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Men and talk about legal abortion in South Africa: equality, support and rights discourses undermining reproductive 'choice'

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Abstract

Discursive constructions of abortion are embedded in the social and gendered power relations of a particular socio-historical space. As part of research on public discourses concerning abortion in South Africa where there has been a radical liberalisation of abortion legislation, we collected data from male group discussions about a vignette concerning abortion, and newspaper articles written by men about abortion. Our analysis revealed how discourses of equality, support and rights may be used by men to subtly undermine women's reproductive right to 'choose' an abortion. Within an Equal Partnership discourse, abortion, paired with the assumption of foetal personhood, was equated with violating an equal heterosexual partnership and a man's patriarchal duty to protect a child. A New Man discourse, which positions men as supportive of women, was paired with the assumption of men as rational and women as irrational in decision-making, to allow for the possibility of men dissuading women from terminating a pregnancy. A Rights discourse was invoked to suggest that abortion violates men's paternal rights.

Key words: abortion; men; reproductive rights; gender; South Africa

Introduction

Abortion is simultaneously an intensely private matter and an overtly public issue. As such, it is both as a political question and as a practice, intricately interlaced with social and gendered power relations. How abortion is discursively constructed within a particular socio-historical moment is embedded in the attendant constructions of gender, reproduction, the role of women, the sanctity of life, and the role of the state in private matters (Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, and Ruchts 2002).

Researchers have increasingly been paying attention to the discourses deployed regarding abortion as well as the socio-historical circumstances within which particular discourses emerge. Examples include Suk's (2010) analysis of the emergence of trauma discourse in relation to abortion in the USA, Hopkins, Zeedyk and Raitt's (2005) exploration of emotion discourse in relation to foetal imagery in anti-abortion campaigns in the UK, Rance's (2005) exposition of the deployment of technical, normative and pragmatic discourses by doctors in a Bolivian hospital, and Reich's (2008) discussion of a 'masculinist' discourse of abortion used by US men whose partners had an abortion.

In this paper, we present some of the results from a study on men's constructions of abortion in South Africa. South Africa represents a particularly interesting case study in terms of gender politics and abortion. In 1996, the country went from having restrictive abortion legislation to passing liberal laws pertaining to abortion. In our analysis of the data we were struck by how discourses of equality, support and rights were used to counter the possibility that a woman may choose to terminate her pregnancy. It is on this trend that we report in this article.

Abortion legislation and changing gender relations in South Africa

The Abortion and Sterilization Act, passed during the height of Apartheid in 1975, severely curbed access to abortion. An abortion was legal under restrictive conditions and the procedures required for obtaining a legal termination of pregnancy were onerous. This resulted in very few women accessing an abortion legally, with most of these being 'white' and from urban, well-resourced areas (Cope 1993). There were high rates of mortality and morbidity from incomplete abortion as, mostly black, women sought alternative means to terminate a pregnancy (Rees et al. 1997).

Within the conducive political environment ushered in by democracy in 1994, women's groups and reproductive health and rights activists mobilised for a change of legislation. Arguments for the liberalisation of legislation varied, including emphasis on women's reproductive rights, public health arguments concerning the burden of care with respect to maternal mortality and morbidity resulting from incomplete abortion, population control, and the rights of doctors to decide when an abortion should be performed (Klugman and Varkey 2001).

The Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act was passed in 1996. This Act allows women to safely and legally terminate a pregnancy and for the state to provide this service. A woman of any age may terminate a pregnancy in the first trimester without having to consult with her partner or parent. Thereafter, a termination of pregnancy may be performed under certain conditions, including if continued pregnancy will significantly affect the woman's social or economic circumstances. The legalisation of abortion has resulted in a lower incidence of unsafe abortions (Berer 2004), as well as lower rates of maternal morbidity and mortality as a result of unsafe abortion (Jewkes et al. 2002).

After the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act was passed, three legal challenges were mounted by anti-choice activists: the first, in 1998, to the Act in its entirety, the second, in 2004, to the clause that allows minors to seek a termination of pregnancy without parental

consent, and the third, in 2006, to the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Amendment Act that sought to extend services. In the first two of these challenges, the court found in favour of the state and upheld both the Act and its clause concerning minors; in the third the government was forced to engage in a more rigorous process of public participation before the promulgation of the amendment.

