

Embodying the Learning Space: Is it Okay if I bring my sexuality to class?

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Introduction

On my return from the XIX Annual Lesbian Lives 'Masquerades' conference (17-18 February 2012) which was held at the University College of Dublin in Ireland I reflected on the progressive nature of our legal framework and made comparisons with the so-called "gender-sensitive" laws in other countries. I realised how much common ground there was between Northern Ireland's post-conflict quest for the equality of its (homo)sexual citizens and South Africans' continuous search for equality despite its "progressive" constitution. Both countries struggle with the persistent discrimination and homophobia against lesbian and gay people. The experience made me rethink the notion of equality as it is applied to South African homosexual citizens and it made me realise how quickly we, as lesbian and gay people, have opted to assimilate into the notion of heteronormativity by striving for the "same" privileges that were always the automatic right of those regarded as heterosexual. I argue for the urgency of ensuring that lesbian and gay people retain their political and subversive identities and believe that we have to develop pedagogies and strategies of difference rather than ideas about assimilation. This article discusses the teaching methodologies that are applied by the Gender Equity Unit (GEU), within the University of the Western Cape, to raise awareness as to why the politics of homosexual identity still matter. Critical to the process of imagining such methodologies is the importance of feminist pedagogy that specifically engages questions of sex, sexuality and sexual orientation.

The article describes the experiences of some of the lesbian, gay and transgender students at the University of the Western Cape in recent years, and goes on to discuss the deployment of pedagogical approaches that are applied outside the formal academic project. The academic project rarely appreciates

the fundamentally important roles that non-academic spaces within the university context may play in the development and implementation of innovative pedagogical methods, which may teach very difficult concepts concerning the complex realities of students' lives. The article argues that it is often in these marginalised places (units on HIV, disability, student welfare, or – in our case – 'gender equity) where cutting-edge research and teaching take place. In her recent work on African sexualities, Sylvia Tamale notes that she has drawn on the workshops in which she participated with other African feminist researchers and teachers (hosted in 2005 by the African Gender Institute (AGI), located at the University of Cape Town and the Institute of African Studies (IAS) at the University of Ghana) in order to develop a participatory gender, law, and sexuality curriculum for her law students at Makerere University. (Tamale, 2011:607). The link between academic departments, research units and institutes and civil society should not be under-estimated, and the workshop described by Tamale included the recognition that there is a continuous and symbiotic relationship between academy and civil society. Such relationships may include ideas on the design of curricula, and suggest particular pedagogical approaches (Middleton, 2000: 473).

In the Gender Equality Unit at the University of the Western Cape, a non-academic unit, the socio-economic and political realities of the South African context, led us to the imperative to create teaching, learning and social spaces that were safe for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) students. Historically the University of the Western Cape (UWC) has been on the forefront of the struggle against the elimination of racial apartheid. And since the mid-1980s feminists have actively driven the struggle against oppression and discrimination of women on campus and have made enormous strides towards the eradication of career and economic inequalities. UWC was one of the first higher education institutions to develop and implement a Sexual Harassment Policy which included a section on same-sex harassment. Nationally post-1994 legislation became 'women-sensitive' and with the continued litigation by lesbian and gay individuals and organisations for their political, bodily and economic rights, the law became more 'gender sensitive' often against great personal cost. The meaning of LGBTQ students and staff was not, however, explored within the university setting until very recently; this article looks at what prompted the Gender Equity Unit's decision

to highlight the hostility of the climate faced by people on campus living beyond the borders of heteronormativity and at the processes of pedagogy and research we developed as part and parcel of changing that climate.

Writing “(homo)sexuality”

Shortly after the first democratic elections in 1994 there was an explosion of research publications and other written and photographic material to corroborate the existence of homosexuality in South(ern) Africa. Like elsewhere on the globe much of the writing focused on the history of gay men; lesbians were very rarely mentioned. The first set of publications mainly framed the history of same-sex intimate relationships in Africa and South(ern) Africa and aimed to prove that homo-eroticism was always part of African culture and rituals. Thereafter the discourse shifted from the anthropological, psychological and medical gaze to sexual orientation as an essential component in the understanding of human rights and social justice issues. The now iconic work, *‘Defiant Desire’* edited by Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (1994) reflected on the history and experiences of the gay and lesbian individuals and movement in South Africa.

