoveries to my reading of relevant literature. As illustrated in Chapter Three, in this study the first level of analysis of the data was achieved through a collective endeavour within the research process, where we as participants engaged in on going reflection and interpretation of what it was that we were experiencing. We also tried to put into context for ourselves the meaning of what we were experiencing. Later on, I undertook further analysis in my role as the researcher as I looked for additional meaning and explanations for what we had experienced collectively. This further understanding is expressed in this chapter.

From the stories and conversations portrayed in Chapter Three, I have come to see how we all come from particular social and cultural environments that provide different contexts and experiences. That in turn contributes to how we come to understand and position ourselves. Our interaction with these social and cultural environments influences various factors that result in specific experiences. How we then respond to those experiences influences how we come to be as people who have different identities and position ourselves and others in

particular ways. It is within this context of our social and cultural environments that our sexual identities are also created and influenced. As Tasker and Damanin (1999, p.33) emphasise, “It is not possible to appreciate sexual identity formation without first considering the contexts that influence this process.” Furthermore, as Morgan (2012) highlights, there is no consistent or set form of sexual identity, nor is it a fixed phenomenon, hence the complexity of our conversations and stories, as illustrated in Chapter Three.

It is these sexual identities that we were attempting to understand through the participatory process we engaged in. We entered as teachers, women, daughters, wife, girlfriends and all the other titles we assume when we interact with the world. Most of us identified ourselves as heterosexual women, while two participants identified as lesbian. Our conversations revealed that for those of us who identified as heterosexual, our heterosexuality was assumed, as it seemed that none had ever thought of it as an area that needed to be understood. Hence, we discovered a silence around heterosexual sexual identity as we assumed it to be ‘normal’. As South African researchers, Bennett and Reddy (2009, p. 245) state, there is a privileging of “heterosexual behaviour, identities, and desires, marginalizing and often criminalizing homosexuality and legitimizing homo-prejudice.” While most of us experienced ourselves as heterosexual and had the support of the dominant sexual culture within and outside our schooling and homes, for those who identified as homosexual or bisexual, the resulting message was that homosexuality is something to be hidden and kept separate from teaching, learning and daily school life (Francis, 2012).

Through our discussions and storytelling, it became apparent that early influences on sexual identity were crucial as we realised that it was in our youth that we begin to form a sexual identity and, often subconsciously, to make decisions as to whom we were or would be as sexual beings (Tasker & Damain, 1999). One example is the story of Xoli who explained that her sexual identity had always been that of ‘Jezebel’. However, as she explained it, her family had played a significant role in hindering the expression of that identity which she later ‘let loose’ as she discovered freedom from family dictations. Nevertheless, our stories revealed that sexuality is not stagnant because, as we grew, we reviewed these identities. Some of us did this intentionally, such as Mandla and Sihle who both made a conscious decision not to be dictated to by anyone else’s standard or expectations regarding their sexual expression as lesbians. While others unconsciously made decisions on the basis of various experiences that

we underwent as we came into contact with various significant people in our lives, such as friends, family changes, peers, lovers and so forth (Tasker & Damanin, 1999).

In our discussions, we acknowledged our diverse backgrounds and experiences that made us each unique and made each story relevant. We agreed that our evolving sexual identities, whether consciously understood or not, were formed in relation to different social and cultural environments that yielded different reactions and consequences for our process of becoming sexual beings and the expression of this. (In the following chapter, Chapter Five, I consider how these kinds of reactions and consequences can lead to both teachers and learners being left behind when it comes to providing effective sexuality education [Baxen & Breidlid, 2004]).

4.2 An abusive environment as a source of influence

Our stories revealed that some of us were subjected to an abusive environment that resulted in a change of identity as a protective measure. Listening to Zama and Mbali's stories, we realised how one can consciously or unconsciously change one's sexual identity in relation to abusive environments – what Herman refers to as “an altered state of consciousness” (2001, p. 8).

In our discussions, we agreed that Zama's story revealed how she lived with an unpredictable husband whose emotional instability in the home later escalated to physical violence. In my view, her home environment was tainted with emotional abuse from her husband, which made the life they lived unpredictable. This was highlighted in Zama's story as follows:

“He had this thing of not eating and just looking at the food. I had started a habit of asking him, as every time food was dished out for him, he would not eat.” (Chapter Three, p. 68).

Through discussion, we realised that living in this kind of environment had led Zama to retaliation that was perpetuated by a lack of understanding of what caused her husband's unpredictable reactions (Wolfe, Wekerle, Reitzel-Jaffe, & Lefebure, 1998). Hence my understanding that individuals that are subjected to abuse such as experienced by Zama either respond by withdrawing to their own space or they eventually respond in kind. Zama

related her own emotional journey where one day she started to retaliate to the inconsistent behaviour of her husband by saying:

“What is wrong?! Do you want to pack?!” “I will help you this time!” I went to the wardrobe and started pulling down his clothes.” (Chapter Three, p. 68).

Consequently, I further see how constant exposure to emotional abuse, which escalated to physical violence, could have an impact on how one would undergo a reassessment of how one perceives oneself, including one’s sexual identity. As explained by Herman, “ individuals [who have experienced abuse] tended to persist in an altered and exaggerated state long after the actual danger is over” (2001, p. 34).

As I have stated before, our conversations revealed that sexual identities are not fixed and, therefore, when we experience life changing moments, they are prone to shift. This can be seen in how Zama responded to her situation. She ventured to make a change that made her feel in full control of her environment and how it would play out:

“... I want a relationship that has no drama. As soon as I sense drama about to start, I leave the guy. I feel it is about me now and I will not have anyone put me through that again. I don’t know, maybe there is something that I am looking for and I am not getting from the men I meet.” (Chapter Three, p. 75)

With Mbali, whose abusive environment was masked by contradictory acts that led to her inability to recognise the apparent danger that she was in, it also led to her denial of what must have seemed obvious to others. As she explained:

“When my eyes opened up to boys, they opened up on him. He loved me and I was everything to him, like a delicate egg that should never fall. I knew whatever I wanted I would receive, but do you know guys what followed every time? ... Hey... beatings.” (Chapter Three, p. 69)

Judging from what Mbali related about her situation, I concur with Cloven and Roloff (1993), when they point out the visibility of punitive power in some relationships that can

render the male the controller over the female. Similarly, Mbali was controlled and monitored to ‘keep her in check’:

“He started to give me permission to attend friends’ parties; as soon as I got there he would come and park on the street for as long as I was in that party.” (Chapter Three, p. 72)

Therefore, it is my understanding that exposure to this kind of environment could result, when it ended, in a reinvention of the self where an adaptation of ‘never will it happen to me again’ occurs. For Mbali and Zama, this required a new outlook on life and how they related to the world at large. I have come to see how abuse can challenge how you will then relate and respond to people around you. It can call into question your ability to reason, identify and respond to harmful situations. Therefore, to prevent a repetition, you tend to shut down as you pull a “veil of oblivion” (Herman, 2001, p. 8) over the experiences deemed unpleasant and only seek what would be the opposite of how you would have normally acted.

4.3 A heterosexuality laden environment

Mandla and Sihle’s stories portrayed how, “the development of a lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) sexual identity, also known as the coming-out process, is often a difficult process of identity formation and integration because of the stigmatized nature of this identity” (Rosario, Schrimshaw & Hunter, 2004, p. 216). Mandla and Sihle shared the challenges of their journey to becoming who they believe themselves to be: Lesbians who view themselves and men and want to be seen and addressed as such. From their stories, I have come to an understanding of how certain social and cultural contexts may hinder the process of a person trying to live an existence that is true to her ‘authentic self’ as she comes to understand it (Rosario et al., 2004). These social and cultural contexts may be influenced by family, religion, gender roles and general cultural practices of the community which the person resides in and wants to be accepted by. This can be seen within the stories of Mandla and Sihle, as Mandla explained how they sat down trying to make sense of the journey that they both knew they had to take, despite the difficulties of that process, which were as clear to them as daylight:

“As we set on that bench, we looked at each other and we knew what we had to admit to ourselves. As clear as it was to us who we were, it became clear to me that there was no way that I was ever going to come out.” (Chapter Three, p. 79)

It is my understanding that, for Mandla and Sihle, the complications of their ‘coming out’ were influenced by an environment that already had some presumption of the ‘normality’ of heterosexuality, as well as a lack of or absence of visible lesbian role models, and silence or a prejudicial attitude towards homosexuality by the members of their families and the majority culture of the community in which they resided and worked in (Parks, Hughest & Matthews, 2004). This can be further understood through the following statement made by Mandla:

“It got worse for Sihle when his family started on him. They called a family meeting that was intended to make him see what was wrong with what he was doing.”(Chapter Three, p. 80)

“The whispering and gossiping started at school. Teachers would approach me! Isn’t that funny, they wanted to know what was wrong with him. At that time, he had started wearing only men’s clothes to work and the other teachers did not understand. I was the one that had to talk to him to tell him how inappropriate he was being.”
(Chapter Three, p. 80)

Through our discussion of Mandla and Sihle’s story, we came to realise that a negative environment can lead to a self-imposed denial of what one really feels, as Mandla went on to explain:

“As the negative talking and comments continued it became clear to me that, that was how they were going to react if I ever came out. I was not sure if I was ready for that.” (Chapter Three, p. 80)

It appeared to us that some parents opt for denial rather than dealing with the situation. Fields (2001) explains that some parents can also experience fear of the role they should play in their children’s lives as they now have become the parents of ‘lesbian’ children, not just parents. On the other hand, they can also transfer blame to someone else so that the situation could still appear to be able to be corrected as long as they can get rid of the threatening

person. As discussed by Wang, Bih and Brennan (2009, p. 292), “parents can project blame and purge themselves of guilt.” In the case of the Mandla and Sihle, we realised that Mandla’s mother believed that removing Sihle from Mandla’s life was the solution. . As Mandla related:

“She made it clear that she never wanted to see me with him ever again.” (Chapter Three, p. 80)

From our conversations it appears that, within our black Zulu culture, we still have a long way to go in accepting individuals coming out as homosexuals because they are caught up in cultural pressures that favour heterosexuality and discourage what appears different (Rosario et al., 2004). This view is also shared by Msibi (2012) as he discusses how we tend to view our social reality through the accepted lens of the dominant group, which in this context is heterosexuality – thus this view becomes the expected way of being.

This seemed to be the case with Mandla and Sihle, where their difficulties were exacerbated by a dominant social and cultural context that lacked understanding or acknowledgement of lesbian existence. In my understanding, what this does is to hinder the process of these parents becoming the role models for ‘mainstream’ society to embrace gay and lesbian people. Instead they become antagonists without sometimes being conscious of their victimisation of their children due to their sexual identity (Fields, 2001).

In our discussions, we agreed that it appeared to us that, in the attempt to control the situation, Mandla’s mother turned to a weapon that most of our parents use: making the situation about them and what it will do to the family name. Within our black Zulu culture, maintaining the family name within the community is an important responsibility of all individuals within that family. This is because the family name is a source of respect and good standing within the community and is understood to be reflected in the behaviour of the children of that family. As Mandla explained, his mother’s reaction was:

“How could you! Everybody in the township says you are having a relationship with that girl! Everybody is saying it. How could you put me into shame? Even in the church, people are telling me they see you with at that girl.”(Chapter Three, p. 80)

As we saw it, this was done as an attempt to remind Mandla of his social responsibility to the family name and as a reminder of the church's stance on the matter. With this kind of negative environment it became clear to us that this could make the process of acknowledging one's sexual identity, if different from the norm, a complicated process that leads to subterfuge and denial to achieve "self preservation" (Herman, 2001, p. 35).

How Sihle and Mandla responded was to begin changing how they lived and to start to express what they believed to be their true sexual identity. It appeared to me that, to do that, they had to change certain elements of their environments that directly affected them. This began with family, as Mandla related:

"I finally sat [my mother] down and reminded her that she was there when I was growing up. I reminded her that not once, but plenty of times she had asked me what was with me and girls, how I felt about girls. I told her, I could explain it to you, but you saw and chose to ignore it." (Chapter Three, p. 81)

Thus, Mandla and Sihle felt they had to choose to please the people they loved or to stay true to who they believed they were for a chance at internal happiness. Mandla and Sihle eventually chose to put themselves first, although the battle was only half won.

It is significant that Mandla and Sihle were not just sons or daughters, they were also teachers. Hence, a question that was posed as we, the other participants, attempted to understand their experiences of trying to find themselves. Our question was: *"What was the reaction of the other teachers and learners' parents as well?"* We wondered how they dealt with the reactions of the school body, as they made their presence known to all while expressing their lesbian identities. Their story revealed how the school environment had brought its own barriers for them to negotiate. By virtue of being teachers within the schooling context, we are categorised as either male or female, with specific titles attached, such as "Miss" or "Sir". It should be remembered that in a school environment we have a collection of individuals whose only link might be their shared duty to teach. In every other aspect, they might each have their own individualistic ideologies about life and opinions about sexual identity and the expression of this. These I understand to be influenced by their own social and cultural contexts.. Mandla reflected this thinking in his statement:

“In the school front, some couldn’t take it well and we understood with their religious beliefs. The trouble started also when we both wore men’s clothes to school. We were called to a meeting to address the issue of a dress code which it was felt we were breaking.” (Chapter Three, p. 82)

It should be noted that, for Mandla and Sihle, the full expression of their sexuality included a complete change in the manner in which they presented themselves in terms of clothing. Since they saw themselves as men, they wanted to dress as such, including their working clothes. They explained to us that this was, for them, the last milestone in their journey: to express what they had internally acknowledged through their outer appearance. As discussed by Freeburg and Workman (2010), there is a connection between how we choose to dress and our self-identity and the expression of it. Dress assists in giving visibility to something as abstract as social and personal identity. It came as no surprise to us that the school body reacted as Mandla explained above. However, our township schools are yet to amend their policies to incorporate the freedom of expression of one’s identified sexual identity, such as the dress code for teachers. When one speaks of dressing appropriately, one of the things assumed is that of dressing along gendered lines. To appear to do differently, gives the impression of being in violation of some unwritten rule. In my understanding, by trying to force Mandla and Sihle to ‘dress appropriately’ (as illustrated in their story), the school was de-emphasising their personal identity through emphasis of what was perceived as an acceptable social identity code for female teachers (Freeburg & Workman, 2010).

The school environment within the townships is still in my view filled with silences around the issues of sexual identities of teachers and the expression of it. As highlighted by Khau (2009), that teachers are also sexual beings therefore their sexuality should be taken into consideration when dealing with the teaching of sexuality. This is made complicated by the position in which teachers find themselves, where they are also responsible for providing an educative environment for the learners that is not only acceptable to the Department of Education, but to the parents and community at large. What I found particularly significant in the stories of Mandla and Sihle was that when asked what the reaction of the learners’ parents was, they said there was never an issue that was brought to their attention over what the parents thought. It may have had something to do with the fact that both were coming from the same community and they were known already to the community. However, this is an opportunity that is not afforded for some teachers in their particular schools.