The transition to democracy in South Africa has led to a slew of new legislation (in addition to the CTOP Act) and an ascendancy of human rights talk (much of which has centred around gender, sexuality, sexual orientation and, importantly in this context, reproduction). This has fundamentally altered gendered power relations, and resulted in a perceived 'crisis in masculinities' in some circles (Walker, 2005a, 2005b, Posel, 2005). While men's relative domination in the state, the economy and private matters has not been dismantled, the emphasis on women's rights to citizenship, their legal entitlements and an emphasis on the gender in relation to human rights has resulted in the opening up of tensions in gender relations (Morrell, 2001, Sideris, 2004). Social transformation has led to a questioning of fundamental understandings of what it means to be a man or a woman. As Walker (2005a) argues

In contemporary South Africa traditional versions and expressions of masculinities and male sexuality have been disturbed and destabilised. Figures of manhood and masculine identity represented in the 1996 Constitution and Bill of Rights derive from, but also break with, the past. (p. 161).

Researchers (Walker, 2005a, Walker, 2005b, Sideris, 2004, Morrell, 2001) have documented the struggles men have engaged in terms of self-identity and behaviour as a result of the changes.

Men and Abortion

Research concerning men and abortion focuses, for the most part, on such matters as male decision-making with regard to abortion (e.g. Holmberg and Wahlberg 2000), men's assignment of responsibility for the unwanted pregnancy (e.g. Reich and Brindis 2006), men's desires regarding services in abortion clinics (Shostak 2008) and men's emotional response to abortion (e.g. Coyle 2007; Holmes 2004; Kero and Lalos 2004; Robson 2002). The latter issue has received the most attention.

Much of the data for research on men and abortion have been collected through interviews with males in abortion clinic waiting rooms (Reich and Brindis 2006). Studies thus are frequently representative of a man engaged in a certain type of relationship (either as the sexual partner of the woman or, in a minority of cases as a supportive male relation of friend (Reich and Brindis 2006)). Research that studies men who are not directly affected by an abortion (either through being a partner or through providing support to a woman) focuses chiefly on their attitudes towards abortion. In this kind of research, gender differences in abortion attitudes are usually one of a number of variables studied such as religiosity, race, age, and support for gender equality (e.g. Strickler and Danigelis 2002).

Some South African research has foregrounded gender as a variable. Patel and Johns' (2009) and Patel and Kooverjee's (2009) research with university students found that there were no gender differences in terms of attitudes to the moral acceptability of abortion and abortion being legally available. However, significantly more men than women felt that the male partner should be informed of the pregnancy, should have a say in the abortion decision, and should have the right to prevent the woman from having an abortion. In addition, more males viewed abortion as a sin, and regarded the foetus as a human being.

While this kind of research provides knowledge of trends in terms of men's general attitudes to abortion, qualitative research is required to capture the nuances, contradictions and gender power relations implicit in such a complex issue as abortion. This kind of nuance

is seen in two studies, conducted in the diverse settings of Sweden and Kenya. Ekstrand et al. (2007) report on focus group discussions with Swedish teenage men, in which some firm statements concerning a woman's unrestricted right to decide on abortion were counterbalanced by sentiments in which frustration was expressed by men not having any legal right to influence the decision. Izugbara, Otsola and Ezeh (2009) juxtapose the narratives of 'ordinary' Kenyan women and men regarding abortion. While the women depicted abortion as something that shielded them from the shame of mistimed entry into motherhood and the negative socioeconomic consequences of mistimed childbearing, the men condemned abortion, describing it as women's strategy to conceal their deviation from culturally acceptable gender and motherhood standards.

Methodology

The aim of this research was to explore how South African men talk/write about abortion. Specific research questions were: What discourses do men draw on when talking/writing about abortion? How do these discourses construct abortion? How do these discourses serve to reproduce, or alternatively undermine, gendered power relations?

In framing our research questions and analysing our data, we utilised a Foucauldian feminist approach, which allows for an understanding of the interweaving of discursive formations and power relations. Foucault (1977, 1978) countered the juridico-discursive model of power, which sees power as: possessed by an individual, class or group; centralised in the law, economy or the state; coercive and negative. He argued that, rather than repressing some metaphysical essential reality, the proliferation of discourse about a range of topics (for example sexuality about which he spoke at length) produces reality. Foucault emphasised that discourse links knowledge and power, and as such, power is not merely

repressive, but actually productive of knowledge and subjectivity. Discourse has a dual character in that it is the mode through which the world of 'reality' emerges, but at the same time it restricts what can be known, said or experienced at any socio-historical moment. It is this duality that links knowledge to power.