More recent writings are either preoccupied with the prevalence of homophobia that is directed at Black lesbians¹; or deal with HIV and AIDS² or cover personal coming-out autobiographies, biographies and various life stories³. Current publications differ from the first post-1994 ones in significant ways, ranging beyond the attempt to create a visible homosexual subject into a wider set of questions about political organizing, the place of individual autobiography, and the meaning of ‘culture’ and commodification in debates about justice. New organisations which focused on specific sexualised and racialised identities⁴ were formed that resulted in new careers, for some, as sexual rights activists.

Deborah Posel refers to the period shortly after 1994 as the era when sexuality became a terrain of public commodification in ways that were totally unimaginable during the apartheid era. She mentions the abundant sudden circulation of sexually explicit movies, magazines and pornography, the urban institutionalization of the sex shop and strip clubs (Posel, 2011:131-132). The apartheid Publications Board had been zealous in the application of protestant-Calvinistic values and morals in censoring and banning all types of publications or media that remotely referred to sex or sexuality. After 1994,

the scenario shifted. Media, technology and billboards using hypersexualized imagery have become common, and I would argue have a profound influence on the awakening of sexual interest among young people and children. High school learners and even younger children are exposed to both the visual and audio material on sex as never before. Popular culture plays a major role in advancing knowledge of previously forbidden subjects. Billboards scream messages of condomising and safe sex – nobody is immune to the instant messaging about sex. Despite this explosion of sexual representation, the public media remains firmly heterosexual and heteronormative. The massive media advocacy around the prevention of HIV concentrated exclusively on heterosexual penile-vaginal sex as a means of transmission. When legal reform moved the age of consent for gay sexual acts from 19-16 (the age at which legal consent to heterosexual sex could be given), public media profiled the concern, especially from education officials: :

By implementing such a Bill you are indirectly encouraging the youngsters to get it on at an early age. At 16 one cannot really understand the complexities of having a sexual relationship. Then there is the issue of HIV and AIDS. We are struggling to sensitise children to the pandemic. But we have not really succeeded – and now we are faced with something like this (Maphelo Ntshanga, principal of Kayamandi High School, Stellenbosch).

and

It is certainly not upholding the moral standards and value systems that we want to inculcate. We all know that the youth are consenting to sex at an early age. They [lawmakers] are bowing to that pressure by decriminalising it because so many are doing it at an earlier age. I am sure it will involve many problems (Tom Clarke, principal of Parktown Boys High School, Johannesburg) (Davids, 2006).

These messages suggest the South African secondary school system is in state of denial that homosexuality exists within the teaching and learning environment. An example that underscores the prevalence of sexual violence in schools is a report by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) in which the NGO the Community Action Toward a Safe Environment (CASE) reported that violence had become such a part of the children's identities that they played such games called '*Hit me, hit me. Rape me, rape me*' on the school grounds. The report further stated that in most incidents the violence

in schools is perpetrated against girls by both male teachers and learners. In fact, the report stated that 1,227 female students were victims of sexual assault and that 8.6% were assaulted by teachers. Toilets are regarded as the most dangerous spaces in schools. In its submission to the SAHRC the OUT LGBT Wellbeing, an organisation working with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people, reported that a research project they conducted has established that gay and lesbian youth experienced high levels of prejudice and discrimination resulting in exclusion, marginalisation and victimisation (SAHRC, 2008: 1, 7-9). Much of the formal research on violence in the educational environment has been conducted at schools, rather than at universities, but I would argue that the research on violent school cultures suggests linkages between homophobic assaults and cultures in which girls risk hypersexualization and attack.

Despite the fact that lesbian and gay social movements have actively and successfully struggled for the inclusion of the right to sexual orientation in the 1996 South African Constitution and that legal reform around access to child custody, civil union, and housing have created unprecedented civil rights for lesbian and gay people, the hate and discrimination continue. The progressive rights within the legal framework of South Africa do not impact upon school learners, and teachers, or upon staff and students in higher education institutions. South African learning and teaching environments remain some of the most conservative and untransformed spaces in the country, even when several academic studies and publications have concentrated on demystifying sexuality and sexual orientation in South Africa.