4.4 Physical attributes as source of self-worth

I concur with Dion, Bercheid, and Walter's (1972, p. 285) argument that, "many have noted that one's self-concept develops from observing what others think about oneself." Our conversations and stories suggested to me that it is within this concept of the self that our sexual identities are also constructed and influenced as we interact with people of importance to us and people we trust and look up to. Our stories also highlight our parents as primary sources for positive integration into the world and the society that we will be living in. In my understanding, that is why it is important for that relationship to be an educative relationship, which will nurture and assist in developing an individual that is filled with self-worth and thus able to view positively all other areas of her life. How our parents think and act towards us thus becomes an imperative tool for self-worth – a realisation that came to us as participants when all had been said. In my view, it is often in relation to that parental relationship that we take certain life making or life damaging decisions about our lives.

Looking at our stories along gender lines, specifically when one speaks of a girl child, it became apparent that the relationship with the mother or another significant female adult often plays a dominant role in that child's life. This thinking is also expressed by Hutchinson et al. (2012, pp. 27-35) who maintain that "parents, particularly mothers, are, widely acknowledged to be the primary sexual educators and socializing agents of children." Thus, I have come to see that when that relationship is tainted with a negative ambience, the results are usually harmful to the child who is on a journey of finding herself. An example is the environment that Zoleka found herself in as she tried to connect with her mother. As she explained, it was an environment that highlighted the importance of physical attributes as means of finding happiness and a sense of worth amongst other people:

"In my early years, I believe that my identity was based solely on physical appearance." (Chapter Three, p. 86)

Therefore, I agree with Dion et al. (1972, p. 285) that "a person's physical appearance, along with his sexual identity, is the personal characteristic most obvious and accessible to others in social interaction." Hence, my observation is that when this is questioned and noted to be lacking by a person who is important to us, it leads to self-doubt and low self-esteem as we

identify ourselves as people that need to be ‘fixed’ – a point brought forward by Zoleka who explains that she:

“received a lot of affirmation from people that [she] loved and trusted that they knew what they were talking about and had [her] best interests at heart.” (Chapter Three, p. 86)

After listening to Zoleka’s story, we agreed that mothers are people that should tell us we are beautiful, no matter what anyone else thinks; however, we came to realise that this is not always the case for some of us. As Zoleka explained:

“I grew up in a family where everybody was thin. I don’t believe [my mother] ever lost an opportunity to remind me of who I could be if I could just put more effort into losing the weight.” (Chapter Three, p. 86)

This influence is explained by Hutchinson et al. (2012, p.28) as follows, “Adolescents are significantly influenced by the family system, particularly by parenting behaviours such as relationship quality, parent-child sexual communication and supervision or monitoring.” It is within that relationship that I see how Zoleka’s whole life became about ‘getting it right’ and being right, meant the way that her mother perceived people should look if they were to be socially accepted.

Zoleka’s relationship with her mother also provided constant reminders of the ‘problem’. Hence, the relationship Zoleka developed with many dietary substances and diets. Due to the nature of the close physical proximity of her mother, the reminders and reinforcements were consistent and frequent. From all of that, we concluded that being in that kind of an environment while still in a learning phase of your life is bound to have a tremendous influence on your development. This is supported by Skorinko, Sinclair and Conklin (2012, p. 171) who explain, “When a significant-other representation is activated, the self in relation to this significant other is brought into the working self-concept, and a variety of states typically experienced in the presence of this significant other are brought to the forefront.” In my view, Zoleka’s story illustrates how one can remain forever be in the shadow of others’ opinions. As Zoleka reiterated, even as an adult:

“I was doing it all by myself. I had by now seen what I was told I needed to see. I became my worst enemy.” (Chapter Three, p. 87)

Hence, as Skorinko et al. (2012, p. 171) explain, “thinking about a significant other leads individuals’ attitudes to be influenced by that significant other, even when the significant other is not physically present.” Thus, we concluded that Zoleka had translated the views of her mother into her own views and that meant she created an environment for herself that was an image of the one created by her mother (Skorinko et al., 2012). Moreover, this meant that her mother’s perspectives greatly affected her self-understanding and self-esteem as a person and a woman (Skorinko et al., 2012).

Thus, I have come to see how the existence of unconditional love between children and parents or other significant adults becomes imperative for the growing child to produce a positive self-image. Hence, I support Hutchinson et al.’s (2012)’s contention that an environment nurtured by love is a prerequisite in assisting children to form positive identities in every aspect of their lives.

4.5 An environment limiting sexual expression of women

It has been stated by McDougall, Edmeades and Krishnan, (2011) that there truly is a need for women to exact some equality in gender relations to counteract those traditional norms that bring limitations to women’s sexual decision making. It is within this context that I understand the environment in which Xolile was raised. In her view, her environment provided limitations to the expression of the understanding that she had of her sexual identity. We later came to conclude that those limitations were along gender lines, as there were specific expectations that were placed on her as a girl and woman in terms of how she should behave and express herself. In our conversations, we agreed that Xoli was not the only woman in our social and cultural background as Zulu black women that had to some degree experienced these limitations. In my experience, it is common and widely accepted that black Zulu family members, and in particular parents and immediate siblings, should assume the role of protectors that direct women towards what it is believed to be ‘positive living’. That in turn influences our identities as they are formed and assisted to shape into what is perceived as an ‘acceptable identity’. What became an issue for discussion for us as

participants was when that protective agenda infringes on the development of a person's identity.

With regards to Xoli, by her own admission she shared that:

“What made me not get out of hand was the fact that I was the only girl amongst older boys at home. They always protected and controlled everything that I did.” (Chapter Three, p. 98)

Through that control, the person that she termed ‘Jezebel’ (see Chapter Three) was suppressed as she played the role that she had been given: a good, well behaved daughter and sister. As Xoli explained, she felt that she had always known who she really was, but how she wanted to express her sexual identity was not accepted in the environment that she was raised in. There were certain ways of being that were expected of women, but not men. Through our discussion, we came to some understanding that we all came from backgrounds where these double standards were created and maintained. Thus, as discussed by Lynos, Giordano, Manning and Longmore (2011), when one speaks of female sexual identity, women are often still judged on their behaviour in relation to issues that men are credited for regarding sexual expression. In my observation, this perpetuates what Sanchez, Fetterolf, and Rudman (2012, p. 169) term “sexual scripts”, where women and men seem to have well defined sexual roles showing prescribed acts that reflect social and cultural norms. Hence the behaviour of Xoli's brothers always trying to control her movements and actions prohibited her free sexual development and experience.

In my view, as women we are then subjected to becoming actors in our own lives, just as Xoli was subjected to perform for the sake of those who took it upon themselves to guard her. In my understanding, what further limited her sexual development was a feeling of social and cultural responsibility towards her parents and community. How she was to behave in the community was to be in line with maintaining a ‘good name’ for the family, more specifically, protecting her father's position in the community as a pastor. Xoli shared that:

“Looking back now I realise that I turned out the way I did because of that control they had, which in some way saved and protected me. The other biggest factor was that I was a pastor's daughter. I had a certain responsibility towards his image so I

could not be myself around people who knew him and my family. I had to be the good daughter.” (Chapter Three, p. 98)

The expectations of Xoli’s family and her community placed restrictions on the development of her sexual identity and she ended up having what I see as a double identity, which consisted of who she felt she really was and who she portrayed herself as. In my view, this might be because “it is believed that, in general, this inhibits young women’s sexual behavior, particularly ‘promiscuous’ behavior, by making it socially costly. Accordingly, women who do not fit the conservative ideal are subjected to negative social sanctions or censures” (Loynos, Giodrdano, Manning, & Longmore, 2011, p. 437). Hence, the ‘acting’ that Xoli had to do to fit in with gendered social and cultural norms and expectations. Even within our group sessions, where we had agreed on a non judgmental environment, judgment was displayed towards Xoli, as discussed in Chapter Three. For some participants, Xoli’s sexual identity was not acceptable and they wanted her to review and change it because they felt it would lead her to dangerous territories, which brought in the issue of HIV&AIDS. I later reflected that, as women, we truly have been what I would call ‘brain washed’ in a way that means that society does not need to keep us locked up within ourselves; we seem to do it very well on our own. As women, we often subject each other to judgments and condemn those that seem to have found ways to break free. I believe that, due to our own fear of being true to ourselves, we lean on how we have been taught we should be as women as this often feels comfortable.

4.6 The reaction: How we respond to our experiences influences identity

What we now needed to ask ourselves was, “*What was it about our experiences that made us become who we now identify ourselves as?*” We were now collectively attempting to draw links between the present self and the experiences of the past. Through the sessions, it became clear that no matter the nature of the environment that we came from, there were profound links to our understanding of the self, more specifically as sexual beings. Hence, I have come to see how the attempt to understand how something has affected you, must include an understanding of how you also have internalised and responded to it.

Through questions and comments, we were able to elicit how people had responded to significant experiences that led to a current understanding of their sexual identity. As participants, our discussions revealed how, as human beings, we are not immune to the effect

that these experiences had had on us: hence we found ourselves constantly evaluating and re-inventing the self.

Our stories and conversations showed that our significant experiences involved family relationships, and romantic and sexual relationships. Some of these experiences were brought about an unexpected situation such as death. There are many ways that people respond to death and some of these may be life changing. Such as the response of Londi, who, as we came to interpret in the session, through her experiences developed a fear of life and living. Hence, she firmly engrossed herself in her religious beliefs that were intended to protect her so that she would not experience that pain again. As she stated:

“You know...for me. I had told myself that I was getting married; Everything was ready, invitations sent out, everything. It was difficult to get out of that mind-set and accept that I was now single again. So, it took me some time. I’m still dealing with it. I still have that fear that, ‘What if it happens again?’ You know, you love somebody and then something happens to them.” (Chapter Three, p. 97)

As Moletsane asserts, “schools, churches (and within these, different denominations) mosques, temples, and other cultural institutions inform the ways in which people, particularly young people, construct and perform their identities” (2011, p. 196). It appeared to me that the control of Londi’s sexual identity by the church was never to be freed as her experience had provided her with the evidence that having your sexual identity sanctioned and dictated by the church was indeed the correct way of living. Londi found herself in a position to justify for herself and us, that her church’s way was the right way for her, since she seemed to lack the ability to rise above it. That is why I agree with Macgregor, Zanna, Holmes and Spencer (2001, p. 472) that, “When people find themselves in the predicament of freely doing something that goes against their attitudes, they resolve the inconsistency by changing their attitudes to justify the action”. This was also why, as participants, we maintained that Londi would be unlikely to further explore her ‘true’ sexual identity as long as she held on to the notion that the church had ‘saved her’:

“It was at that point that I was grateful for the rules of the church that strongly discouraged sexual relations before marriage. Had I been intimate with him I don’t know what the story would be right now for me.” (Chapter Three, p. 97)

In contrast, a different response to her environment was exhibited by Xoli, where she gave in to the influences of social and cultural norms only when she felt she needed to. She managed to find spaces in her life where she experimented with who she believed herself to be. As Xoli shared:

“Whenever they were not around, I did all sorts of things that were not right. Whenever I found an opportunity Jezebel came out in full force!” (Chapter Three, p. 98)

We realised as participants that Xoli had an understanding of what she saw as her true sexual identity, as well as the negative impact that the expression of that identity would have on the people around her. Through her, we learned that when the sexual identity of a person is not in line with the social and cultural expectations, she often resorts to acting a part. Being raised within a strong Zulu cultural background develops a sense of responsibility towards individuals such as parents and a desire not to disappoint. What that means for an individual is that when she is in that environment, she is likely to act the part and project the sexual identity that is expected of her. However, later in her own private space she might let loose her ‘true identity’. What that implies for me is that there is a double life that is adopted by individuals who try to please others, while at the same time trying to be themselves in private spaces.

This was also the case with Mandla and Sihle, who came to know who they believed they were; however they also had to respond to the expectations of their environment by playing a role. As Mandla explained to us:

“As clear as it was to us who we were, it became clear to me that there was no way that I was ever going to come out. The people at home were going to freak out and that was the last thing I wanted to do!” (Chapter Three, p. 79)

Being true to themselves meant disappointing family and thus they responded by hiding who they felt they really were. However, from Mandla and Sihle, we learned that not all sexual identities can be hidden or ignored for a long time. They both acknowledged that, although

they were lesbians, they had lived most of their public lives as heterosexuals to meet the expectations of others. As explained by Mandla:

“At that time, he had started wearing only men’s clothes to work and the other teachers did not understand. Being his friend, they felt I was the one that had to talk to him to tell him how inappropriate he was being! Mind you, at that time, I was still looking like the Mandla they knew with skirts and all! So they suspected nothing with me.” (Chapter Three, p. 80)

I believe that it is sometimes difficult and hurtful to a person when they have to deny who they believe they really are for the sake of others. As Mandla explained in our conversation:

“I hated being around home, that was why I decided to move out and not be at home. I needed to a place where I can be myself around. The only place was to live with people that did not know me and I did not care what they thought of me. That is why I moved to a flat.” (Audio recorded conversation, 20 September, 2010)

The comfort that was provided by being in an environment that was unknown provided a sense of relief for Mandla and Sihle. This suggests that when people are not known to you, you feel less responsibility to try to please them. Also for them, there is no other you that they know other than the one you have introduced yourself to be.