Two sources of data were accessed: newspaper articles written by men on the topic of abortion, and focus group interviews conducted with young men. The analysis of two different sources of data – news media, which represents an open and formal public forum, and focus group discussions, in which views are expressed in a more closed and informal public space – served as a method of data triangulation. We sought, through this, to analyse the cross-cutting discourses deployed by men in at least these two spaces. We do not claim that the discourses explicated here are dominant or that they represent the discourses that will be deployed across a range of men. Men writing news articles have access to a certain level of resources, and the men interviewed in the focus group discussions were university students or employed. Thus, working or middle class status can be assumed.

Newspaper articles were located from the SABINET Database, SA Media. All articles on abortion in the period 2004 to 2011 were scanned for those written by men. Articles were defined as news articles, columns, and letters to editors. They were selected based on the name of the author indicating a male writer, or when a particular term identified the writer as male, such as 'father', 'brother', 'husband', or 'boyfriend'. Where we were unsure concerning the gender of a name, or where other markers such as those referred to above were absent, we consulted specialists in our Linguistics Department, or searched the web for other instances of the name. Only those articles where we were sure that the writer was male were included. Any other biographical details of writers such as 'race' or age could not be definitively determined and so are not reported on here. Of the articles surveyed, 74 were deemed suitable.

Four focus groups, with 4-6 men each, were conducted by the second author: two with men living in East London, a city in the Eastern Cape, and two with students from Rhodes University, a university located in a small town in the Eastern Cape (20 men in total). Focus group discussions, which offer a distinctive method of collecting data, were considered appropriate given that the main focus of the project was on public discourses. In the words of Tonkiss (2004), "Focus groups ... are not simply a means of interviewing several people at the same time; rather they are concerned to explore the formation and negotiation of accounts within a group context, how people define, discuss and contest issues through social interaction" (p.194). Participants were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling. The second author approached men of his acquaintance both at university and in his home town (East London), and asked whether they or others of their acquaintance would be willing to participate in the focus group discussions. The only inclusion criterion was willingness to participate in a focus group discussion about abortion. All participants were between the ages of 18 and 25. The two groups from East London were comprised of 'white' men (G1; G2); one student group comprised of an equal number of 'white' and 'Black' students (G3) and one of 'Black' students (G4). The discussions in East London were conducted in the homes of two of the participants, and those with Rhodes students were conducted on campus. To start the discussion, a vignette was presented (see Appendix 1). The discussions were tape recorded for later transcription.

The research was given ethical clearance by the Rhodes University Psychology Department's Research Projects and Ethics Review Committee. Participants in the focus group discussions provided informed consent and were told that they could withdraw if they were uncomfortable. Group confidentiality was established at the outset. To ensure anonymity, the transcriptions of the interviews were numbered, G1 – G4, and participants in

each group were assigned pseudonyms. The second author (Jateen) facilitated the discussions.

The data were analysed using discourse analysis. We use the term discourse in its Foucauldian sense to describe a set of related statements that construct and produce a particular reading of reality, and which make specific subject positions available within that reality. The analysis consisted of (1) reading and re-reading the texts, (2) chunking the material according to themes, (3) utilising Parker's (1992) seven criteria for identifying discourses, and (4) infusing the analysis with Parker's (1992) three additional criteria which speak directly to power relations.

In the following we outline the equality, support and rights discourses deployed in the discussions and articles. These discourses were deployed in all of the focus group discussions (although in G4 discussion centred more foetal personhood) and in 37 of the 74 articles analysed. In these 37 articles, rights featured most strongly, with the classic foetal versus woman's rights being dominant. Other major themes deployed in the newspaper articles included foetal personhood, abortion as a disruption of the family, and fatherhood. We show in the following how each of the equality, support and rights discourses may, at times subtly and at other times not so subtly, be used to simultaneously mask and bolster patriarchal power relations that undermine reproductive 'choice'.

Equal Partnership discourse

The heterosexual relationship that leads to conception and the creation of a heterosexual family was spoken of by participants as being an equal partnership – something in which both parties have an equal share of responsibility. Such an equal partnership is spoken of in positive terms.