Transitioning to university: campus cultures and homosexuality

It is important to make the connection between school learner and the university environment in part because the new university student simply exchanges one highly hetero-sexualised environment for another. Students come to the university with various sexual identities and their movement into a new educational environment offers them an opportunity to experiment more openly with these identities. Years of experience led us, at the Gender Equity Unit at the University of the Western Cape, to believe that the first semester of the university academic year is usually the most challenging time for any first year student. The heteronormative environment is confounding

for the gay or lesbian student. I have noted elsewhere that the campus culture and environment is not particularly prepared or welcoming for the needs of lesbian, gay, and transgendered people (Hames, 2007: 68). During this period they have to transition from school to university and try to “find” themselves, a “finding” process which includes sexuality. While sexual harassment opened up the initial conversation and policy development on sex and sexuality in the higher education environment in the early and mid-1990s, HIV and AIDS overtook that conversation in the current century. The conversation on homosexuality within educational environments has never really been open. Lesbian and gay people insisted that the equality clause should formally include sexual orientation in the Bill of Rights but there has been no pressure on the academic institutions that *all* policies should include a clause pertaining to sexual orientation. It seems that there is an assumption in the academy that policies are inclusive of the needs of same-sex needs. Are university policies in line with the legal changes and have they explicitly written these rights into these policies?

Twelve years ago when the GEU organised its first Open Day for UWC lesbian and gay community only one law lecturer was prepared to share his experiences. During the preparation of the Anti-prejudice Awareness Week in 2006 we approached the then Student Development Department, who asserted “*We know nothing about prejudice reduction*”. And when we asked the Human Resources department to assist with preparations we were informed that there was “no problem with gay people because they are so artistic”. Something in the system was very wrong.

With the maturing of democracy, the increase in lesbian and gay organisations country-wide and on our campuses, and the unlimited possibilities that were provided in the enabling legal framework, the scene was set to ensure that institutional cultures were transformed. The need arose to teach and learn about sex and sexuality in ways that differ fundamentally from what how we were taught. There are ample printed and visual material and research opportunities to support Reddy’s argument for “institutionalising the sexuality discourse within an epistemological dynamic to expose the silences, challenge prohibitions and problematize oppressive constructions” (Reddy, 2001:167). It was clear that this need was one the Gender Equity Unit needed to tackle.

Sex, sexuality and pedagogy

The question that underpins this section is how we can teach sexuality and sexual orientation as matters of political interest without pathologising homosexuality? How do we connect the activism outside with the theoretical inside? How do we raise consciousness about the injustices against Black lesbians in a situation when those who teach are mainly white and when research turns those who are being taught into spectacles? What processes do we follow to maintain dignity and ask the difficult questions about being Black and being homosexual or transgender?

It is important to have a sound knowledge of the intricacies and nuances that prevail in the South African academic environment. Each of the higher education institutions comes with its own apartheid baggage and all universities remain essentially heteronormative. In order to initiate new pedagogies around lesbian and gay experiences on campus, the GEU chose to work with students themselves, outside the formal academic curricula of the campus. This approach has been successful: in 2012, UWC is the only Historically Black University (HBU) that has *two* visible and active lesbian and gay organisations, Loud Enuf and Gayla. Gayla is a fairly new political organisation for cross-dressing, transgender and transsexual students. Loud Enuf has been in existence since 2006 and is one of the GEU's programmes. The majority of the students that belong to either of these organisations are not Women's and Gender Studies students. However, some of the students who became involved in Loud Enuf progress to enrol in the WGS department. Some of the lesbian and gay identified students from the neighbouring Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) find community within these two organisations and they join the GEU's volunteer projects and activities.

Through Loud Enuf the UWC and the CPUT lesbian and gay students become involved in the human rights focus of the GEU and attend meetings and rallies within the community. There is a focus on the building on solidarity. As part of the GEU's programme we raise critical consciousness about sexuality and race through community involvement and discussions. The question of how to do this, with integrity, remains one worth exploring. How do we endeavour to create a suitable and confidential learning environment, inside or outside academic forums, that affirms the studying of sexualities that is not confined to individual(istic) post-graduate research or limited to academic research projects?