Our stories also revealed how our environments provide us with situations that are not our own direct experiences but have an equally strong influence on our identity formation. Such as the child that is raised in an environment as described by Azande, a family living with adultery. Being a girl child raised in a family where the father committed adultery affected Azande’s assumptions about men and relationships:

“You know, when I view men, I see cheaters....There were so many mistakes that both my father and mother had made and I have not been aware that I have lived my life safeguarding myself from those mistakes. It now feels like I am spending my life correcting those mistakes. When I get into a relationship, I never have high hopes for it. I always expect that soon it will end and it always does. I have to say in my life, I have never seen a relationship that works.” (Chapter Three, p. 92)

In our discussions, we agreed that Azande's view of relationships and men had been distorted by the image of men portrayed by her father. We felt that when this happens, the person is more likely to develop protective measures that will see to it that they never get to experience that hurt for themselves. Their sexual identity and how they will express it is now mirrored against the experiences of the other:

"That relationship proved to me that my initial thoughts on relationships and men were right."(Azande, Chapter Three, p. 92)

Again, we saw the possible redirecting of the focus, such as developing a religious sense that would further protect the person from the exposure to situations she deemed harmful. It is my understanding that this transferal of control is unconsciously done due to an inner fear of not being able to control the natural growth and expression of one's sexual identity. Therefore an alternative path is chosen as an assurance that 'history will not repeat its self':

"Right now I am a child of God and I now live my life as dictated by the rules of the church and that of God." (Azande, Chapter Three, p. 92)

Our stories and conversations also illustrated how a person can respond to her environment in an inward self-hating or self-judging manner that will result in the negative development of her sexual identity, such as the experiences of Zoleka. Through her experiences, we learned that negative exposure can result to negative responses. As explained in her story, her view of the self was constructed under the view that physical appearance is the foundation for a person's self-image. How she responded to that was to allow that negative view to influence how she saw herself, as she explained:

"I had by now seen what I was told I needed to see. I became my worst enemy. I saved some of my pocket money to try out whatever that I thought would help. That marked my existence for very long time." (Chapter Three, p. 87)

Zoleka responded by becoming the person that placed those ideas in her head, which meant she now was the one reprimanding herself about how she needed to be. We felt that this

proved to be detrimental as the ideas were negative, and resulted in her shutting down as, according to her:

“Over time, I have created a very sheltered life for myself.” (Zoleka, Chapter Three, p. 86)

Thus, she built defensive walls around herself that would not allow a chance of being hurt. In my understanding, one way of doing that is to stop living fully by denying the existence of that part of you that is reflected through your sexual identity. In some ways, this is denying the existence of a sexual identity, so as not to experience the possible hurt that you have been raised to believe that (unless you change) you are bound to experience. Hence, when asked:

“Have you ever had a crush on somebody before?” (Lunga, audio recorded conversation, 20 September, 2010)

Zoleka responded by saying:

“I don’t think so, even if I did I don’t think in the frame of mind that I was in , I would have allowed it to happen or acknowledge it as such. To do that I would have to believe that there was a chance that that person could like me too and I don’t think I wanted to find that out.” (Audio recorded conversation, 20 September, 2010)

Zoleka’s story also illustrated how excelling in other areas of your life can be another responsive move that can take the focus away from dealing with the issues at hand. As Zoleka further explained, she became good at school and made sure she shone in that area. That left no room for her to acknowledge what might have been missing in her life.

Our stories also portrayed how have experiences of violence can provoke responses that are critical to our changing sexual identity. Mbali and Zama both experienced abuse at the hands of a loved one. Their stories revealed that one way that people may respond to such an environment is to also exhibit similar characteristics to the abuser. To illustrate, Zama once responded to her husband’s frequent abuse with anger:

“Do you want to pack?!” “I will help you this time!” I went to the wardrobe and started pulling down his clothes. At that time, I was also very angry and shouting pulling down clothes...” (Chapter Three, p. 68)

Likewise, Mbali also showed jealousy in response to her boyfriend’s constant jealousy and abuse:

“He had taught me that love is jealous and that lead to me starting to act crazy. I was keeping track of wherever he was and who he was with, until I got tired and accepted that he was no longer mine.” (Chapter Three, p. 70)

Thus, this story illustrated to us how we can be influenced by exposure to abuse. Mbali and Zama’s stories also revealed the response of denial of what is evident in front of us:

“It was later on that I realised that the psychopathic signs were there, but I chose to ignore them as my life depended so much on what he was able to provide for me. I had never told myself that anything was wrong, minus the beatings at times. I thought, you know, I should have known.” (Mbali’s Story, Chapter Three, p. 71)

In our discussions, we agreed that we weigh the importance of that person in our lives against the hurt they cause us. If our need of that person is strong, we then can shut out what might seem so obvious to others. Our conversation also revealed that, due to their experiences of abuse, the final response of Mbali and Zama was to want to control their sexual identities. They wanted to control their environment so that it would not reproduce old experiences, by either controlling the type of individuals that they had relationships with, or by avoiding being involved in a serious relationship. This is due to how the trauma experienced forces us to leave in a state of violated faith in human natural ways of being (Herman, 2001).

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have continued to respond to my first research critical question, *“How can teachers better understand their sexual identities?”* I have explained how, from the storytelling and conversations portrayed in Chapter Three, I have come to see how we all come from particular social and cultural environments that contribute to how we understand ourselves. Hence, what has been highlighted in this chapter is that our sexual identities are

not fixed; instead, they are constantly influenced by our social and cultural environments and interactions. Therefore, for us to understand our sexuality and sexual identities, and the positions in which we are placed and place others, we need to understand the social and cultural backgrounds within which our identities and positions have been created and maintained.

In Chapter Five, I engage with my second research question, “*What are teachers’ key experiences as sexuality educators?*” I discuss the expectations that are held of teachers by parents, the Department of Education and our peers. I then look at what teachers consider as ‘uncomfortable talk’ with learners they teach, thus affecting the implementation of the LO programme. This is followed by a discussion of whose role is it to teach sexuality education to learners. Lastly, I look at the how the LO learning area is perceived to be a female domain within the school environment.

CHAPTER FIVE

“KEEP IT REAL!”

COMING UP WITH A COLLECTIVE UNDERSTANDING OF A WAY FORWARD

5.1 Introduction

In this study, we embarked on a journey to learn who we were as sexual beings and how knowledge of the self could add to how we interpreted and taught sexuality education and also related to the learners we taught. In the previous chapter, Chapter Four, I extended my exploration of my first research question, *“How can teachers better understand their sexual identities?”* I explained how, as I looked for further meaning and explanations for what had emerged through the conversations and storytelling re-presented in Chapter Three, I came to see how our interaction with our social and cultural environments had contributed to the development of our sexual identities. I highlighted my learning that, for us to better understand our sexuality and sexual identities, we need to better understand how socialisation and culture surround us and influence how we come to see ourselves and others. In an attempt to deepen my understanding of our interaction with socialisation and culture, I identified and discussed the following five key issues that appeared to have played a significant part in the development of our understandings of sexuality and our sexual identities:

- *An abusive environment as a source of influence*
- *A heterosexist environment*
- *Physical attributes as source of self-worth*
- *An environment limiting sexual expression of women*
- *The reaction: How we respond to our experiences influences identity*

For purposes of this chapter, Chapter Five, I address my second research question, *“What are the key experiences of teachers as teachers of sexuality education?”* I commence by discussing the participants’ views on what is expected from us as Life Orientation (LO) teachers by various role-players in the schooling system. These expectations examined through looking at the parents, and the Department of Education and fellow teachers. I then discuss the views of teachers regarding what they consider as being ‘uncomfortable talk’. I discuss whose role is it to teach sexuality matters as understood by

the participants in this study. Lastly, I address the discussion around the issue of how LO as a Learning Area is viewed as a subject that should be taught by females.

5.2 What others seem to expect of us as teachers: The dilemma

In our discussions, we agreed that when it comes to teachers, there often seems to be an assumption that teachers know everything and are capable of teaching anything to anyone. However, our storytelling and conversations highlighted our learning that *teachers are people first before they are teachers*, even though this might not be recognised by the Department of Education, parents or other educator stakeholders. We realised that teachers experience life and changes in their lives in the same way as any ordinary person. These experiences affect who teachers as people are and how they choose to express themselves as teachers. Moreover, we became conscious that when confronted with any educational activity, teachers will draw from the person they understand themselves to be. As Beijgaard, Verloop and Vermunt (2000) explain, how teachers see themselves affects how they will engage themselves in development and educational changes that affect their teaching practice. Based on our experience as LO teachers, we agreed that there was tremendous expectation placed by the Department of Education (DoE) on teachers with respect to LO (see DoE, 2000). We felt that the DoE has made many of assumptions about teachers' capability and capacity to make the necessary pedagogical decisions for effective teaching of the LO programme.

These assumptions came up in our discussions as we spoke of what it is that is expected from us by various role-players in the schooling system. We considered the school life and our classroom experiences while teaching LO, with specific reference to the sexuality content covered. As participants, we agreed that unrealistic expectations of teachers could play a significant part in a lack of effectiveness of the LO programme. We felt that, as teachers, we battled to meet what we saw as others' expectations of us. Our discussion brought to light the following topics as we looked at the various stakeholders in schools and the ways in which they appeared to position us as teachers.

5.2.1 The parent

As we viewed the roles that we as teachers of LO appeared to be expected to play, we deliberated on what seemed to us to be an abdication of responsibility by parents to communicate with their children about issues relating to sexuality. As I have previously highlighted (Masinga, 2007, 2009), we agreed that there appeared to be an eagerness by the

parents to let the school take charge in the teaching of sexuality issues to their children. We agreed that there seemed to be reluctance on their part to be open with their children about sexuality matters and an assumption that, as teachers (no matter what our subject expertise) we would automatically be expected to teach sexuality education:

“The parents are expecting the teacher to unlock and say things that they are afraid to say to their kids. They think because we are teachers we can do and say it all.”
(Azande¹)

However, we did acknowledge that parents send their children to school for an education and, since the inception of LO, teachers are now expected to impart valuable knowledge about sexuality to learners. Nevertheless, we concurred that, to some extent, we viewed these expectations as a:

“Transfer of responsibility by the parents. We are partially responsible they need to do the rest and support the initiative that the teachers have taken to help raise their kids and responsible adults.”(Xoli)

This notion is supported by Mchunu (2007), when she argues that in South Africa there seems to be an overall silence around the topic of sexuality in many homes and cultural contexts. She proposes that this inhibits many parents from opening up to their children on issues that they might feel ill equipped to talk about, even with fellow adults. Therefore, the responsibility gets transferred to the school.

We agreed that there should be no assumption made by parents or the DoE that this role will now be taken over completely by teachers. Nevertheless, we also acknowledged that, as teachers we do have a significant role to play in the teaching of sexuality; however, as advocated by Goldman (2012) we felt that the home should remain the primary source of information regarding sexuality. Moreover, within our conversation, we realised that when one speaks of issues of sexuality the issue of discipline comes into play as we discussed that it would take some level of discipline and a positive attitude for a child to be receptive to new knowledge. In our view, ‘good’ behaviour should be instilled at home and the school should

¹ All comments used in this section were from the same audio recorded conversation that took place on 2 October, 2010.

continue on the foundation that has been laid down by the home life. However, our experience had shown us that this was not always the case:

“Look at how the children are disciplined: ‘Wait until schools open, you are going to get what is coming to you! I will tell your teacher what a terrible child you are and she will deal with you!’ And when they get to the school, [the parents] are not ashamed to tell you that they did not do anything hoping you will take care of it!”
(Zama)

We took into account that, with the high prevalence of HIV&AIDS in our society, some of our learners in the schools do lack the presence of an adult in their homes because of circumstances such as death of the parents or any other adult person they had in their lives (see Gasa, 2012). However, we argued that not all learners are in that same predicament. As we saw it, increasingly teachers are finding themselves dealing with issues that used to be addressed within the home, but somehow now are becoming the responsibility of the school. To illustrate, Mbali shared the following experience:

“Apparently the girl did not come home on Friday and was later found in her boyfriend’s house that Saturday afternoon. Instead of them dealing with the issue at home, the parent came to report the issue at school and being her class teacher and LO teacher the issue was brought to me. Can you imagine! This happened at home! They waited the whole weekend and did nothing about it because the teacher was to deal with it. I was so angry because I felt when the issue came to my principal he should have told them that issue should have been resolved at home.”

In our response to Mbali’s experience, we saw that now the role of the teacher included being the police and the disciplinarian. As I perceive it, in the case above, the parent seemed not to know how to deal with the issue and therefore assumed that it was the teacher’s role to know what needed to be done.

We acknowledged that we often felt overwhelmed by what seemed to have become an additional burden for teachers. We acknowledged that there are some social and cultural dynamics that exist in different homes regarding the communication of sexuality issues that may influence how parents engage with these issues. We discussed how, in our black Zulu

culture, there is some expectation of women to be the ones to have open sexual conversations with their children, more so with the girls. In our experience, however, this often proves mis-educative (Dewey, 1963), because, as Mturi and Hennink (2005) explain, the conversations appear to be dominated by discouragement of early sexual involvement, threats of unwanted pregnancies and other scare tactics. In my opinion, this becomes mis-educative because sexuality is also about pleasure, relationships and sharing, which should not be hidden from children. Instead, these aspects should also be discussed at the same as emphasising the importance of responsible behaviour. Similarly, Jewkes (2009) draws attention to the value of letting children be aware of sex as a source of joy, so that they would know that if this brings any kind of pain, it is not right. Hence, Jewkes continues to advocate, that within the South African context schools remain important sources of educative messages for learners.

We also discussed how, for the boys in our communities, there seems to be no such conversation of any kind with either parent. Mturi and Hennink (2005) explain a lack of communication about sexuality with boys in this way:

Mothers were most likely to state that this was due to embarrassment or the lack of awareness that young people were having sexual relationships, while fathers were more likely to state that such discussions would encourage sexual behaviour and were therefore inappropriate. In addition, fathers stated that they were deterred from discussing sexual issues by socio-cultural taboos. (p. 135)

It should be however be noted that, in recent years, in our school communities we have noticed a shift in family dynamics. The term parent does not necessarily mean biological mother and father. As highlighted by Gasa (2012), due to HIV&AIDS and other social factors many grandparents have taken on the role of parents. This role has also been taken over by older siblings, who find themselves in the parental role through similar circumstances. Hence, the question for me is, *“How capable are these newly acquired parent substitutes to continue with the responsibility that we have said lies primarily in the hands of the parents?”* What this suggests, in my view, is that as schools and teachers we need to start keeping this change in mind when dealing with the learners. To achieve this, the DoE needs to provide assistance for teachers that will develop them in dealing with the changing image of family in our communities.

5.2.2 The Department of Education

As Goldman (2012, p. 200) explains, “Puberty/sexuality education frameworks and curricula need to take into consideration the educational policies of the government/s of the day; contextual issues such as social, economic and political changes.” Hence, I can understand the stance that was taken by the Department of Education (DoE) of South Africa, where they heeded the call for action to meet the challenges posed by HIV&AIDS and high rate of teenage pregnancy. The Department had to set working standards to attempt to meet these challenges. As I discussed in my master’s research (Masinga, 2007), teachers were automatically designated to be at the forefront of this attempt. Hence, there were expectations placed by the DoE on the teachers it employed, as outlined in its policies of the kind of teacher they expected (see, for example, Department of Education, 2000). As Jansen (2001, p. 242) explains, “Every education policy document contains powerful images of the idealised teacher. Whether explicit or implied, whether conscious or unconscious, policymakers hold preferred and cherished images about the end-user of an education policy.” However, what was highlighted in our discussions was that those expectations might well forever remain within the policy documents, as we as teachers fail to meet some of these expectations. We agreed that there is often a conflict between who the teachers are and who they are expected to be (Jansen, 2001). In this conversation, Xoli voiced our collective opinion:

“There are a lot of assumptions that are being made by the LO policy, regarding the capability of the teachers to deal with such heavy issues. LO to me is very broad and some of us are not emotionally matured enough to handle things. I know personally I am not. I cannot be expected to deliver as they thought I would manage to do. There are no formulas in LO that direct you as to how to do this, unlike subjects such as Maths. The emotional attachment that comes with teaching LO gets to be too much.”