Extract 1

John: If two people come together, have a most intimate act and create a life, that's positive. That's cool. We can't actually understand it until we face it. When you're young, you don't really think about it, 'I'm actually going to be a father'. (G1)

Extract 2

Thabo: I mean you can't deny the guy has a part. It's fifty-fifty. (G3)

Extract 3

Senzo: If they have had sex, they are at that stage where they can work out things together. (G4)

In Extract 1, John mentions that 'two people' are required to 'create a life'; in Extract 2, Thabo states that the 'guy has a part' and that 'it's fifty-fifty' in reference to conception; in Extract 3 Senzo emphasises the 'togetherness' of working things out. The discourse of Equal Partnership thus draws attention to the fact that heterosexual intercourse requires emotional labour, may lead to conception, and potentially to the heterosexual family ('I am going to be a father'), and as such is something in which two people engage. Equal responsibility for conception and emotional labour is assigned to the partners, and there is no acknowledgement that heterosexual relationships are often inherently unequal.

This discourse is similar to the discourse of Egalitarian Gender Relations found by Lazar (2000) in her analysis of a Singaporean national advertising campaign concerning parenthood, in which there was an expectation of symmetry in gender relations and roles. Lazar (2000) argues that, despite its promise to undermine conservative gender relations, this discourse may in fact buttress such relations, as seen below in how the Equal Partnership discourse was used to oppose the possibility of a woman opting to terminate a pregnancy.

The Equal Partnership discourse was used to bolster a narrative of abortion needing to be a joint decision between the two people responsible for the conception.

Extract 4

Jateen: What if she makes the decision to abort by herself?
Peter: Wow. It's a bit of a cop out.
John: Sometimes you may start questioning relationships. Is she willing to do this without consulting someone else? Without her partner? Without you? That's quite shocking. (G1)

Extract 5

Dave: This is a bit extreme. I think if someone wants to have an abortion, she should tell someone. I mean her partner should know. You were a part of it. It couldn't happen without you. But now it's like you are not equal. (G2)

In these extracts, participants express shock at the possibility of a woman deciding to have a termination of pregnancy without her partner participating in the decision. The perceived equal partnership in conception equates, according to these men, to equal decision-making in relation to abortion. When the woman makes the decision without consulting her partner, this calls into question the equality of the relationship ('it's like you are not equal').

Of relevance is that this discourse was drawn on only when abortion was mentioned in the vignette (after Question 3 – see Appendix). Despite knowing that the research was about abortion, not one focus group brought up 'abortion' until it was mentioned in the vignette. When the researcher indicated that the woman in the vignette had decided to have an abortion, participants switched from talking about how the couple should mobilise for the arrival of the child to talk of how the equal partnership had been violated.

While the argument that women should consult a sexual partner regarding the outcome of a pregnancy may seem reasonable, we see in the following extract how an 'equal parts' relationship is depicted as implying a decision against abortion.

Extract 6

- Charles: It is kind of strange that she would make that decision without him.
- Jateen: Why would you say that it's strange?
- Charles: A relationship is meant to be equal parts. What is it about their relationship that isn't right? What don't we know? I mean the story doesn't really tell you that. I mean if everything was okay, would they even think about abortion? (G3)

In Extract 6, Charles indicates that a woman's decision to have an abortion is a clear indication that something is wrong in the relationship. The 'equal parts' ideal has been shattered. The implication here is that were the equal parts working well, there would be no decision to have an abortion. The only criterion for continuing with a pregnancy, in this scenario, is an equal relationship.

The narrative of abortion needing to be a joint decision provides space for the insertion of a patriarchal voice regarding the outcome of a pregnancy in relation to the duties of the father to the child, which is most clearly evidenced in the extract below.

Extract 7

- Dave: If I wanted the child and she aborted it, I would say you killed my child. I couldn't be with her. I mean you are meant to be an equal partner so you have an equal say. But unfortunately you can't force the woman. So it's not equal. And the weight of the child is going to be there. I wouldn't want to be in a relationship like that.

In Extract 7, Dave seems unaware of the irony of equating not being able to force a woman to forego an abortion with lack of equality. We see in this extract how the notion of 'equality' is invoked to mean that when there is a difference of opinion, the man's opinion will take precedence. If it does not, then 'it's not equal'.