Few people in South Africa have written about pedagogy and (homo) sexuality. The following section discusses the approaches of two South African academics, Reddy and Bennett, who argue for pedagogy that problematizes sexuality and sexual orientation⁵.

Reddy has long been interested in a pedagogical approach to lesbian and gay studies in the South African academy. He argues that there is an indelible link between activism and academia and that the latter is not a privileged space that is immune to social change. His knowledge of the history of the lesbian and gay movement in South Africa and his positioning within the academic environment gives him a unique insight into the importance of pedagogies that addresses the visibility of gay and lesbian people. He argues that 'queer studies' should not only be restricted to queer scholars but should be interdisciplinary and widely accessible, although he recognises the hostility and homophobia present in the academy (Reddy, 2001: 181). Reddy is aware of the complexities involved in the teaching of sex and sexualities outside the medical, psychological and anthropological models and he is attuned to the hidden agendas in the heteronormative academic institutions and this is something that I will return to when I discuss the institutional culture and arrangements at UWC.

Heterosexual sex and sexuality are discursively discussed and treated as "normal" within the academy whilst homosexuality is still largely dealt with as abnormal as the examples in this article will show. Studies about homosexuality remain an oddity in the academy and in my own experience, disdainful remarks in academic committee meetings about research on lesbian and gays still abound. Jane Bennett argues that much of the teaching, training and the designing of workshop material on sexuality is done within the NGO sector, rather than the academic one, and she points to the lack of reflexivity on pedagogical practices with regard to sex, sexuality and sexual orientation within the mainstream heteronormative academic environment. She writes that although seminal work is done outside the academy the perception prevails that real "education" happens within. I agree with her when she notes that the important transformative and educational work is mainly done in settings outside the formal learning environment. She argues when it is taught with the necessary understanding, empathy and analysis within the academy it is usually done by feminists or people who have had experience of the NGO environment. Bennett is of the opinion that it is imperative that sex

and sexuality should be taught in the academy and she says that “pedagogies of sexualities must prioritise the destabilisation of heteronormativity, as a precondition of their integrity”. But she, like Reddy, admits that it is easier said than done. (Bennett, 2006: 68, 70-71).

Amina Mama proposes an “activist scholarship” that focuses on the development of a curriculum that is globally informed and locally grounded and that recognises and includes the diverse struggles of women (and gender?) in the region (Mama, 2011: 77). The overall consensus (Reddy, Bennett, Mama) is that the artificial divide or binary between praxis/activism and theory/intellectual should be undone. This is a recurrent discussion by various writers concerned with the pedagogy of sex and sexuality.

There are numerous examples of how activism pertaining to sexual rights and consciousness raising both inside and outside the academy has contributed to the development of training material within the higher education environment. An excellent example is the “*Southern African higher educational institutions challenging sexual violence/sexual harassment: a handbook of resources*” which is one of the very first practical pedagogical examples how to teach and train about sexuality and sexual violence within the southern African institutions (Bennett, 2002). This is also an example of how Mama’s notion of the locally grounded has developed into “activist scholarship” and how through these concerted efforts people across the academic divide could conceptualise a common pedagogy to teach about sexuality and sexual rights. This handbook, however, is explicitly devoted to teaching about sexual harassment and while this may be important, pedagogies of sexuality should also address desire, pleasure and nonconformity.

Pedagogical challenges

Confronting the medical gaze

The sex and sexuality debate remains a difficult one as Bennett and Reddy show in their research on the teaching of gender, sexuality and sexual orientation across South African campuses of higher education. They were curious about the connection between the constitutional inclusion of “gender equality” and the pedagogical practices in the different academic departments and faculties. Bennett and Reddy were particularly concerned how the “representation of the ‘body’ is being taught to young doctors, anthropologists, lawyers, cultural critics, and economists” (Bennett and Reddy, 2007:48).