As discussed in Chapter Three, teachers can find some parts of the LO content very personal as these sections touch on what they have gone through or are going through in their own private lives. Wood (2012) explains that teachers are also at risk of being affected psychologically and emotionally by their own exposure to HIV&AIDS related matters and sexuality issues and this can make them feel helpless when required to assist learners in need. In my understanding, it is in those instances where the curriculum policy meets the personal

(Jansen, 2001) as the pedagogical choices that the teacher would make in teaching such issues would be influenced by that personal experience and the opinions they hold on the matter. These personal experiences of teachers may not always be positive ones – as we saw in the stories of the teachers in this study (Chapter Three). Hence, as Khau (2009) argues, a lack of consideration of teachers' abilities to teach sexuality issues and of their own sexuality-related experiences may affect their effectiveness in such lessons. However, in my experiences of the various training sessions that we as teachers are exposed to, the teacher's own life seems never to be considered. Thus, the image of teachers that policy sets out will not necessarily translate into new ways of teaching and learning (Jansen, 2001).

As participants, we drew a list of some of these attributes that we felt the DoE is expecting from the teachers. However we agreed that these attributes may not necessarily be there in all teachers or some teachers may have some of the qualities but not all. We listed these attributes as follows:

1. *Be sensitive and brave.*
2. *Be comfortable with everything*
3. *Open minded*
4. *Good listener*
5. *Approachable for the kids*
6. *Understand the meaning of consulting and not assume to know everything*
7. *Has to be caring*
8. *Has to be someone who does not discriminate*
9. *Flexible*
10. *Non- judgemental*
11. *Be confidential with peoples' issues*
12. *Trustworthy and friendly.*
13. *They must also have wisdom, not just from being a child of GOD but not be naïve of issues and things because they can do a lot of damage.*

These attributes we identified are similar to those discussed by Mchunu (2007) regarding the DoE's expectations of teachers as sexuality educators. The above attributes are also partly incorporated in Jairam's (2009) description of counselling characteristics that can be helpful for teachers in dealing with issues of HIV&AIDS and sexuality. In addition, she also includes

respect, acceptance and empathy as valuable counselling characteristics. In my view, a counsellor is a trained individual who has the necessary experience and skills that will allow her to embody and use these characteristics to deal with learners. My concern is whether most teachers have the training or experience to be effective counsellors. Also, in my understanding, when you say a person should be flexible, what that means in the context of sexuality matters is that the teacher should be able to handle whatever matter that comes her way, irrespective of her personal feelings. However, as pointed out by the participants, that is not always possible (as illustrated in the following discussion on what teachers feel they will never be able to discuss with children). What this can lead to is a negative attitude towards the LO programme. As Goldman (2012) explains, teachers are often reluctant to teach it, the school management uses timetable priorities to devalue the programme, and teachers are not made accountable for their omissions of some issues in the programme.

What also emanated from our conversation was concern about a lack of proper training for teachers to assist them in becoming the type of teachers expected by the DoE. Likewise, Lesko, Brotman, Agarwal and Quackenbush (2010) explain that American teachers also often feel unprepared to teach topics that have sexuality content, where they have to translate issues of social, emotional and societal content to learners. Thus, we agreed that the DoE needs to provide more relevant teacher development to facilitate the teaching of sexuality education.

5.2.3 Peers (fellow teachers)

As participants, we also explored the responses of the other teachers within our schools towards the issue of sexuality education. We noted that, within our school contexts, other teachers also have their own expectations of LO teachers. This issue emerged as we engaged in conversation about what we felt as the ‘burden’ that has been positioned on the shoulders of the LO teacher. We agreed that the non-LO teachers in our schools have now started to place responsibility and expectations on the teachers of LO. For example, when issues of discipline and misconduct of learners (particularly those relating to their sexual expressions within the school) come up, the LO teacher often seems to get the blame. As Zoleka shared:

“I’m so sick and tired of being called to any disciplinary discussion that takes place in the school when the learners have been found either smoking behind the toilets, kissing in some parts of the school ground. Apparently other teachers are now unable to handle such matters. Since, as I was once told by one teacher, these are things that

they should be learning in LO and 'Miss you need to do something about it.' I have never been so angry. I blew a fuse I am telling you! She is a teacher in the school; she is the one that the matter was reported to, why am I called in? I am not even the official guidance counsellor in the school!"

In our view, LO teachers have become 'the escape route' for some teachers as they refer learner behaviour that is considered as 'misbehaviour' to LO teachers. In my understanding, this may be because these teachers too feel unable to discuss such issues with children. It was of interest to me that I could not locate relevant literature that spoke to this transferral of responsibility by other educators. In my view, this is an important aspect, because when we speak of shared responsibility we should also include support that we as teachers give to each other. As outlined in (DoHET, 2011, p. 49) that, "Roles should be understood as everyday functions [including the care of the learners] of the collective of all educators at a school."

5.3 "I will never say that!" What teachers consider 'uncomfortable talk'

As participants in this study, we clarified that we are not opposed to the teaching of sexuality education in schools. In contrast, we reached consensus that it is of great importance that LO be taught in schools for the sake of the learners, based on we identified as a changing world. This view is shared by Helleve, Flisher, Onya, Mukoma & Klepp (2009) who highlight that, in general, South African teachers are not opposed to the their teaching of matters of sexuality and HIV&AIDS in LO, but still question their competence to teach it. Lesko et al. (2010) also highlight that American teachers that they interviewed in most part do support the teaching of HIV&AIDS and sexuality education to learners. In our discussions, we agreed that we aware of our limitations and the possible contributing factors that Helleve et al. (2009) mention:

The teachers expressed that they considered inherent personal characteristics such as personality, life experience, being comfortable with their own sexuality, and the ability to maintain discipline in the classroom as important when teaching sexuality and HIV/AIDS. (p. 16).

We agreed that we often feel uncomfortable and ill equipped to teach sexuality. On the other hand, it was expressed in the sessions that, by being LO teachers, we took on roles such as that of being a friend, parent, counsellor or social worker for the learners. However, we

highlighted that it may not be within all teachers' capabilities to fulfil all of these roles successfully for the benefit of the learners. Therefore, as much as I concur with Helleve et al. (2009) when they state that, as teachers, we have been given "leverage on some pedagogical flexibility to meet what we as teachers believe to be of priority to our learners" (p. 191), my view is that many teachers have used the same flexibility to avoid teaching certain content and using certain methods that have proved uncomfortable for them. As highlighted by Beijaard, Verloop and Vermont (2000), assumptions have been made about teachers based on a general expectation that teachers are subject matter experts, as well as pedagogical and didactical experts.

In my understanding, what has not been sufficiently considered and has major implication for the choices teachers make are the moral and ethical dimensions that are forever present in the teaching profession. These can present a stumbling block for teaching and learning. In our conversation, we agreed that, as teachers, we are generally aware of the task of openness to the learners when teaching LO. We are also aware that we have the responsibility to 'keep it real', a fact we acknowledged in our discussions. As Sihle asked, *"Are we not supposed to be talking facts with children or truths?"* This question gave us food for thought as we attempted to unpack what we meant by 'truth'. On this point, we concluded that it was the teaching of the 'true' realities that might await the learners in the real world.

However, we also acknowledged that, for teachers, moral and ethical dimensions do come into play (Beijaard et al., 2000). For the participants of this study, those ethical and moral dimensions became apparent when different issues came to the fore in our discussions. An example was the instant response that was evident when the issue of language as a matter of concern was discussed. We responded from our own personal stances on the issues, such as this response given by Zama:

"Truth or not. As a parent let alone a teacher, I would not want my child to hear about 'the bitchy staff' huh!"

This statement was also supported by Mbali when she added, *"Oh my...like bonking..."* As a researcher, I observed that a line was immediately drawn and personal beliefs on what and how we should speak to children about certain issues came to light. Looking at Mbali's response, she used who she was as a mother and a teacher to justify her position on the

matter. Even when it was highlighted that these may not be terms used by the teacher, but introduced in the learning environment by a learner, there was an unwavering position taken. Some participants were adamant, that such words were inappropriate and should be discouraged in the classroom. However, there was an attempt also to show where this fear originated from. As Xoli tried to explain:

“I guess it is the education we received that makes us say that... with me I am comfortable to talk about ‘bitch stuff’ because I am with you people, but even for me I will never say that to a child as it is too strong a language for a child.”

There was further discussion around the issue and the following dialogue gives further insight into what worried us:

Zoleka: *“Removing the strong words and looking at the meaning behind the words would you feel comfortable going to a grade 6 class and explain sexuality?”*

Sihle: *“Hmmm.... Hey...no...I will not feel comfortable, shame.”*

Xoli: *“Explaining it to a child would be difficult, even for me. Although I now know that, had somebody came to my grade 7 class back then and kept it real for me I would have a different view of life.”*

Mbali: *“ Hey guys... for me it does not matter the words that are used even if you sugar coat it and say ‘dirty stuff’, I would still find a way to make it sound bad... not meaning to... that is the way we were raised...our generation is not capable to do this... not with our socialisation.”*

There was a connection that I observed that occurred as the teacher-self and the personal-self interacted with each other on the issues, with the personal-self having a stronger hold on the thinking and reasoning of the individuals in the session. The views expressed by Xoli, Mbali and Sihle above could be understood within the reasoning of Beijaard et al. (2000) that how teachers relate to the task of teaching may be influenced by their prior education in school, their family life as they interacted with parents and siblings and the dramatic experiences experienced in their private lives. (See for example, Mbali and Zama’s stories in Chapter Three). This concern was shared by Xoli when she stated:

“That is why I think it would have been better if our parents were then in the same level of looking at things as we are now. This generation, which is us, we are not the people to be talking about this to the young ones. I was not spoken to this way; I was not even allowed to speak that way at all. So, what would really make me now able to say anything?”

What I later came to realise was that the learners we teach are coming with a different perspective on life and ways of living. That exposes them to situations and experiences that are often different from what we went through when we were their age and often make them more mature in their knowledge, be it correct knowledge or not, than we were at their age. That poses a dilemma for teachers in the classroom, as they come face to face with the learners’ own experiences. As Mandla stated:

“You know what, these kids. You know the things we cannot say? They have no problem saying. You will be amazed when you hear some of the language that gets reported that has been said by some child in grade 3! Do you remember how ignorant you were at grade 3 level?”

I therefore understand that the meeting of these divergent experiences of teachers and learners might have led to teachers electing to use certain pedagogical styles to save ‘face’ and thus appearing to fail to meet the objectives of the sexuality programme within LO. Furthermore, we acknowledged that the positions that the teachers took on certain issues may have been validated by other stakeholders in the learning environment. We identified that other stakeholders in the schooling system also contribute through imposing restrictions on the policies such as that of LO. This concern was expressed by Xoli:

“I believe, even if we were able to do this, the policy would not allow us to talk to children and use such language, even if it’s the language they understand and hear being used at home all the time.”

The feeling was also shared by Mbali:

“I do feel the policy restricts us as to what we can say to the learners according to their age. What is amazing is that the same things that I am told these kids are not

ready for are the ones that gets brought to me as cases to attend to, 'cause someone had either said that to her or done that to her. I would ask myself does the policy even know the learners we teach anymore?"

This is a sentiment that I also discuss in Masinga (2007): that there is an assumption regarding what learners need to know and at what level of their schooling. However, this not always in line with what the learners truly want to know as ‘burning issues’ for them. When this happens, we, as adults in their lives are often viewing them as asexual. Thus, we think that they are not to be in need of some aspects of sexuality at certain levels, which results in some crucial information being left out because it is deemed unnecessary for learners at specific grades, such as the silences around the issue of freedom of sexual expression of individuals.

For me, this implies that teachers are given ‘loopholes’ through policies to justify some of their actions as they interact with the curriculum. These loopholes are then used by teachers to avoid certain elements of the programme under the premise that ‘it is not allowed’. During the discussions on language and policy implications, there was an element of disagreement among the participants where some strongly opposed any kind of language or talk that was labelled ‘inappropriate’ for children. This can be observed in the following statement made by Azande:

“Even so guys, you do not take these issues to the classroom. As the teacher we can teach the child about the body, emotions and everything. However, even if they asked me a question that will lead to that place I always tell the child, ‘I cannot explain your question in the class unless you come to me in private.’ I can have that one on one but not in the classroom.”

This was met with some disagreement from the other participants such as Xoli when she commented, *“That is the problem! Why privately?”* When I look at Azande’s response, I can identify signs of personal discomfort from her statement.

To further expand on why the participants had reservations about discussing certain aspects with learners; a discussion on discipline came about. Azande continued to clarify her position:

“Who wants the class to get out of hand? You know what these kids are like when such things are discussed? Besides, the policy says so.”

What that suggested to me as the researcher was that when teachers have attained a certain level of discipline in the class they gain a sense of having achieved effective teaching. This is also explained by Kunene (2009), who argues that many teachers feel for them to survive and maintain their position they need to be in control of their classrooms. Hence, the participants in this research admitted to what appears to be a problematic position that they found themselves in as they came face to face with what I have termed “demons” (Masinga, 2007, p. 59) that hindered their ability to effectively teach LO. Teachers resorted to all types of tactics to avoid addressing certain issues. However, there was awareness on the part of the participants that our apprehensions towards certain parts of the curriculum could produce negative results for the learners. This was expressed by Lunga:

“I feel as if we are giving the kids incomplete information. No wonder they start finding out on their own. Then they cause problems for themselves in the process. What do we do after? We judge them and forget the role we played by running away from the truth.”

This view was further emphasised by Xoli when she said:

“That is why we are where we are. It’s a shame that the policy looks at the child in terms of what theory says a child of 13 should be able to know and understand. They are so far off with the reality as I see it. Look at me, if growing up in the 80s did not make me better than them and I did not have half the exposure they have to these things of sexual nature. However I am still Jezebel!”

Despite the above acknowledgement, we were still in agreement that with or without the limitations posed by the DoE or the parents, we felt we would still not be able to discuss or teach certain content. This came out when Zoleka posed the question:

“What if policy allowed us to talk about some of these issues and use such words that are familiar to the kids, would you guys do it?”

To this, Sihle responded:

“I am sure that I will never be able to do it. I am glad there are things that I am not expected to say to the children. Ha... let the parent say them!”

Lihle also expressed her view on the matter by saying:

“Hey... me too... I don’t want to lie I would even refuse to teach LO. That is not how I was raised.”

Our social and cultural contexts also came into play as we made reference towards the upbringing we all received. This done to explain the position we as teachers find ourselves in as we interact with the content of the curriculum. This was clearly stated by Mbali when she said:

“I do not think I would do it too. Guys, it goes back to how we were socialised. How we are now is a reflection of how we were raised. I cannot talk to the kids about something that I was never spoken to about. Guys, remember we were even beaten for saying anything of a sexual nature, things when you think about them, were so stupid. That is why, when we get to those issues, we skip them or we polish them. Guys the damage has already been done. We cannot do this.”