The difference of opinion centres, in this extract, around the status of the 'child' and the assumption of foetal personhood, which positions the sexual partner as 'father' and places a spotlight on the woman's responsibility in providing incubation for future progeny (Ruhl 2002). Dave depicts a man acting in the role of the father – it is his duty to take care of the

child, which in this case means protecting him/her from the woman's decision to terminate the pregnancy. The woman, by making the decision to abort, violates the equal partnership, which in effect means violating her partner's patriarchal duties.

The Equal Partnership discourse emerged mostly in the focus group discussions, probably because the vignette was set up to facilitate talk about a couple. A discourse of equality emerged in the newspaper articles although in the form of the general reproductive relationship between men and women.

Extract 8

If we, men, believe that abortion is wrong, we should argue against it. Men have an equal right in the enterprise as women. (Glover, S. 2004. "New photographs are 'clear proof that abortion is wrong'." *Star*, 30 June)

In this extract the equality discourse does labour beyond undermining the individual woman's decision-making in relation to abortion. The author argues that on the basis of an equal share in the reproductive relationship, men should be able to take an anti-abortion stance (the only feasible one, according to the author, who also argues that abortion is equivalent to killing).

Overall, the sentiments expressed by the men in this section are in line the attitudes of male university students in Patel and Johns's (2009) and Patel and Koveerjee's (2009) studies. As indicated above, the men in these studies felt that a male partner should be informed of a pregnancy and should have the right to prevent the woman from having an abortion.

Support and the 'New Man' discourse

In the following extracts, participants and a columnist speak to the support, respect and responsibility that men should and do show to their partners and their families.

Extract 9

It is a commonly held view that the majority of single-parent men are irresponsible fathers. [...] This may be true of an older generation of men. I've argued in a previous article that it's my belief that a new generation of South African men are taking firm steps to be responsible partners, and in fact want to have children and be loving and committed fathers. (Lockhat, R. 2007. "Abortion – who says men don't care?", *The Saturday Star*, 10 November)

Extract 10

Ted: From my perspective it means supporting what your partner ultimately wants. But being a partnership you have to discuss it, but you kind of just have to respect her. (G1)

In Extract 9, the writer refers to a new generation of South African men who are 'responsible partners, and in fact want to have children and be loving and committed fathers'. This relates to what is referred to in the literature as the New Man discourse. In this, the new man is constructed as "sensitive, emotionally aware, respectful of women and egalitarian in outlook" (Gill 2003, 37). This new man is attentive to his partner and to his children, and emerged, in large part, as a response to second wave feminism, which characterised men as emotionally detached with regard to their partners and children (Singleton and Maher 2004). The new man has been spoken of positively in the literature on masculinities in South Africa (e.g. Morrell 2001). Elements of what the new man is supposed to do are invoked in Extracts 9 and 10, where participants refer to supporting a partner's decision, and being respectful.

Over 20 years ago, Chapman (1988) argued that constructions of masculinity such as the New Man discourse are patriarchal in nature, implying only a superficial change so as to give the impression of a positive transformation in light of feminist critique. Below we see how the New Man discourse was combined with notions of masculine rationality to allow for depictions of supportive men rationally persuading their partners to not go through with an

abortion. A construction of lack of rationality on the part of the pregnant woman, which is counterbalanced by the rationality of the male partner, is evidenced in the extracts below.

Extract 11

- Jateen: Earlier we spoke about supporting your partner. Do you think in this case it would be a good idea?
- John: You can support her. But only to an extent. Not if she's doing something that's wrong. I mean I can help her through it but I'm not going to be a part of it. Especially if I tried to talk her out of it, tell her this is wrong. But in the end it is her decision.

Extract 12

- Jateen: Y asks X to go with her to the termination of pregnancy clinic. Do you think that he should go?
- Jacob: Definitely. He has one last chance, I think, to convince her, because it will be different being there than actually thinking about it. Saying that you want to do something and then getting there and realising this is actually what we're doing.
- Thabo: It could spark off something and maybe they would want to keep the child. It could be painful for the guy but maybe it's his last chance to have the kid. One of them might change their mind. It certainly could change when they confront it. It's easy to say let's go climb a mountain until you're faced with it.

In Extract 11, the man's rational understanding of what is morally wrong is stated unequivocally and he is depicted as providing moral instruction to the woman regarding this ('tried to talk her out of it'). If the woman persists in having an abortion in the face of being given this rational moral instruction, she can no longer rely on the man's support. In Extract 12, accompanying the women to the termination of pregnancy clinic is depicted as support to do what is rationally correct, i.e. not terminating the pregnancy. The man is depicted as understanding that 'doing' something is different to 'thinking' about it, and that when faced with the reality of a termination of pregnancy, the woman may be 'convinced' or simply 'change her mind'.