New ways of combining teaching and activism are, in fact, discovered and applied where it is sometimes least expected as Lynette Denny and Nomonde Mbatani show through their work when they intertwine medical care and compassion for women rape survivors. They point to a very important aspect that is particularly relevant for this article namely that the gendered nature of rape needs to be addressed differently by medical practitioners and that male rape survivors are not the responsibility of gynaecologists. Denny and Mbatani suggest that while “gynaecology is the specialisation on the female reproduction system”, knowledge of gynaecology is simultaneously knowledge of the way political and cultural meanings about women’s bodies come into the medical arena (Dosekun, 2007:114).

Pedagogic distance

At the GEU we asked: “How do we teach young women and men about their (homo)sexuality?”. Not many university teachers are formally educated in pedagogies of teaching and learning, let alone teaching and learning about sexuality. The fact is that many of UWC’s students are first generation university students and that a large percentage are daily commuting to campus from townships, outlying towns and peri-urban areas and *carry* their own daily experiences about sexism, sexuality, racism, ethnicity, nationality, violence, xenophobia, (dis)ability and homophobia *in* their *bodies* to the classroom and campus. So does the lecturer.

Feminist pedagogues teaching sexuality should be alert to what sexualities may enter the classrooms in those bodies.

I concur with Bennett when she writes that “very few of us have learned about sexuality from academic-controlled pedagogic spaces”. She points to the fact that the “admission to these spaces is constrained by rigid, and competitive discourses on the ‘intellect,’ ‘academic merit,’ and where long colonisation of academic space by the elite (in South Africa, white, wealthy men)” (Bennett, 2006:76). Her observation contributes to my analysis of the “pedagogic distance” as UWC is an institution that was historically designed for a specific race group and continues to be loaded with political innuendos about race, gender and sexuality.

Pedagogic distance is not only present between lecturer and student but between student and student. Anecdotes by students show how they had to negotiate situations in the classroom and how vulnerable they often feel when

the issue of homosexuality comes up. There is much subjective evidence on how homophobia slips out during both staff and student conversations and interviews. While there is some kind of sensitivity with regard to race there remains intense hostility towards those who are perceived as homosexual.

Institutional culture

Institutional culture is best understood by those who experience it. There are the unspoken ways, symbols, the various spoken, written and electronic evidence that makes up the prevailing culture. In this respect I find Dorothy Smith's notion of institutional ethnography useful – her view is deeply embedded in feminist standpoint theory. According to Smith “institutional ethnography is located in people's experience in the local sites of their bodily being and seeks to discover what can't be grasped from within that experience, namely the social relations that are implicit in an organization” (Smith, 2001:161). Smith's view is that the day-to-day experiences, social interactions and communication say a great deal about the institutional atmosphere and culture.

Jonathan Jansen writes about “institutional perspective” and he says it is much more than just the accumulation of modules and credit hours but it is also about the concealed knowledge within the institution. It is learning about both the penalties and strictures for moving outside the institutionally legitimated knowledge and about the advantages of “slotting in” to the dominant knowledge forms (Jansen, 2009: 173). Lesbian and gay lives and studies are the opposite of “slotting in” or “assimilating”; they disrupt the existing norms.

Although higher education and research institutions may sometimes teach about and conduct research on sex, sexuality and sexual orientation, very little is “formally” done to improve the social life of homosexual people or the inclusion of homosexual orientation in- and outside the classroom context. In many instances there is a disjuncture between what is taught inside the classroom and the lived experiences of the students outside those walls.

When Yvette Abrahams conducted a survey on the lives and experiences of lesbian and bisexual women at UWC in the 90's, she could not find students to share their experiences and ended up speaking to alumni (Abrahams, n.d.:10). This was an indication of the hostile institutional environment that existed thirteen years ago. Women were too scared to identify as lesbian or bisexual

and preferred to complete their studies and once they have “made it” in their respective professional lives they were much more comfortable to speak about their experiences. The survey by Abrahams led to the development of an annual awareness campus campaign by the GEU against anti-homophobia and anti-homophobia. It started in 2006 and is usually one week long. The campaign and critical consciousness raising have been so successful that a formal programme Loud Enuf was established which is now headed by student representatives, networks were developed with various organisations (lesbian and gay supportive faith-based organisations, the Triangle Project, and Kaleidoscope, the inter-university student organisation for LGTBQIA students) and it has become the contact for all lesbian and gay activities on campus, it conducts workshops on sexuality with other organisations and institutions on campus and it lobbied the HIV and AIDS programme to be more inclusive of the needs of the lesbian and gay student population.