I later reflected that the issue is not necessarily that teachers are vehemently opposed to the teaching of sexuality. The issue is rather how they have been positioned by the different contexts in which they have come to know themselves, as they are not separate from the social and cultural contexts in which they were raised. During our discussions, there were constant reminders of how our upbringing influences our teaching. Mbali stated:

“That is our reality. We don’t want to continue what is not helping us. However, we just now said we are not able to do this... we cannot help it.”

In my understanding, this perpetuates the “silence” identified by Morrell (2003) around issues of sexuality in South African schools. In my view, this silence around issues of sexuality will continue to reign in our classrooms unless platforms of discussions and

dialogue for all stakeholders are created to assist each other to face whatever it is we need to face to be able to teach what learners really need to know and understand. As Xoli said:

“Are you saying, ‘We are damaged, so we should continue to damage?’ When then will it end? We say we skip and polish. That means there is so much that gets left behind. No wonder these kids have no hope! There has to be a solution somewhere.”

As we moved along in the sessions, I made an observation that there seems to be a lack of faith on the part of us as teachers in our ability to rise above the past and use current knowledge to move forward. As Xoli stated:

“Then the kids will have the same negative experiences and your child will have the same bad negative life.”

I acknowledged to myself that it is this disparity that this study was attempting to bring to light and thus begin the process of dealing with the issue. Through this journey, we opened a door to this realisation that these issues do have a context and it was that context that we were attempting to give light to, as we began to pave a more positive way forward.

Later on, as I listened to the audio recordings of the conversations, I gathered that there was unwillingness on the part of the participants in their roles as teachers to bear the responsibility of owning the outcome of the learners’ experiences after they had taught them. This came across clearly when Mbali responded to Xoli’s statement presented above:

“No, no. Now you say, ‘my child’. There is a difference for me, when it comes to my son. I can say whatever. However, those kids in the class they come from different homes and have different parents with different expectations. I don’t want to be responsible for those.”

Furthermore, I concluded that the apprehensions of the teachers were further heightened by possible responses of the learners. As previously discussed, there seems to be advancement in the knowledge and experiences of the learners that we as teachers are not ready for in some classrooms. As we touched on this issue in the sessions, it emerged that some of the

children's responses to lessons left some teachers feeling embarrassed. This evident in Azande's comment:

"Do you know what happens in class the minute the word 'sex' or whatever related to it is mentioned? I teach grade 9s, as you know. Heh... they get excited...start laughing, even some of the boys start asking to go out. It's embarrassing, shame."

We agreed that, partly, that state of embarrassment leads to teachers opting to teach safer topics, and in doing so, leaving a significant portion of the curriculum untouched. What I have also come to realise is that there is an element that has not been considered regarding the age of the learners we teach. The general expectation is that a specific age group would be in specific classes. However, through our observations, we agreed that teachers now have to deal with children who are above the expected age for the classroom. We felt that this was partly caused by the influx of learners from the rural areas who enter school at a late stage, as well as the dropout rate increasing with some of those learners later returning to the system. These are children who, because of their actual age, may have already experienced some of the issues we are reluctant to discuss. This creates dilemma when the learner views issues in a less childlike manner than you expect.

In my experience as a grade 6 class teacher (and that of the other participants), it is not surprising to have a seventeen-year-old sharing the class with eleven and twelve-year-olds. Therefore, we agreed that these age differences among learners have contributed, to a certain extent, to disruptions in some parts of the teaching process. This is illustrated through Azande's experience:

"Hey guys (laughing), can you believe that I actually had one of the boys in the class getting an erection and he actually stood up to ask to go outside!! Since that day I didn't die of embarrassment, I don't know what would kill me!"

What exacerbates the situation, in my experience, is that the interaction between the older learners and younger learners sometimes brings about cases of a sexual nature. These produce extra anxiety for the teachers when these get reported.

The discomfort experienced by the teachers was not only related to the ages of some of the learners. This came to light when Zoleka asked the question:

“What about teaching content that speaks to same sex relations, would you guys teach it?”

As a researcher, and as a participant, I was taken aback by the immediate negative responses that were expressed by the participants. All participants were rushing to have a say by making statements such as the one made by Zama who said:

“What!” Shame, no I would remove it”

Mandla’s immediate reaction was *“What!”* Zama went on to explain:

“No, listen. I do not know enough about it and I don’t believe we should take anything we are not clear about to the children, we don’t want to confuse them.”

For me as a researcher, Mandla’s interjected voice in this extract is intended to show his reaction to the statement. This response was not surprising as Mandla, one of the openly lesbian participants in the study, always seemed to me to be in a defensive mode whenever an issue of sexual orientation came up. I was interested to know how the other participants would respond to his reaction. Hence, at that point I reserved my own personal opinion on the issue to observe how others responded. There was a quick retaliation from other participants, such as Lunga, who responded by saying:

“No no Mandla, don’t take it personal. I am comfortable around adults talking about it. Not children, no.”

This line of conversation provoked a question from Zoleka, where she asked:

“Why are we lacking in that knowledge ‘cause for everything we teach we prepare and research about? Why don’t we do the same for that kind of topic?”

The following dialogue resulted from an attempt to respond to the question:

Zama: *"It is not the same; this is more personal and needs you to understand on a personal level and what you also believe about same sex relations. Dangerous place to put yourself as a teacher."*

Azande: *"In the senior phase that issue falls under controversial issues. You do not have to explain it. You give it to the children and they will discuss it and your job is to monitor."*

Zoleka: *"When you monitor, don't you also attend to the questions they may have in doing the task? What do you do then, run? There is no hiding when the issue is to be discussed. I do agree we should be prepared and not run from it. However, you should not lie to yourself about your personal feelings on the subject as it will show itself in a wrong time, more so if it is negative."*

Londi: *"For me even if I have to monitor, just listening to them will be too much."*

Sihle: *"Now you see why Mandla reacted that way. Admit it guys, you all have issues just like everybody else. Zoleka is right; you all need to be true to yourselves first before you unknowingly hurt a child battling with this in your class."*

Later on, I reflected on this dialogue and the session as a whole and these were my thoughts:

"Oh, how I commend the control that some of the participants have. I know as a fact that the opinions of the participants differ vastly from what they stated. These may have been true, however there is more to what they willingly shared. In private, some of the participants shared their true feelings and thoughts towards teaching about same sex relationships. What they appeared to not have the nerve for was to be open about it. For those that did vent their opinions to me, they placed a lot on how they did not want to offend Mandla or Sihle. However, in private they went all out. What this means to me, is that people are still not being true to their feelings, which hinders profitable discussions to take place so that they can have informed opinions on issues. I truly believe because of that, they lost an opportunity to learn and grow. What makes it sad for me is I could not push the issue as I had no control over the process and I also cannot betray opinions shared in private."(Personal Journal, 20 September, 2010)

The question asked by Francis (2012, p. 599), "how would heterosexual teachers who wish to remain neutral in terms of identity position themselves?" becomes relevant in attempting

understand the other participants' reaction. They chose silence and internal distancing on the issue to avoid voicing their true positions on Mandla and Sihle's revelations regarding their sexual identity as lesbians.

Another interesting development occurred when Sihle contributed to the discussion with an unexpected response. He said:

"You know guys, I have a child. Let me tell you, when one day she came to me and said, 'Mom I saw a girl kissing another girl.' At that time, I think she was in grade 2, I didn't know what to say. I am lesbian and at that time she was too young to notice and understand who I am. I ended up saying. 'You are too young to understand, one day you will understand why.'"

This proved surprising for the participants who at some point felt somehow accused of 'being in the closet' about their true thoughts and feelings towards lesbians and gays. The general assumption for us as participants was that, as lesbians, Mandla and Sihle would have had an open willingness to talk about it with anyone. This was expressed by Xoli when she asked:

"I thought it was easy for you guys to talk about this?"

I observed nods all around the room, as it appeared that Xoli had asked a question that was apparently on every person's mind. It later appeared to me that there were many assumptions around homosexuality. Because both Sihle and Mandla had come out and said they were lesbians and were living openly as such there was the expectation that they would have all the answers and understanding to explain issues for the rest of the participants. However, Sihle was quick to clarify:

"Not with a child. Remember, I may be lesbian, but I was raised by the same community under the values by a community that raised you. Why should we be different?"

I later pondered this discussion in my journal:

“Sihle raised an issue that I have not really thought about. I understand what he means. For the past session, we have been agreeing on the fact that we are bounded by the upbringing that we received, that was heavily influenced by cultural beliefs and norms. It is the same experiences that [Mandla and Sihle] also went through. The fact that, on a personal level, they managed to find their true self and started to live it does not mean it will automatically translate to all parts of their lives. (Personal Journal, 20 September, 2010)

With the issues that had been raised, there was a need for a reflective discussion where we tried to put into context what we had been discussing. This was part of the journey that we took to make meaning of what we were learning about ourselves as teachers. As Azande contributed:

“As part of the solution, the change has to take place both in the classroom and outside the classroom. For me, there is a need for the Department to play its part through programmes that speak the truth about what the children really want to know. Then provide necessary assistance that is relevant and appropriate for the learners. It also needs to be real about the limitations of the teachers, and then provide assistance where teachers fail to comply.”

This was a sentiment that I also shared in Masinga (2009) where I stated that we need to be aware of the limitations affecting our teaching, so we can be able to deal with them as they appear. We further discussed that, as part of helping teachers, the parents also need to play a role:

“The parents as well. We all know that the exposure to things of a sexual nature of these kids is high. They have to work at limiting this and also be there to explain to their kids when a need occurs and not wait for me to do it. The kids are not assisted to put what they see and hear to perspective that will assist them in future.”(Mbali)

That notion came about from a view that the language that was sometimes used by learners and was considered inappropriate was mostly learned around the home area. This view that was endorsed by Lunga when she said:

“I agree, every time when you ask ‘Where did you hear that or see that?’ the answer would be ‘home’.”

What the above discussion meant for me was that, while we might have been aware of our shortcomings as sexuality teachers, what we had not been fully conscious of were the origins of those shortcomings. Through the research process, we had the opportunity to identify and converse on these origins. We might have not come up with immediate solutions, but we did however come to the realisation that we needed to be clear on what it was that was keeping us from achieving full comfort when teaching LO and, in so doing, begin to strategise as to how we could overcome this for the sake of the learners. We realised that for that to happen, there was also the need for other stakeholders to be aware of the limitations that we had identified, as explained by Azande:

“I guess the Department has to keep it real about the type of teacher they really have in schools. More so relating to LO. There has to be continuous developmental activities provided by the Department for the teachers where we meet and do exactly what we are doing now. It helps to know you are not alone and the fears you have are shared by many. However, they must not be venting meetings, but solution seeking ones. I know that sometimes I get lost as to the type of activity that will give the best result for some of the issues. If we were to meet, I would have ideas. I know we have the clusters² but those never work. They are about doing the paperwork correctly and never about how to teach effectively the content.”

On the same note, we also acknowledged that there has to be a willingness in us as teachers to admit our limitations, thus opening room for new curriculum development and assistance. However, as Zoleka commented:

“What I have experienced is that some people do not want to be assisted as they see it as being told they are not doing the job well. I have had times where people have snubbed me saying I think I know better; unfortunately learning from each other is a

² Clusters are where teachers of neighbouring schools teaching specific learning areas are grouped together to form a subject committee. They are designed to bring teachers of the same subject within the same phase together as a support system where they interpret the subject content and plan lessons and design assessment.

skill we still need to learn as teachers. Also that development can come from any source.”

Nevertheless, this process showed me that teachers are not really uninterested in being assisted; it is how the assistance comes about that we appear to have concerns with. Our sessions demonstrated that when teachers are in a situation that values our input and uses their voice to learn, we become more receptive to the change. Thus, teacher development is not about telling teachers to get on with it and do what they were hired to do. Instead, it is about working through their misgivings with them and coming up with a collective understanding of a way forward.

5.4 Whose role is it to teach sexuality education?

From what has been discussed in this chapter, I have learned there are assumptions that have been made about the abilities of the teachers in relation to teaching LO. When teachers are bombarded with responsibilities that include things they do not feel capable of handling, we begin asking ourselves, *“Who really should teach sexuality issues to the kids?”* One of the main conversation topics that came up again and again in our sessions was how different role players should be engaged in the teaching of learners regarding their sexual growth. We highlighted what we saw as the abdication by parents and government of the responsibility to have an effective input in the teaching of sexuality to the children. Through observation on my part, I realised that there was a lot of reference to teacher development and training in the sessions. Teachers expressed concerns about being left with a responsibility that we had not been trained for or assisted with. This was linked to a lack of pedagogical ideas about how to deliver the content in a manner that would be more meaningful for the learners. These concerns were expressed by Zama:

“In our defence, guys, we were not offered LO during our training as teachers. Even during the introduction of OBE, there was no emphasis on the learning area. Such that nobody took it serious. Look at the allocated time given for LO in a week. It is two periods as compared to the six given for Maths. Look how serious the search becomes when a school is looking for a Maths or Science teacher. It becomes important that the person should show evidence of his training and experience in teaching these Learning Areas. However, with LO anyone who can prove they qualified as teachers can teach LO.”

It appeared to me that teachers' lack of confidence in our abilities to teach LO makes us doubt the effect they are having on the children they teach. This is evident in Sihle's statement:

"It makes me wonder if we are really shaping the child as it is often said when referring to the act of teaching in our policies. Are we really producing responsible future adults that have all the skills that we never had an opportunity to learn about when we growing up? I don't see it, hey how many future stostis [criminals] do we see in our classrooms. Hey, some of these kids, they are so forward they scare me. I don't know about your schools, but I cannot count how many times a learner has been caught with a knife or some other dangerous weapon. These are intermediate kids that I'm talking about. Don't get me started with dagga [cannabis]."

There was a feeling of having the odds stacked up against us as teachers who wanted to have an effective impact on the learners. Hence, the argument that the parents should assume their responsibility of being the primary providers of sexuality education. The issue of parental neglect was highlighted in this statement by Lunga:

"Come on we live here in the townships and how many times have you seen a child carrying a bottle of alcohol that an uncle sent him to buy? There is no limit as to what these kids are exposed to and some of them are done in their presence. What chance does the school have when it is all glamorised by the adults around them. The government talks of a high rise in alcohol consumption... they have no idea!"