In the above extracts, the deep-seated patriarchal notion that men are rational and women emotional stands comfortably alongside the New Man discourse. Men are depicted as

using knowledge of the moral status of abortion and of the difficulty of carrying through with such a decision to guide women. In the extracts, the men do not speak of physically stopping their partners from going to abortion clinics. Instead, they talk about discussing the situation reasonably with their partners, from a position of sure knowledge of the outcomes of abortion. This ‘reasonableness’ holds no danger for their self-positionings as the new man.

Rights discourse

A discourse of rights has always been central to feminist arguments around abortion. Rights in relation to women’s bodily integrity and reproductive decision-making have, however, inevitably butted up against a claim regarding the right of the foetus to life, which has resulted in a basic impasse (Hopkins, Reicher and Saleem 1996). This kind of rendition of rights featured strongly, particularly in the newspaper articles analysed.

Extract 13

While the term “choice” may sound democratic the person who opts for abortion is neglecting to consider the fundamental right to life of the foetus. To claim the right to abortion and to recognise that right in law means to attribute to human freedom a perverse and evil significance (Kokoski, P. 2004. “Abortion law allows us to murder.” *The Star*, 10 June).

What has been less common in general public talk, but which appeared in the data collected for this research, is a deployment of a rights discourse in relation to men and abortion. In this, the features of a rights discourse in terms of claims to certain entitlements are used to question the status of men in relation to abortion, as evidenced in the extracts below.

Extract 14

As a man, do I have a right to a view on abortion? Many women would say no. ... Abortion, so we have been told so often that most of us men believe it, is ultimately a matter for women. .. The issue is women’s right to do what they want with their own bodies. (Glover, S. 2004. “New photographs are ‘clear proof that abortion is wrong’.” *Star*, 30 June)

Extract 15

Thabo: I mean you can't deny the guy has a part it's fifty-fifty. I don't think there are enough rights. I think generally women are given enough rights.

In these extracts, the writer and speaker respectively use a similar strategy to the one in which foetal rights are pitted against women's rights, except here women's rights have trumped men's rights. In Extract 14, men's the entitlement to free speech is encroached upon (to the extent that men may not even have a view on abortion), while in Extract 15 men's entitlement to 'equality' in reproductive matters is depicted as being undermined.

As with the 'equal partnership' discourse, the use of the rights discourse was linked, in many instances, with paternity.

Extract 15

Legally speaking, unmarried men don't have any rights regarding their unborn children and they are completely at the mercy of their partners. (Lockhat, R. 2007. "Abortion – who says men don't care?" *The Saturday Star*, 10 November)

Extract 16

The government enables the mother to disregard the right and desire of the father to have a child (Modise, S. 2004. "Abortion Inequality." *This Day*, 30 August)

In both of these extracts, reference to children and the father implies, in the first instance, foetal personhood and, in the second instance, ownership of this child by the father. The fact that the men have no rights in relation to the pregnancy thus wrests them from their patriarchal bond with their unborn child. The insertion of the patriarchal voice allows for the

depiction of power relations that disadvantage men. Men are ‘completely at the mercy of their partners’, and women are able to ‘disregard the right and desire of the father’.

The deployment of a rights discourse by these men dovetails with Walker’s (2005a) findings. She indicates that some men in her research felt threatened by women’s improved status. They perceived women as having achieved equality, and that their own positions have been undermined as a result.

Conclusion

The transition to democracy in South Africa has seen significant changes in gender relations, with men having to confront so-called traditional and post-democracy masculine identities (Walker, 2005a, Sideris, 2004). These changes have, in the words of Walker (2005b: 225) “had a number of highly contradictory consequences for women and men, as old notions of masculinity and male privilege have been destabilized”

The changing gendered landscape has partially been precipitated by legislation that has fostered gender equity, amongst which is the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act (Walker, 2005b). As Bradford’s (1991) history of abortion in South Africa shows, gender, classed, raced, colonial and medical politics have always cohered around the practice of abortion. The control that a woman has over her reproductive capacity is intricately linked to the social and discursive power relations of the time. What the Act has introduced in the post-Apartheid reproductive health landscape is a clear and unequivocal discourse of gendered rights around reproductive control by women.