Although Loud Enuf and the GEU have crossed important divides in the institution it does not mean that the university is now free from prejudice and that it has become a “home for all”⁶.

Institutional “home”

“‘Home’ is a four-letter word” (Holland, 2005: ix)

Women’s Studies has traditionally been the institutional home for the teaching of sexualities. However, as Reddy has noted, it makes sense to have lesbian and gay (or queer) studies across disciplines and I would argue that the law, political science, government studies as well as the faculties of medical and health sciences amongst others should have curricula which teach beyond the traditional frameworks about sex, sexism and sexualities. While WGS is the institutional home for the formal theory at UWC, the GEU has become the physical, activist and grounded theoretical home for lesbian, gay, and transgender students to think through the politics of gender, race, and sexuality. As a “non-teaching” department we have become the activist home for the critical thinker and we have designed programmes for all the marginalised politicised concerns (homosexuality, violence against women, disability, and poverty), housed at the GEU. We firmly believe that the GEU is the safest space on campus.

As feminist staff we are aware that “home” is often the most dangerous and dysfunctional place. Our GEU version of “home” is both a cerebral and a

physical space where body and intellect meet. In 2010 we conducted a survey amongst lesbian and gay students to ascertain whether they felt that the university is a safe space and whether they regarded it as “home”. The survey questionnaire was titled ‘UWC LGBTQ Climate Survey’ and was a collaborative project between the GEU and WGS. The purpose was to gather the experiences and perceptions of LGBTQ students at UWC in order to develop “safe spaces on campus free from prejudice and discrimination”. The analysis of the questionnaires gave us a sense of what students who identified as lesbian and gay thought of UWC. Our sense was that there is an “imagined home” for the students and this home was located within their respective lesbian and gay friendship circle. In this small circle they could be who they are and not fear the backlash from the rest of the campus community. The research made us aware that there are certain safe spaces on campus where lesbian and gay students gather in numbers, and they “own” those spaces where they knew each other and knew that the students who frequent those spaces are lesbian or gay. Creating their own spaces allowed them to combat isolation but they were also very vocal about the fact that the university authorities should create official “safe spaces” for them. There was also the fear amongst some of being isolated and for them a safe space did not necessarily mean a “loving environment” but “a place where I would feel protected” from the heteronormative gaze and hate. For this group “safe space” translated into “a place where I could hide”.

Why is the notion of home of such importance to us? For the students there is such a strong desire for belonging that they yearn to embrace the university slogan “home away from home’ although this was never meant to include homosexual people. We often hear students say with relief when they enter our offices (our offices are incidentally located in a *house* on campus) and hear about our work and programmes: “We feel at home”. The GEU provides space where they can imagine their institutional home and construct it themselves. Home is not always a physical construction but can be an intellectual or spiritual place.

Spiritual home

Religion plays a big part in the lives of many students. This can cause much agony in the process of accepting the self. At the end of formal classes and over weekends the campus comes alive with all kinds of Christian faith and

religious-based activities. Soon after Loud ENUF was established one of the Muslim gay students resigned from the programme as he was afraid that his fellow Muslim community would ostracize him. One of the biggest struggles for students is to reconcile their religious upbringing with their sexuality.

There are numerous Christian student organisations on campus and many charismatic organisations preach the link between “sexual sin” and fire and brimstone, calling homosexuality an abomination. His People⁷, one of the biggest and most influential charismatic organisations, started as a student religious organisation but have grown and have massive impact on the homophobic messages of its followers. This organisation has a weekly Sunday church service in one of the biggest lecture rooms on campus. On 4 August 2006 in anticipation of the changes to the Marriage Act the Department of Religion and Theology in partnership with the GEU, WGS and the Triangle Project hosted a conference, “Revisiting Intimacy: The Challenge of Homosexual Relationships to Church and Society”. The main purpose was to unlock vigorous debate amongst church and society on aspects of inclusiveness, respect for difference, and tolerance (Hames, 2007: 65). One Dutch Reformed Church minister stormed out of the conference because he could not “accept” homosexuality as part of the church.