This in my judgement reemphasises the notion that curriculum policy makers are not truly in touch with the type of learner that we have in the classrooms and the level of exposure to many issues that the children have. This view was highlighted in my master's study (2007), when I discussed the issue that the LO programmes in schools are designed for prevention. They do not speak to the realities of children that have already experienced these issues I termed "social ills". Those learners are now looking for answers as to how they can deal with these experiences and put them into a context that allows room for growth and reflection. Hence, the teachers' stance on the shared responsibility that we felt should be attained to assist the learners. Mbali articulated this view when she said:

“That’s why I feel we are not ready for this kind of relationship. Not on our own. In my opinion, the parents and community need to step up and take responsibility over what they expose these kids to. As for the government, it needs to stop hiding behind us teachers and actually introduced services in schools that specialise in some of these issues.”

As part of the concerns of the teachers, there was the feeling that as teachers we have been placed in a position that renders us hypocrites. I understood this feeling to emanate from the place where the teacher self meets the private self. Some of the issues covered in LO lessons are issues that some of these teachers had gone through themselves and where they felt they had made the wrong choices. Some were still feeling that they could not to speak of such issues that they, in their private lives, were struggling with. I am reminded of the issue of condom use that came up at some point in the sessions. Most teachers expressed their inability to consistently use condoms themselves and thus they felt hypocritical talking about it in class. This was summed up by Azande when she stated:

“We really are not in the position to teach most of the content in LO. How can we do that without feeling a bit like hypocrites? You all know we can be.”

This was further emphasised by Zama when she too said:

“That is true.” “We talk of responsible sexual acts and we don’t practice that. We talk of pregnancy before marriage; most of us in this room have kids that we got in our twenties and late teens. Who are we kidding?”

It was truly in those moments I believe, that the professional self met the private self, as we attempted to work past these mixed feelings to achieve what we felt we ourselves had failed at. As Gerouki (2011) explains, “As in all sites of social interaction, members of the school community have to follow particular rules and conform to scripts that regulate how they behave” (p. 4). It is this conformity that some of the teachers in this study struggled to understand or relate to. There was a feeling that, as teachers, we are not given an opportunity to lead private lives. There is a certain level of decorum that we are expected to portray and maintain in the communities we live in. It is such decorum that some teachers questioned, as

they asked themselves, *“If the parent cannot act accordingly in the presence of their child, why then should that fall on the shoulders of the teachers?”* This was questioned after the statement that was made by Azande above regarding teachers having children out of wedlock and as teenagers themselves. As Mbali argued:

“I don’t get what does that have to do with them. Those are my mistakes and they are lucky they have a learning area that tries to help; we didn’t. I hate it when we are judged.”

In my understanding, those experiences of feeling judged can cause teachers to retaliate by withdrawing from the task of teaching. However, we later had to agree that because of the nature of the occupation we had chosen, we are bound by the responsibility to be exemplary to the learners we teach. As Zoleka attempted to explain:

“That is the nature of our job. The intention is not to judge but to make sure that we live up to some of the things we expect from the children. I know the first thought there would be, ‘What is then the job of the parent?’ We need to remember that we are there as a support structure where parents fall short. That means we cannot be seen doing the opposite of what we say in LO. Obviously you would not go to your neighbouring tavern and drink.

This statement was also further elaborated on by Lunga as she said:

“It is hard to hear, but it is true. What can you say on Monday to a child that saw you staggering home from a tavern when you have to speak on a topic of alcohol and drug abuse?”

This was one of those arguments that we as participants had the most disagreement on, with others taking the position that:

“I don’t want that kind of responsibility, shame. How can I be expected to be all clean and proper all the time? I live here; I cannot hide my life forever. The fact that I am lesbian, I will not hide it out of fear how it will be perceived by the learners.” (Sihle)

To which Xoli responded:

“We are not saying that we should hide the reality from the kids. They need to understand the different dynamics of society and personal choices that people make. However you and your better half would not be walking around kissing now would you? That would be wrong whether you were lesbian or not.”

I found this argument interesting as it highlighted the different perspectives from which we as teachers viewed our chosen vocation. These perspectives provided us with different experiences in the classroom and around the community, as we went about matching the private-self and the teacher-self to meet the expectations of the job. After much deliberation on the matter, we came to an understanding that, in the end, we are partners in the raising and teaching of the young people. Therefore, the same expectations that we have about the parents’ behaviour can also be expected from us. This was summarised by Xoli:

“Then we agree that it is a social responsibility for all to reflect positive behaviour in the presence of the children. As teachers, we should not be given the full responsibility while parents sit and wait to receive perfect children.”

This view is also expressed by McNamara, Geary and Jourdan: “Positive role modeling by all teachers is important in supporting students to improve the quality of their relationships and responsible decision-making with regard to sexual activity” (2010, p. 231).

5.5 I am female and therefore I should teach Life Orientation

As participants, we also discussed how the choice of who should teach LO most of the time takes on a gendered dimension. We discussed that there seemed to be some fears amongst male teachers to attach themselves to a learning area such as LO. This issue is discussed by McNamara et al. (2010) who identify the fears that some male teachers may have in teaching sexuality education, such as the risk to personal and professional identity which comes from the internal and external sources. In their study, McNamara et al. (2010) highlight that there is a notion that female teachers are better positioned to assist learners with more personal issues, such as those that could be brought up by sexuality education. They argue that there is

however, a great need for male presence in sexuality education, to provide a balance in role modeling for the learners, more so for the male learners.

As participants, we raised issues that were of concern to us around the identification of women as the best option for teaching LO and for teaching about sex and sexuality. For instance, Azande stated:

“The problem is that people think, because we are mothers and nurturers, we will know what to do. When we are just as lost as the men. Maybe worse off, because we allow men to rule and manipulate and control us.”

This statement changed the tone of the conversation as we started to identify what is it about the female role in our community that renders women feeling incompetent. We agreed that as women in our society, we are as yet to get the recognition that we deserve as role players in all aspects of living. Hence, the question posed by Zoleka:

“Do we all feel like that? I know that sometimes I have to work extra hard to get a small amount of respect from males and females, in such a way that sometimes I just let go and don’t fight. I know that is not the way it supposed to be, as I get tired, angry and disappointed in how things are towards me as a female and those are the kind of things we should be teaching to the kids. Issues of equality and fairness, the problem is that the reality of the situation is that the kids, when they go home inequality is all they see.”

Mbali, also brought a different dynamic into the dialogue when she said:

“Some of us face that in our own lives, so how can we be in a position to teach that to the learners?”

Lunga also added her thoughts on the matter by saying:

“Look how submissive we are even in sexual matters in our relationship. Sex is about men and their satisfaction and that is how it has been. Very few women take charge in

their relationships and actually have a say. That is why I ask, 'How does that make us better candidates to teach LO?'"

It appeared, to us that, as women, we have been positioned by by the social and cultural norms of our communities and also that we, as women, have perpetuated and allowed this positioning to be perpetuated by others in ways that may not necessarily in the best interests of the image of women. Hence this statement by Zoleka's held some truths for all of us:

"As women, we need to be aware of those issues and deal with them in situations like these. As women, we are yet to be emancipated. Our sexuality, in my view, is still largely influenced or dictated by culture, society or social interactions and at the same time some men don't want to teach something that most claim to be expects in."

5.6 What are the implications for teaching and schooling?

I agree with Baxen and Breidlid (2009, p. 35) that, "the culture of schools and teachers' personal identities act as filters to the knowledge taught about HIV/AIDS [and sexuality education]." What this means to me is that it is critical that we have teachers who have a clear understanding of what those personal identities are, specifically their sexual identities. Teachers also need to understand the role and impact these identities will have on their day to day contact with the learners and on the content covered within sexuality education. However, through the discussion thus far in this thesis it is evident to me that this may not be the case for the participants in this study and for other teachers as well.

Since teachers' own personal understanding of issues plays a role in how they will interpret and communicate the content covered, it is then important that we discuss the implications of these understandings for the teaching of LO. As Baxen and Breidlid (2009) emphasise, "teachers as the embodiment of community social and cultural practices, act from a particular position" (p. 35). It is this position that is influenced by teachers' experiences, attained within different contexts of the community life the teachers have been exposed to. That raises the question, *"How would a teacher that, for instance, has been exposed to violence and then shaped her identity around that experience, interact with the content of abuse as she delivers it in the classroom?"* Is this teacher going to be able to disassociate herself from her personal experiences and be able to deliver the content as intended, so the learner can benefit from the lesson?

Baxen and Breidlid (2009) argue that, “assumptions seems to have been made (a) that as teachers merely deliver an already agreed upon body of knowledge and that their own influences and experiences do not act as mediatory tools for what and how they teach...” (p. 36). What this implies for me is that the teacher in question may pose a threat to how the message is delivered to the learners on the basis of the position she will take on the issue of abuse. This may prove detrimental to a child that may be in her classroom going through the same issue, or to boys who may feel the resentment towards men that may come from the teacher, thus creating images that may prove mis-educative for them.

In my understanding, if teacher sexuality continues to be ignored and not attended to, a lack of effectiveness of programmes taught in schools will also continue. As it stands now, in my view, most educational endeavours undertaken in our schools to equip learners with effective life skills seem to have failed. That leaves them ill equipped to handle and make decisions on life and health issues (Croft & Asmussen, 1992).

The teachers involved in this study engaged in dialogue to determine how each of us could better understand her sexual identity. Through the experiences discussed, we came to understand how each of our journeys of growing up provided experiences that eventually had major implications for how we developed as sexual beings. As discussed in various parts of this chapter, the experiences that each participant went through provided lasting impressions that led to the creation of a person we have started to know ourselves to be.

Schools have their own environments that have been created through the policies that govern them. Also, the content taught to learners gives some form of direction as to the expectations towards their developing identities. The issue that comes to the forefront is the people that enter schools – learners and teachers – come with their own individual expectations and identities that have already been influenced by the different environments they are coming from. The key question now is, *“How can schooling assist in a positive way to consolidate or supplement positive or negative experiences of learners in such a way that they are given a chance to develop positively?”*

As participants, we felt that the home environment can be a strong barrier to achieving this. As much as children spend some time at school, it might be that the negative environment to

which they go home to is a much stronger influence. What that means now is that the school has to counteract the negative experiences with positive ones and give the child the tools to weigh their options. To achieve this, means that we need teachers who are capable of fulfilling this role.

However, in this study it is becoming clear that this may not be an easy task. Teachers also come into the school with experiences of their own that have been influenced and may still be influenced by their private interactions. Looking at the experiences of the teachers in this study, who experienced violence, parent control and other experiences, these do not automatically get left behind; they bring them into the classroom as they interact with the curriculum. That means that if teachers are not assisted in putting their experiences into positive perspective and also to work with a curriculum that seems to require more than they feel capable of giving, the learners will always be affected. The question is, *“Who then should provide these tools for the teachers?”*

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I focused on exploring the second research question of this thesis which was, *“What are the key experiences of teachers as teachers of sexuality education?”* I considered the expectations of parents, the DoE and other stakeholders about the capability of teachers in teaching sexuality content. I also looked at how participants discussed what we considered as inappropriate and uncomfortable talk. This led to a consideration of who then should be teaching sexuality education. Lastly, I discussed how the issue of gender plays in role in decisions on the suitability of teachers to teach sexuality education.

For me, the main highlight of this chapter is how we as teachers seem to have been positioned by others in ways we often find difficult to handle. Due to this positioning, we become designated sources of information and instruction for which we mostly find ourselves lacking in effective pedagogical tools. This chapter revealed that there is tension as to who should be the primary source of sexuality-related information and education for learners. We as teachers advocated that, as much as schools should take responsibility, the parents should also play their role. Nonetheless, as a researcher, having being exposed to relevant research findings, I concur with the notion of teachers as leaders in sexuality education and schools as appropriate places for teaching of sexuality. However, this chapter emphasises that teachers need to be appropriately trained and necessary provision made for them to be able to fulfil

this demanding task. At the present moment, it is my view that many schools and teachers are not yet equipped to meet this task. What I also found particularly significant in this chapter which was the gendered positioning of females as ‘best suited’ to teaching sexuality education. It was made clear by the participants that there is a need for both sexes in the teaching of sexuality as they bring different but equally important perspectives to sexuality, which are important for learners to be exposed to. Another important discovery for me was the use of language as a source or means of positioning (Harre & Lagenhove, as cited in Francis & De Palma, forthcoming), where we as teachers take stances on what we feel is inappropriate or appropriate to discuss with the learners, based on our own positions on what is appropriate.

Chapter Six is the concluding chapter that is intended to map the journey and the experiences of the participants and my own journey in a participant and researcher roles. In the chapter, I first address my personal and professional reflections on the study; I then offer methodological reflections on the experience of working within two methodologies, as experienced by myself and other participant. This is followed by a summation of each chapter of this thesis, leading to the discussion on what it was that we are taking away from the study as related to the theoretical framework that underpins the study, looking at the different positions assumed by teachers as we interacted with the sexuality content in LO. I then look at the recommendations for improving practice and possibilities for future research. Lastly, I discuss the contributions that have been made by this study to research on teaching and learning of sexuality education.

CHAPTER 6

JOURNEYS TO SELF-KNOWLEDGE: LESSONS LEARNED

6.1 Introduction

In this study, I involved myself and a group of my fellow teachers of the Life Orientation (LO) learning area in a collaborative inquiry to review who we are as sexual beings, how we understand sexuality and how this self-knowledge might affect our interaction with learners and our teaching of sexuality education. In the previous chapter, Chapter Five, I probed the second research question of this study: “*What are teachers’ key experiences as sexuality educators?*” I examined participants’ views on what parents, the Department of Education (DoE) and other stakeholders in the schooling system expect of us as teachers when teaching sexuality-related content to learners. I then looked at what participants considered to be ‘uncomfortable talk’ that can inhibit us in addressing certain sexuality-related issues. I also reflected on our discussion about whose role it is or should be to provide sexuality education for learners. Finally, I considered the issue of gender roles in deciding who is to teach sexuality education, where participants expressed how, in our experience, females tend to be regarded as the appropriate teachers of sexuality education.

This chapter is the concluding chapter of this study where I look at the collaborative self-study journey that has been travelled. This review of the study is interwoven within my third research question, “*How might increased self-understanding influence how teachers interpret and teach sexuality education?*” In my role as researcher, I felt that in order to address this final question, it was important that we bring the research process back to who we are as teachers. Thus, I asked participants to engage with this question through reflective letter-writing (I discuss this letter-writing process in more detail in Chapter Two). The insights that were shared through the participants’ letters have been interwoven into various parts of this chapter to show our growth and our understanding of the implications of the journey we have taken together.

I begin my review of the study by giving a synopsis of the thesis and considering what each chapter has contributed to the entire study. I then offer my personal and professional reflections on the study. This is followed by methodological reflections on working within the research genres of self-study and collaborative inquiry, as experienced by me and other participants. Next, I engage in a discussion of lessons learned relating to the theoretical

perspectives that underpinned the study. In this section, I deliberate on what we learned about the different positions that teachers take and those that teachers have been given in relation to the task of teaching sexuality education – in relation to re-positioning of the personal self, re-positioning of the professional self, and re-positioning of others. Following this discussion, I look forward to possibilities for improving practice and for future research. Lastly I draw attention to the contributions that this study has made to research on teaching and learning sexuality education.