Given this, it is interesting that the language of rights, equality and support featured heavily in the talk of these men. The ‘equal partnership’ discourse emphasises shared responsibility; the ‘support’ discourse encourages men to support and respect their partners; and a ‘rights’ discourse, as deployed by these men, draws on the notion of entitlements. This

kind of language has much currency in general in the post-Apartheid context within which these men find themselves, as well as within the global arena in which gender equality is a highly visible topic (Connell, 2011).

As pointed out by Connell (2011), men's response to the push for gender equality is uneven and complex. While resistance from certain quarters is easy to identify, there are also times when men espouse equality, but practise in ways that subvert the possibility of equality. The men featured in this article are not sprouting anti-feminist or conservative views, nor are they acting in contradictory ways. Instead they are orienting themselves to the dominant post-Apartheid human rights discourse as well as recent trends in which fathers are able, and encouraged, to take a more central role within the family and in nurturing children (Dermott, 2005; Lupton & Barclay, 1997).

What makes this research particularly interesting is the manner in which these discourses were used to perpetuate, in a new guise, private patriarchal gendered power relations in which men are able to control women's fertility and decisions about their bodies. Walby (1990, 94) described private patriarchy as "based upon the household, with a patriarch controlling women individually and directly in the relatively private sphere of the home." Private patriarchy rests on personal relations – father to child and the intimate heterosexual relationship between man and woman – with sexual and reproductive processes being key to the resulting power relations.

The subtle invocation of private patriarchy is evidenced in a range of ways. The equal partnership discourse is used to imply that the decision regarding the outcome of a pregnancy should be shared and that the man should have a say over what happens to the woman's body once pregnant. It was implied that, for the most part, the 'say' that the man would want to have would be against abortion and for the birth of 'his child'. Should a woman go ahead with an abortion, the equality of the relationship was viewed as having been disrupted, and

the man's fatherly duties with respect to the 'unborn child' thwarted. The support discourse was deployed alongside the patriarchal ascription of rationality to men. This allowed for the men to position themselves as the New Man, supportive of women, but at the same time gently persuading them to forego a termination of pregnancy. A discourse of rights was used to counter the feminist understanding of the rights of women to decision-making with regards to their bodies. The entitlement of men to be fathers, in particular, was seen as being undermined.

What this research highlights is how the use of the liberal notions of equality, support and rights does not necessarily imply a move towards gender equity. The appeal to equal rights made by these men buttresses unequal power relations in its demand for 'equality' that ignores 'equity'. Equality, as referred to these men, is taken to mean that everyone should be treated the same (i.e. that there should be a fundamental equality of all persons). Although there are debates in the literature concerning the meaning of equity, it is generally related to fairness or justice in the provision of benefits and it takes individual circumstances and requirements into consideration (Espinoza, 2004). An equity approach, thus, takes into consideration gendered, raced, classed (and other) power relations in terms of the obstacles that people have to overcome to access resources or opportunities and the compensations that are required for outcomes to be equal. It is the approach taken within the reproductive justice movement in which the inequities and power relations underpinning a range of issues (e.g. female genital cutting, sexual assault, trafficking and sexual exploitation, STIs and HIV, contraception, infertility and reproductive technologies, pregnancy and prenatal care, birthing, infant care and infanticide), including abortion are considered (Chrisler, 2012). It is from this perspective that the deployment of equality, rights and support discourses as evidenced in this paper must be countered.

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Appendix 1: Vignette for Focus Group Interviews

X is a 23 year old man. He has been seeing his girlfriend _Y_ for some time and they are sexually active. Recently, his girlfriend has told him that she is pregnant.

1. What do you think _X_ is experiencing? What is _X_ feeling?
2. What kind of conversations do you imagine _X_ and _Y_ will have?
3. What are some of the possible things that _X_ can do?

Y has told _X_ that she has decided to have an abortion.

4. How do you think _X_ reacted to this?
5. _X_ has told you about this. What advice would you give him? Why would you give this advice?

Y asks _X_ to accompany her to the Termination of Pregnancy Clinic.

6. Should _X_ accompany _Y_ to the clinic? Why?
7. What do you think _X_'s experience of accompanying _Y_ to the clinic would be like?

After the abortion _X_ and _Y_ continue to live together.

8. What do you think their relationship would be like?
9. How do you think _X_ and _Y_ would react to the recent events in their lives?