On the 9 of August 2006, National Women’s Day, a group of students affiliated to one of the Christian student organisations marched on campus holding placards that read amongst others “Homosexuality is a sin”. The irony was not lost because that year we commemorated the 50th anniversary of the March of Women to Pretoria. For the lesbian and gay students this was a threat to their safety, security and freedom to exercise their sexual choice and rights on campus. One lesbian student took photos of the march and brought the evidence to the GEU. Did this action constitute hate speech? Legal opinion informed us that that action could not be interpreted as hate speech as the right to religious freedom is extremely broad and very difficult to litigate against. We had to resort to an even more vigorous campaign with the assistance of the supportive religious student organisations such as Anglican Student Society. Fortunately the Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu was the Chancellor of UWC and we used his message of support.

So where and how would students find their “spiritual home” on campus? During our annual awareness weeks against homophobia we have a standing agreement with the lesbian and gay inclusive churches to conduct an

interfaith service on campus. We have found that most mainstream churches have a very welcome and inclusive message and that all churches have known lesbian and gay members as part of their congregations.

The GEU and Loud Enuf have close relationships with three faith-based organisations the Good Hope Metropolitan Community Church (GHMCC), the Inclusive and Affirmative Ministries (IAM) and Inner Circle which is an organisation that service the needs of mainly Muslim LGTB people. These organisations offered their assistance to give spiritual guidance in case students need to overcome their internalised fears of spiritual or religious rejection.

Coming out (of the closet?)

Since 2005 there has been a change of atmosphere on campus and students are championing their right to be sexually active and to love, learn and live on campus without fear⁸. The confidence in students in their own sexuality has grown and especially when they know their professors are “just like them”. Students are coming out in the classroom and even come to campus in drag.

The 2012 Pride March in Somerset Green Point is the third Pride event that the Loud Enuf students attended and this year they had their own banners, painted their own T-shirts and placards and gyrated with the music as the Beef Cake float passed them by. The sounds of Lady Gaga’s lyrics ‘*Born This Way*’ bouncing off the hot tar:

Don't hide yourself in regret
Just love yourself and you're set
I'm on the right track, baby
I was born this way.

No matter gay, straight or bi
Lesbian transgendered life
I'm on the right track, baby
I was born to survive

Don't be a drag, just be a queen, don't be a drag, just be a queen.

Lady Gaga’s song ‘Born this Way’ must have been the lesbian and gay anthem for 2011 and especially for the members of Loud Enuf and Gayla at UWC. Thanks to the activist pedagogy of the GEU, and of the lesbian, gay and transgendered students themselves, there has been a remarkable shift in the confidence of lesbian and gay students on campus. In 2010 some gender questioning students would sit in the student centre dressed in dresses and

during 2011 certain gender questioning students would attend their classes in dresses. One lecturer in WGS reported that during the student presentations in her Sex and sexuality class one of the students was brave enough to come by taxi in drag. In conversation with the students they reported that they were extremely comfortable with themselves.

And while this may be part of the gender performance, it proved that students are claiming important social and geographical spaces on campus. Part of the annual awareness week in 2010 was devoted to a Drag Show in the Student Centre. It was well attended and the show was twice repeated in 2011 once during lunch time in open air. These performances are mainly organised by the gay students; lesbian students have yet to organise such a public event for themselves.

Despite this, campus discourses continue to generate homophobic speech and attacks. *"I have nothing against gays but they should not touch me. They should not enter my space."* (Student during an awareness raising workshop, GEU:2011). During the period of writing this article, certain public homophobic incidents occurred at both our neighbouring campus as well as on our own campus⁹. This has reinforced the resolution to continue with the debates and awareness raising with regard to the understanding of sexuality and sexual orientation to interrogate the issue of "inclusive citizenship" for lesbian and gay people on campus. Most recently it was reported that some of the members of Gayla were brutally attacked by fellow students so we have to be ever vigilant for the backlash and consistent prejudice and hatred. The time for awareness-raising and education is not over. The positive aspect of this experience is that the students publicly stood up for their rights, something that was only dreamt of before we institutionalised the awareness campaigns. We are reminded that "any praxis, and pedagogy, is by definition, selective" and it is our choice to continue advocating for the inclusion of sexual orientation in and outside the formal curricula (Price-Spratten, 2001:63).