6.2 Synopsis of the thesis

The journey we undertook for this study was aimed at engaging ourselves as teacher participants in a collaborative process of inquiry. We intended to probe how we saw ourselves as sexual beings, and how that self-understanding might contribute to our teaching about sexuality within LO and also to identifying with our learners. This was achieved through various stages that saw the development and outcome of this study.

The story of our journey began with Chapter One, where I discussed how this study was conceptualised. I discussed my professional and personal inspiration for the study. I listed the three research questions that guided this study and I briefly outlined the two research methodologies that I have used in exploring these questions. Subsequently, I considered the socio-educational context for the study, showing how, particularly in the light of HIV&AIDS epidemic in South Africa, sexuality education has become a noteworthy and challenging responsibility for schools and teachers. I then elucidated the theoretical perspectives that have informed this study, which were social constructivist and positioning theory. To conclude, I offered an overview of the chapters that comprise this thesis.

In Chapter Two, I offered a more in-depth discussion of the two methodologies that have underpinned the study: *self-study in teaching and teacher education* and *collaborative inquiry*. I reflected on the suitability of these methodologies for the study and on my experiences of using these two methodologies. In the chapter, the research setting and participants who took part in the collaborative journey were also described. In addition, I put forward detailed clarification of data generation, interpretation and re-presentation processes followed in the study. To conclude the chapter, I gave a reflective account of the journey that I travelled as a researcher participant in this study. As closing thoughts, I shared the highlights of my learning as presented in the chapter, such as the importance of participants'

input in the entire journey of the study, while providing a favourable environment that offered a sense of comfort for the participants. Another highlight of my learning was the emphasis on sustaining reflective processes on the part of the researcher to attempt to achieve a sense of balance between the researcher and participant roles.

Chapter Three inquired into the first research question, “*How can teachers better understand their sexual identities?*” In this chapter, I showed how, as participants, we deliberated on differences in our comprehension of sexuality and related stories of experiences that had influenced the development of our sexual identities and the contrasting positions we have taken on sexuality as we have interacted with the world as teachers and as people. I showed how storytelling, collage and conversation with trusted ‘friends’ enabled a process of personal and collective meaning-making centred on deeper insight into sexuality and our sexual identities. This chapter brought out how teacher conversation can be a significant and challenging way for teachers to develop in their personal and professional competence as they articulate and bring into question their views and positioning through collective participation.

Progressing from the conversation initiated in Chapter Three, in Chapter Four I proceeded with the representation of our journey towards understanding the development of our sexual identities. I demonstrated how I embarked on further analysis in my role as the researcher, looking for additional meaning and explanations for what we had experienced collectively. In the process, I identified and conversed on five key issues: *an abusive environment as a source of influence; a heterosexuality laden environment; physical attributes as source of self-worth; an environment limiting sexual expression of women; the reaction: how we respond to our experiences influences identity*. My discussion of these issues, in dialogue with relevant literature, gave further clarity to my enhanced understanding of how our cultural and social interactions and environments affect our development, understandings and positioning as sexual beings.

Then in Chapter Five I spoke to the second research question, “*What are the key experiences of teachers as teachers of sexuality education?*” I explored participants’ views on what was expected from us as LO teachers by various role-players within the schooling system. I also spoke on what we as participants expressed as our boundaries in teaching sexuality education, particularly in relation to ‘uncomfortable talk’. This then brought up the issue of, “*Whose*

role is it to teach sexuality education?” Connected to this was our deliberation on how, in our experience, LO tends to be viewed as the duty of female teachers. For me, the key message of this chapter was how we as LO teachers appeared to have been positioned by others and to have positioned ourselves and others in ways we often find challenging and how a way forward for sexuality education needs to be collectively developed by all role-players in education.

6.2 My personal reflections on the study

My reflective thoughts on my own journey:

It is of interest to me how ignorant we mostly seemed to be of our own sexual identities. The fact that it was an issue that had never crossed our minds while it seems to have had such major consequences for us was also interesting. For my own journey, with the help of the other participants, I have come to realise how my life has been in bondage as I allowed the past to dictate my future experiences. I have come to realise that my journey towards my sexuality has yet to be explored. Through the sessions, I have begun the process of identifying what has been holding me back. Through that process, I have gained some understanding and tools for moving forward. I have a task to awaken learners to possible risks in life and giving them the skills to prevent them. However, I have come to realise that it has to begin with me. I have to start giving myself the tools of letting go and starting to live a life that will produce positive thinking and thus make me a better LO teacher.

The collaborative process has been instrumental in this regard as I awaken to my reality. I have become aware of what may be reflected in my teaching style and how I may send out mixed messages for the learners thus producing a mis-educative environment. (Personal journal entry, 11 May, 2011)

As indicated in Chapter One of this thesis, my personal drive stemmed from a need to gain understanding of how I could best provide opportunities for the learners to learn about sexuality. To achieve this, my intention was to take an introspective journey into my own teaching of sexuality education; looking for whatever it was that rendered the process problematic. I shared this journey with other teachers of LO who became my critical friends, as we aimed at increased self-knowledge within the context of sexuality through self-introspection. I had my own revelations brought out by the process. It became clear to me that

my ‘demons’ (Masinga, 2007, 2009) extended beyond the classroom and my ability to teach certain content. I came to see how my personal history and the view I had of myself emanating from my lived experiences had created barriers that hindered my own personal growth. I realised how these issues have subconsciously influenced the interpretation and teaching of sexuality education in my classroom. I also came to understand that those barriers translated into particular positions that I took on various aspects of my teaching.

6.3 My professional reflections on the study

In this collaborative self-study process, I gained an understanding that the concerns that I had about my ability to teach sexuality education were not unique to me. I came to understand that other teachers also experienced this feeling of not knowing what to do and how to go about teaching sexuality in an educative manner for the learners. I began to gain an understanding of the various positions (as discussed later in this chapter) that we took as teachers on the content we taught, as we picked and chose what we ‘could’ and ‘could not do’ in our classrooms. I realised that these kinds of issues can be more successfully attended to if we engage in a continuous process of collective development as teachers of LO and are reflective about our actions and choices that we make when we teach. I also realised that, as teachers, we seem often to have different expectations from those of parents with regards to the role we are to play in educating the learners. This leads to us experiencing frustrations and even anger over these conflicting expectations (Keyes, 2002). However, what was most significant for me was that we acknowledged that these feelings should not be allowed to stand in the way of making changes within our practice and that we should look for ways and means to work around these issues for the benefit of the learners.

6.4 Methodological reflections on the study

This study drew from two research methodologies: *self-study in teaching and teacher education* and *collaborative inquiry*. Both proved suitable for the intentions of the study, which was to engage in a journey of self-knowledge as sexuality educators as we aimed to improve our practice to meet the needs of the learners. I found that these two methodologies complemented each other, as I was able to participate in self-study in the company of critical friends on a shared journey of self-understanding as sexual beings and educators of LO. This journey was facilitated within a collaborative environment with other teachers, who shared the same professional concerns regarding our teaching of sexuality education to learners and our ability to meet the needs of these learners. An atmosphere of trust was created, which

was reemphasised through constant reminders of our ethical responsibility towards each other. We were able to create an atmosphere that was conducive to the nature of the study as we dealt with sensitive issues. We were also able to achieve a feeling of caring and showing understanding for each other in every session. This allowed my own self-study process to take place in a validating and challenging environment.

Significantly, the combined methodologies also assisted in exploring who we were as teachers instead of only focusing on what we did in our classrooms. We were able to revisit and re-evaluate our beliefs as we attempted to comprehend ourselves and our actions as teachers and as people.

Throughout this journey, I maintained a dual role as a participant as well as the researcher. One of the important things that I learned through this was that, to stay true to my role as a researcher, I had to devise means to facilitate this aspect of my task. What contributed to the success of my journey was spending time, after each session and again later on my journey, reflecting on the process through journal writing. This became crucial because, as a participant, the writing of field notes during sessions was not always possible. This reflective journal writing process also served a unique purpose that I later came to appreciate. The intimate nature of the sessions resulted in us as participants developing close relationships with each other. This made the stories participants shared emotionally challenging for me as the researcher. Hence, I experienced an ‘emotional roller coaster’, which brought to the fore the issue of self-care (Pithouse-Morgan, Khau, Masinga, & van de Ruit, 2012), which, for me was achieved through journaling.

The collaborative self-study research process also provided a source of care for all participants. In this regard, the nature of the environment in which our conversations took place became especially important. What could have been the re-traumatisation of the narrator or the listeners instead became a healing opportunity for all. I also gained insight into how collaborative self-study allowed each participant to gain personal insights through reflective moments and instant feedback from the other participants.

Research is often presented as being about order and planned processes; in contrast, this study provided moments of chaos and uncertainty that were of concern to me as the researcher. Nevertheless, as I later reflected and came to understand, this chaos was actually

an important element in creating an informal, interactive environment that produced comfort and a sense of sharing. A bond between participants was reinforced as we laughed and chatted with each other. Furthermore, collaborative involvement in decision-making gave participants an opportunity to gain a sense of ownership of the process and assisted in shaping the process of data generation and interpretation. As participants, we were able to collectively develop an environment that was content sensitive as we were dealing with personal experiences that involved our private sexual identities and thoughts. To illustrate, Mandla expressed in his reflective letter that he:

“Gained a lot from this experience than what I have gained from other developmental activities I have been part of. There was positiveness in the sessions that gave me a sense of value as a valid contributor to the process. I felt safe to share my life with people who were heterosexuals and trusting them with my own vulnerability as I shared my sexual orientation as a lesbian.”

Mandla’s explanation of his learning in a collaborative environment validated for me as the researcher and as a participant my own experience of the effectiveness of combining self-study and collaborative inquiry for this study.

6.5 “This is where the journey brought us”: Lessons learned

This study was guided by three research questions that formed the foundation for the study, namely: *“How can teachers better understand their own sexual identity? What are teachers’ key experiences as sexuality educators?”* and *“How might increased self-understanding influence how teachers interpret and teach sexuality education?”* Collectively as participants we began to form some basis of understanding of what it was we aimed to achieve through responding to these research questions – in keeping with a social constructivist perspective that recognises the significance of active learning or meaning making (Richards, 1997). To initiate this process, we began by looking at the first question, *“How can teachers better understand their own sexual identity?”* This was followed by *“What are teachers’ key experiences as sexuality educators?”* In our conversations, we agreed that this was an appropriate sequence, looking at the self first, then looking at those experiences that we were confronted with as we came into contact with sexuality education with the intention of identifying what it was about ourselves that influenced the positions we took in the relationships we had with the learners and in our teaching of sexuality in LO. Through

exploring the first research question, we concluded that the understandings that we had of who we were as sexual beings stemmed from the influences and experiences that evolved as we interacted with others within the social and cultural contexts of our lives. This understanding was aligned to a social constructivist perspective that maintains that our personal growth is interconnected with our social interactions as we progress in life (Richards, 1997). Further, we came to see how our social and cultural contexts and interactions informed particular positions that we were living out in the storylines of our lives, as embodied through our speech and actions (Francis & De Palma, forthcoming).

6.5.1 Re-positioning the personal self

In this study, we identified that before we are teachers, we are people first. Therefore, as people, we are entangled within the influences that emanate as we interact with family, culture, peers, friends and other people that we happen to meet in life, thus influencing the different positions we take on issues. We concluded that these positions are linked to the relationship we have with our memories and with emotions that resulted from past interactions. We learned that, due to the nature of some of these experiences, we had felt pain and it is perhaps that remembered pain that creates certain positions rather than the memory of the experience itself. We realised that often, because of that remembered pain, we had attempted to build shields around ourselves that to ensure a sense of safety from having to experience such pain again. To illustrate, Zama expressed in her letter that:

“I am so glad of this experience gained from the sessions. I was aware of the pain that I went through as my marriage and sense of trust came apart. However, I have been made to realise that pain is part of my life. As I now look at my relationship with men, I see I have been looking at them through the eyes of my experiences with my ex-husband. I understand why they [other participants] fear for my life. Due to the experience, I have exposed myself to danger as I became casual in my relationship so that no other men get to make me experience that pain again.”

As we reflected and engaged in dialogue we came to the realisation that positions are not necessarily permanent. Our ongoing lived experiences and interaction with the world can influence changes in our positions on issues such as abuse. Hence, we acknowledged that the positions we take are not fixed and can be influenced towards more positive or negative positions. Participants in this study who came in with specific positions on various issues

gained the opportunity to re-evaluate these positions and to begin a process of change to influence their growth on a personal and professional level. The study also created opportunities for individuals to reassess how we saw our selves, including our sexual identities. For example, Zoleka's letter expressed her personal gain from the process as we attempted to speak to how we could better understand our own sexual identities:

"I need to make peace with my past relationship with my mother that does not need her acknowledgement. I need to make peace with the physical self that I have come to be. And know that it is an issue of concern to me and I have been denying its existence in such a way that it has, in many ways made me stop living. I want to understand myself, because if I don't get myself right, I will not reach the full potential of being a teacher or woman."

6.5.2 Re-positioning the professional self

Together, we explored our daily practice of teaching LO and reflected on how this task could be hindered by our personal histories and by certain positions that we were adopting or within which we were being placed. In reflecting on this through the collaborative self-study process, we considered how we might become better teachers who were more enlightened in our role as teachers as well as in our personal growth. In this regard, this is what Sihle as shared in his letter regarding the question, *"How might increased self-understanding influence how teachers interpret and teach sexuality education"*:

"The concept of my private life and experiences having an effect in my teaching was new to me. It amazed me to realise how my life is connected no matter what role I'm playing at whatever capacity. I got to understand what each experience meant to my future actions and relationship with learners." (Sihle)

Thus, due to the understandings we developed of our personal selves, we also realised how we have come to position ourselves and are positioned by others in our roles as teachers in different forms. In the sessions, we became conscious that when confronted with any educational activity, teachers will draw from the person they understand themselves to be. It also became evident that teachers' view of who they are often comes into conflict with policy images (Jansen, 2001) that position them differently from what they understand themselves to

be capable of. Again, we came to see that the professional positions we take are not fixed and that we can re-evaluate these positions to begin a process of change.

Another aspect of our professional selves that emanated from the study was the issue of ‘responsibility’ that came from our social and cultural contexts and from expectations by the DoE of us as teachers. It became evident that our understandings of ‘responsibility’ could include the possibly contradictory elements of: keeping to the teachings of the cultural and social contexts of the learners and their parents; being what is seen as ‘age appropriate’ in our choice of certain subject content and language; and following the LO policy as prescribed for each phase. Hence, we realised that our understanding of sexuality and sexuality education and the positions that we were taking were interlinked with a complex sense of personal and professional responsibility. As Xoli expressed in her letter:

“I have my ways of which I am not ashamed of, but going through this process I have come to realise the responsibility that comes with having such a free thinking spirit. I would not have realised this had I not been part of this experience. I have come to realise, as I look at my teaching that I have been careless with my learners and I lacked the full understanding of the responsibility that came with teaching LO. As much as we don’t get the support we need from the other teachers, this should not make us slack in our role for the sake of the learners. Whether I like it or not I am a teacher twenty four hours and my actions in and out of the school and classroom matter. A lesson I wouldn’t have learned had I not seen myself through the eyes of the other participants.”