UWC is far from the city centre with its lesbian and gay friendly shops, LGTBI NGO's, inclusive churches, bars, bookshops and clubs and other social networks. It was therefore critical to develop a programme that is not part of the formal academic programme because not all the university staff teaches in the Women's and Gender Studies Programme on lesbian and gay studies, or in the Languages Department on lesbian and gay representation in literature or even in the often problematic departments of Psychology, Sociology and Anthropology.

I started to bring my own personal books, TV series and popular films and documentaries to work. In order to make the books more accessible to lesbian and gay identified students we kept a record when they borrowed a copy. I tried as far as possible to purchase popular lesbian and gay novels where the main protagonist(s) is Black. For instance the students were introduced to mainly American authors such as Octavia Butler, E. Lynn Harris, Ricc Rollins, Shonia L. Brown, Jewel Gomez, Laurinda D. Brown and Sidi, amongst others. There is still a dearth of local black lesbian and gay novelists in South Africa. As part of the offerings is one of the first feature films made by a black lesbian, Cheryl Dunye, and titled 'The Watermelon Woman'. All of these films are popular with the lesbian and gay students and have become important teaching material.

In conclusion, the teaching and learning environment of South African universities is full of theoretical paradoxes. The classroom is a powerfully, privileged, cerebral space which has the potential to silence many in the name of "access" and "opportunity." Within a voluntary learning space which allows for personal development and political awareness actual education may be generated, collectively. It is within the GEU space, I argue, that realistic options for activist and feminist pedagogy have been allowed to thrive, and that given this opportunity, marginalized students – especially those marginalized through the politics of gender and sexuality – have created their own university, their "home".

Endnotes

- 1 An example is the publication edited by Nonhlanhla Mkhize, Jane Bennett, Vasu Reddy and Relebohile Moletsane: *The country we want to live in: hate crimes and homophobia in the lives of black lesbian South Africans*. Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2010 is based on a round-table discussion hosted by the Human Sciences Research Council in 2006.
- 2 See Neville Hoad. *African intimacies: race, homosexuality, and globalization*. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007 and the conference proceedings edited by Vasu Reddy, Theo Sandfort and Laetitia Rispel. *From social silence to social science: same-sex sexuality, HIV & AIDS and gender in South Africa*. Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2009.
- 3 For instance Ruth Morgan and Saskia Wieringa's edited publication *Tommy boys, lesbian men and ancestral wives: female same-sex practices in Africa*. Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2006.

- 4 Organisations such as the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW) concentrated on the rights of Black lesbians and the Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL) organised lesbians across the African continent.
- 5 I have selected them for various reasons – they are some of the few who have not only come out as gay and lesbian in the academy (Reddy as a gay person of colour and Bennett as a white lesbian) but have long (her/his)stories of involvement both in the academy and in the lesbian and gay movement.
- 6 During a campaign by the HIV and AIDS unit in 2011 the GEU and Loud Enuf distributed the booklet “The young gay guys guide to safer gay sex” as part of the information package. We received an e-mail from a woman staff member complaining about “the pornographic filth” with which that the GEU is contaminating the campus.
- 7 His People has a very large student following on campus and its organisational leaders are often in the media expressing their homophobic opinions.
- 8 In 2011 two of the Loud Enuf members were sitting under a tree close to the GEU in a loving embrace. When the campus security started to harass them they refused to be intimidated and came to the GEU with the security in tow. The matter was amicably resolved when we pointed out how we interpreted the security behaviour as homophobic and made it clear that we are going to take action against them.
- 9 In 2010 the University of Stellenbosch hosted their annual event ‘Die Soen in die Laan’ (Kiss in the Avenue) where it is accepted that heterosexual students kiss each other in public as part of a publicity stunt. Two gay students decided to kiss each other and were photographed and the photo was published in ‘Die Matie’, the student newspaper, an uproar followed and the event was subsequently cancelled in 2011. In October of 2010 during the Pink Week at the University of Cape Town the Pink Closet built by students was burnt down during the night. In both instances the responses by the university authorities were mild.

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Lyrics

Diana Ross. *I'm coming out*

Lady Gaga. *Born this way*