Additionally, it became apparent that the HIV&AIDS epidemic in South Africa has also influenced how we have positioned ourselves as sexual beings and the positions we have taken on sexual expression and sexuality education. A sense of danger and caution became influential factors in the positions we took as we aimed to protect ourselves and others against the disease. In our conversations, it became evident that the silences around the issues connected to HIV&AIDS create uneasiness about opening up and conversing about the issue. Our stories revealed that, because of the prevalence of HIV&AIDS in our communities, the epidemic has a personal meaning for many teachers. Thus, it became apparent that the different experiences teachers have had with HIV&AIDS will have an influence on how they will position themselves towards teaching about sexuality and HIV&AIDS-related matters.

6.5.3 Re-positioning others

Through the study, we also became more aware of how we were positioning others through our actions and our words. For example, we realised how we positioned parents as preferred providers of sexuality education and we identified them as abdicators in this regard, while we failed to take into account their own positions on issues of sexuality. Again, we became conscious of how we tended to position other teachers in our schools as abdicators and unwilling to contribute to sexuality education or to dealing with learners' personal and social difficulties. We also became more conscious of how we often positioned learners as helpless in contributing to their own learning and ignored their own social and cultural influences that might hinder or enhance their ability to learn. This positioning of others was also revealed through our conversations as we looked at how, due to our social and cultural contexts, some of us had positioned men in our lives as 'providers' who were worthy of our allegiance irrespective of the harmful outcomes of our relationships with them. We also realised that, on the other hand, experiences of abuse at the hands of a man could lead us to position all men as 'abusers'.

Through our discussions, we realised that the choice of words we opted to use when expressing ourselves was interlinked with our backgrounds and identities. Also, we came to see how our social upbringing and contexts had an influence on how we thought and related to each other, thus determining how we would react to each other's choice of words to express a certain thought or feeling. Therefore, it became evident that, through language, we overtly or implicitly reveal our positions on matters and that we use language as a basis for positioning others. These positions can create a lack of tolerance and acceptance of others' positions. This was identified through the reaction of the participants to Xoli, whose choice of language broke down the barriers of our cultural teachings, thus placing her in a line of fire from those who opted to hold on to those teachings. Hence, as a researcher I was pleasantly amazed by what Mbali had to say about Xoli in her letter:

"In this experience I got an opportunity to experience being around a person like Xoli, whom I believe had left the most impression for me. I know that in a different place, I would not have associated with a person that speaks the way that she does. I, however have come to appreciate her as I believe with her free thinking and flexible way of looking at life, she stands a better chance at changing and improving on her

teaching. Her manner allows her to connect to all topics – a skill I don't think I am yet to achieve. I may never speak and say what she is capable of saying, but I have come to respect her ways."

A new awareness of the importance of re-thinking how we position others was also expressed in Sihle's letter:

"I also got to understand the people around me and started to see how they too could be influenced by their own life experiences, that affecting how they saw me as a Lesbian."

6.6 Possibilities for improving practice and for future research

6.6.1 Re-positioning teachers as learners

One of our key realisations from this study is how, as teachers, we have been positioned as knowledge bearers and as pedagogic experts who will make appropriate choices leading to effective teaching of sexuality education. In our discussions, we identified this positioning as being linked to assumptions made by the DoE regarding the capabilities and capacity of teachers in making these pedagogical decisions. Hence, we identified a need to evaluate what knowledge and pedagogic expertise teachers truly have regarding sexuality education, in order to embark on supporting teacher learning in these areas. In my view, what this study highlights is that key to such development is the involvement of the teachers themselves, so that they will have opportunities to express their views and gain understanding of what it is that makes it uncomfortable and difficult for them to teach sexuality education.

Through our collaborative inquiry, we realised the importance of providing learning spaces and situations for teachers that are intended to initiate and promote discussion and reflection on daily teaching practices. Such development would have to be more interactive and recognise that teachers' knowledge and perspectives would form an important base for their learning. If this kind of interactive teacher development were to take place in a consistent pattern, it could provide continuity and relevant growth for teachers. This also should allow teachers to share their learning as they assist each other to face what needs to be faced for them to be able to teach what learners really require. Londi expressed this in her letter as follows:

“I learned that open talking as teachers is important to assist each other with the task of teaching that would produce effective learning and teaching as we assist each other to view the policy of LO and suggest teaching styles that provide openness and sharing in the classroom.”

An important part of open talking among teachers would be to acknowledge the complications that are brought forward when curriculum policy meets the personal, as the pedagogical choices that the teacher make in teaching such issues would be influenced by their personal experiences and the opinions they hold on the issues. In my opinion, the study has also highlighted a need for LO teachers to be exposed to a range of relevant pedagogic methods that suit the nature of the learning area, especially in relation to the sexuality content covered within LO.

We also concluded that the teaching of sexuality education is affected by the meeting of conflicting experiences and expectations of us as teachers and of our learners. We realised that, as teachers, we often omit certain pedagogical styles and content in order to protect ourselves from possible embarrassment caused by what we would deem as ‘inappropriate’ learner input and responses. It is thus important that teachers are also supported in understanding influences on their own pedagogical decision-making and in developing strategies for approaching such situations in a manner that would create positive communication with and among learners. This is demonstrated in Londi’s letter:

“As a teacher I have gained that it helps to talk openly with your learners, especially on topics based on sex. Sometimes we assume they know, not knowing that they know less and what they do know is not positive to a healthy sexual development.”

The related issue of age of learners also came into our discussions and it was the opinion of the participants of this study that this issue needs to be reviewed by the DoE, which needs to recognise the effect of the age gap between learners who are placed in the same classes. This has resulted in the issues of sexual nature being reported as the older children interact with young ones. This adds to the teachers’ difficulties in providing an educative environment as other older learners become role models for the younger ones.

The study also revealed the need for further development for teachers regarding the changing face of what is termed ‘the parent’. This made imperative by the high prevalence of HIV&AIDS in our society, which has resulted in some of our learners lacking the presence of an adult in their homes because of circumstances such as death or illness of the parents or other adult caregivers. Consequently, some learners now perform the tasks of being homemakers and other parental functions for their siblings and the schools often have no consistent adult guardian to communicate with (Keyes, 2002). This brings into question what the teachers may consider an abdication of parental responsibility in relation to sexuality education, when in fact this may be due to the unavailability of parental figures in the learners’ lives. Therefore, teachers need to be given practical skills in understanding these changes and how to deal with them to achieve what the best for the learners in their care.

6.6.2 Re-positioning teacher effectiveness

The study also revealed to us a need to redefine ‘effectiveness’ in our teaching practice as we realised that we often assume that maintaining discipline in the classroom is an appropriate measure to use. We agreed that this rethinking of what makes an effective teacher has to be achieved through revised approaches to teacher training and to developmental activities designed for teachers. We however highlighted that the Departmental teacher professional development workshops that we have attended generally seem to be content delivery driven, and that is what we as teachers commonly take back into our own classrooms. Mandla’s letter illustrates this point:

“As a teacher I have gained some understanding of what my role needs to be for the learners I teach. The need to be reflective in our teaching over what it is that we do in the class is an important tool that I have gained. I cannot be a robotic teacher who moves from one content to the next with only the sense of having achieved some set of assessment requirement demanded by the system.”

We realised that for these workshops to enhance teacher effectiveness, there is a need to re-evaluate what is often considered as ‘venting’ or complaining from the teacher (Makhanya, 2011). We felt that teachers’ views should be taken into consideration in order to better understand what teachers need to know and how they want to know it. We agreed that the frequent response of “It’s policy!” also needs to be re-evaluated as it implies finality and no room for future improvement or teacher contribution required, thus making teachers feel

excluded and detached from the sense of responsibility to achieve the aims of the policy (Masinga, 2009).

Although the Departmental policies speak of collective responsibility and participation in schools (DoHET, 2011), our discussions suggested that this is not being practiced in our schools regarding sexuality education. Hence the need to reemphasise these policies and for all teachers and other stakeholders to be involved in conversations about in effective teaching of sexuality education to learners, as this is one school task that must move beyond the classroom into the school setting as a whole. This could be achieved through the provision of various forms of platforms, created for discussions and dialogue for all stakeholders.

6.7 Contributions of the study

In teaching sexuality education we are dealing with a most contentious aspect of the child's learning life – their sexual growth, which sees learners making valuable decisions about and for their lives. This implies that we need teachers who are able to meet this challenge, an issue that has been a source of concern in research on sexuality education (as highlighted in Chapter One). Thus, a pressing question in the existing body of knowledge on sexuality education has been, *“Do such teachers exist in our schools?”* It appears that there are reasons for concern as teachers all around the world have expressed their doubts about their ability to teach certain content to learners as their personal apprehensions come into play. It was these apprehensions that this study sought to comprehend as we began by identifying the need to recognise the impact of teachers' own personal relationships with sexuality as these in turn influence the different positions that teachers adopt as they interact with the content and the learners.

Within the context of this study, when we journeyed into self-knowledge regarding our sexual identities and the teaching of sexuality education, we began to acknowledge and shift the various positions that we had held on sexuality upon entering the research process. What we managed to do for ourselves in this study was to collaboratively draw a thread between our private and professional selves as teachers of sexuality education. Making these connections was of benefit to us at both the personal and professional levels. We came to understand and demonstrate that our positions are variable, as when we were given a platform that both honoured the positions we brought into the process and encouraged critical re-evaluation of these positions, we began to reposition ourselves. Our collaborative self-study

process brought to light that our positions can be challenged at an internal level, where one does self-evaluation and also at the outer level, where others reflect on and respond to our positions. The study revealed how the challenging of positions, when done in a supportive, interactive environment, can result in the re-assessment of the self and the repositioning of the self that brings us closer to becoming the teachers we ought to be, as we become leaders and shapers of our own learning and collectively influence change.

6.8 Conclusion

This study has revealed insights that I believe bring us closer to understanding how we can reposition teacher effectiveness in relation to how teachers interpret and teach sexuality education. The study draws attention to the value of teachers gaining an understanding of how their lived experiences, and the social and cultural settings in which these are created and influenced, can contribute to how they relate to and enact sexuality education. The study illustrates how continuous dialogue with trusted ‘friends’ can allow teachers opportunities for personal and professional development in a socially and culturally sensitive environment as they come to realise that their positions need not be fixed, nor bounded by cultural and social influences.

Furthermore, the study reveals that this is not is a journey that one can travel on one’s own. We need companions who are also travelling down that road and see the value in clearing the field for a safer journey. As we journey together, we begin to recognise our shortcomings and to assist each other in identifying how we might reposition ourselves and gain new perspectives within our teaching.

As teachers, we are and always will be on some sort of a journey as we seek to do better today for our learners than what we did yesterday. For that to be achieved, we should never stop the journey into the self, as continuous self-introspective learning opens a chance to new understandings and brings us one step closer to effectiveness as teachers.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER FOR PARTICIPANTS

From: Miss Lungile R. Masinga

488 Road 7

Chesterville

Durban

4091

27 August 2010

To: Fellow educators

I am presently studying for a PhD degree at the Faculty of Education, University of KwaZulu -Natal. For this degree, I am researching issues of sexuality and the teaching and learning in sex education (Life Orientation). My specific focus is on the issues of sexuality covered within the LO programme. I have chosen to work with the intermediate and senior phase educators who teach or have taught Life Orientation in these phases.

My proposed title for the study is: *Journeys to self-knowledge: a participatory study of teachers as sexuality educators*. The study will be conducted in a collaborative environment, where you and other five participants (who are also teachers) and I will engage in different activities as we attempt to answer questions about teaching sexuality. We will be looking at how teachers see themselves as sexual beings and how that might affect how they understand and implement the Life Orientation Curriculum. The activities will include creating collages, keeping a reflective journal, writing stories of past experiences and other activities that will be explained during the first meeting. Research meetings will take place outside of working hours and will not be held on school property. The suggested estimated time of involvement is working during the second term to the third, over six sessions that will be three hours long a day. These six sessions will spread over the two terms and will be conducted during the weekends. However it should be noted that during our discussion over venue the issue of time and availability for all will be discussed.

I plan to draw on written work generated during the research process, audiotapes of group discussions, and my observations of the research process as evidence for my PhD research. I plan to draw on written work generated during the research process of group discussions, and my observations of the research process as evidence for my PhD research. I will only refer to your written and spoken words and my observation of your participation if I receive written consent from you. If I receive your consent, I will draw upon your work in a manner that shows respect for your dignity and privacy.

As the issues that emerge from the research might be of a sensitive nature due to the research topic itself, I have made arrangements for professional assistance that will be available as the need arises. I will be available to discuss this and any other concerns that you may at any time research process.

There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this study. However, I hope that this study will help to increase understanding of the teaching of sexuality education in the South African context.

I therefore request your participation and full use of any data or materials that will generated from the process to use in my thesis and other presentations or publications that might come out of the study. You are guaranteed that your name or any other information that might identify you or your school directly will not be used in the study or any other presentation or publication that might come out of the study. The use of pseudonyms will be applied throughout the writing. Copies of your written work, audiotapes of group discussions, and my observations will be securely stored and disposed of if no longer required for research purposes.

I also wish to inform you that you have no binding commitment to the research process and may pull out at any time during the process if you feel the need to. If you withdraw from the process you will not be prejudiced in any way.

Please be advised that travel costs to and from research meetings will be reimbursed.

I would appreciate it if you could take some time to think carefully about my request and please complete, sign and return this letter by **3rd September 2010**. Please be aware that participation in this research process is completely voluntary and your response to this letter will not in any ways disadvantage you. You will receive a copy of the signed letter for future reference.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Ms. L. R. Masinga

(The researcher)

Cell No.: 0787472590

Email: relungile@yahoo.com

Supervisor: Dr. K. Pithouse- Morgan (University of KwaZulu Natal, School of Education and Development)

Tel: 031- 260-3460

Email: Pithousemorgan@ukzn.ac.za

Co-supervisor: Prof. D. Francis (University of the Free State, Faculty of Education)

DECLARATION OF CONSENT

I ----- (name of participants). Hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this letter and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I give my consent for Ms. L. R. Masinga to refer to my spoken contributions generated by the activities of the Journeys to *self-knowledge: a participatory study of teachers as sexuality educators* research process as evidence for her PhD study and any other presentation or publication that might come out of the study.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so wish.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE