

Exploring Religious and Cultural Identities and the Right to Bodily Self-Determination in a South African Higher Education Context

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^{1,2}SHORT BIO

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ABSTRACT

This article argues that it is essential to create safe spaces in which to explore conversations at the intersection between personal religious and cultural identities and human rights. To facilitate this exploration, located within a feminist research paradigm, an empathetic-reflective-dialogical approach is adopted to engage with pre-service teachers in a South African Higher Education Institution. Selected Bachelor of Education Honours students were encouraged to engage in self-dialogue and to write their self-narratives. Participating in Communities in Conversation, Communities in Dialogue, and Communities for Transformation provided the opportunity for empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying to take place. This restorying has the potential to address the possible disconnection between the individual's personal identities when considering human rights issues, and in this instance, the right to bodily self-determination, and more specifically the termination of pregnancy. In doing so, the ways in which power operates in gendered relationships, often promoted by religious and cultural norms, is explored. In particular, female students found it empowering to engage with their "other" (male students). Both female and male students described this engagement as transformative.

KEYWORDS

empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying; communities in conversation; communities in dialogue; communities for transformation; right to bodily self-determination

Introduction

In a recent study, adopting an empathetic-reflective-dialogical approach, women and men found it helpful and empowering to hear perspectives

from their “other”¹ with regard to gender (in)equality.² The findings showed that gender equality is not promoted in their religious discourses³ and that it is important for both women and men to be secure in their personal identities so as to be able to acknowledge the other as having equal value.⁴ The participants in this study suggested that the same approach be employed to engage with other human rights issues. The women, in particular, suggested that this approach would be helpful to explore their integrity and autonomy when it comes to their right to bodily self-determination, and more specifically the termination of pregnancy.

In African countries, including South Africa, a number of women, both young and old, have terminated pregnancies. This practice is perceived to be un-African and contrary to particular religious and cultural⁵ discourses.⁶ Constructed within socio-cultural gendered spaces, religion, ethics, and societal moral values influence attitudes to the termination of pregnancy in African societies.⁷ Socio-economic barriers in particular become a dilemma, especially for young women, compelling them to terminate unwanted pregnancies. In South Africa, women may request a legal termination up to twelve weeks of gestation and the decision-making rests with the woman.⁸ However, even when women are legally provided with “choice” and “right” concerning the outcome of pregnancy, unintended pregnancies remain a major problem. When looking at bodily

¹ While it is recognised that there are more genders than the male and female binary, in the context of this study, “other” is used by the female students to refer to their male counterparts and *vice versa*.

² Janet Jarvis, Ncamisile P. Mthiyane, Eva M. Lindhardt, and Olav C. Ruus, “Which Right is right? An exploration of the intersection between religious identity and the human right to gender equality in two different teacher education contexts: South Africa and Norway,” *Journal of Religion and Society* 20 (2018).

³ Janet Jarvis and Ncamisile P. Mthiyane, “Conversing at the intersection: religious identity and the human right to gender equality in a South African teacher education context,” *Alternation, Special Edition*, 23 (2018).

⁴ Jarvis, Mthiyane, Lindhardt, and Ruus, “Which Right is right?”

⁵ Religion and culture are being used synonymously.

⁶ Malvern Chiweshe and Catriona Macleod, “Cultural De-colonization versus Liberal Approaches to Abortion in Africa: The Politics of Representation and Voice,” *African Journal of Reproductive Health* 22, no.2 (2018): 49-59, doi: 10.29063/ajrh2018/v22i2.5.

⁷ Dorothy Shaw, “Abortion and human rights,” *Best Practice & Research Clinical Obstetrics and Gynaecology* 24 (2010).

⁸ Republic of South Africa. Government Gazette, *The Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Amendment Act, Number 1, Volume 512, No. 30790* (Cape Town: Government Printers, 18 February 2008).

self-determination as a human right, as underpinned by the South African Constitution,⁹ the associated dominant religious and cultural discourses can play a central role in maintaining entrenched religious and cultural perspectives. Braam and Hessin indicate that religious and cultural ideologies and practices have institutionalised the idea of male dominance in all decision-making, including reproduction.¹⁰ This disempowers women, rendering them as powerless to engage with their right to bodily self-determination that includes their health and well-being.¹¹

Research has indicated that young women in particular struggle “alone,” often feeling judged, embarrassed, guilty, and shameful about the decision they have made to terminate a pregnancy.¹² For this reason, terminations are often carried through in secrecy. Acknowledging the need for safe, supportive, and accessible spaces in which to discuss a woman’s right to bodily self-determination, women speak of the utmost importance to “unsilence” women’s discourses on the termination of pregnancy, with the aim of advancing their position in a patriarchal society.¹³

⁹ Republic of South Africa. *The Bill of Rights: Chapter 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (Cape Town: Government Printers, 1996).

¹⁰ Tamara Braam and Leila Hessini, “The Power Dynamics Perpetuating Unsafe Abortion in Africa: A Feminist Perspective,” *African Journal of Reproductive Health* 8, no.1 (2004).

¹¹ Fiona K. Bloomer, Kelly O’Dowd, and Catriona Macleod, “Breaking the silence on abortion: the role of adult community abortion education in fostering resistance to norms Culture, Health & Sexuality,” *An International Journal for Research, Intervention and Care* (2017), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2016.1257740>.

¹² Emily M. Mojapelo-Batka and Johannes Schoeman, “Voluntary Termination of Pregnancy: Moral Concerns and Emotional Experiences among Black South African Adolescents,” *South African Journal of Psychology* 33, no.3 (2003): 144-53.; Sian M. Beynon-Jones, Merran G. Toerien, and Catriona Macleod, “Articulating reproductive justice through reparative justice: case studies of abortion in Great Britain and South Africa,” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* (2017): 601-15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2016.1257738>.

¹³ Indira Gilbert and Vishanthie Sewpaul, “Challenging Dominant Discourses on Abortion from a Radical Feminist Standpoint,” *Affilia* 30, no.1 (2015): 83-95.; Stephanie Herold, Katrina Kimport, and Kate Cockrill, “Women’s Private Conversations about Abortion: A Qualitative Study,” *Women Health* 55, no.8 (2015): 943-59, doi: 10.1080/03630242.2015.1061092.

This article argues for the creation of safe spaces¹⁴ in higher education institutions where students can engage in self-reflection and negotiate their religious and cultural identities. These safe spaces do not only refer to literal or physical safety, but rather denotes the figurative and discursive use of the notion.¹⁵ In this small-scale research project, employing an empathetic-reflective-dialogical approach, Bachelor of Education Honours students were provided with the opportunity to engage in particular with the issue of the termination of pregnancy.

“Empathetic-reflective-dialogue” refers to the capacity of individuals to understand and respond to others with an increased awareness of the other person’s thoughts and feelings and that these matter,¹⁶ while simultaneously examining responses, beliefs, and premises resulting in the integration of new understandings into experience.¹⁷ Engaging in dialogue encourages the search for meaning and understanding, recognising that each person has something of value to contribute,¹⁸ opening up to the possibility of learning from the other.¹⁹ Empathetic-

¹⁴ Petro du Preez and Shan Simmonds, “Understanding how we understand girls’ voices on cultural and religious practices: toward a curriculum for justice,” *South African Journal of Education* 31 (2011): 322-32; Cornelia D. Roux, “A Social Justice and Human Rights Education Project: A Search for Caring and Safe Spaces,” in *Safe Spaces: Human Rights Education in Diverse Contexts*, ed. Cornelia D. Roux (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2012), 29-50; Esti Strydom, “Exploring safe spaces for students to engage with critical and caring thinking regarding portrayals of ‘self’ and ‘other’” (Master of Visual Arts diss., Stellenbosch University, 2018).

¹⁵ Melissa Redmond, “Safe space oddity: Revisiting critical pedagogy,” *Journal of Teaching in Social Work* 30 (2010): 1-14; Barbara Stengel and Lisa Weems, “Questioning safe space: An introduction,” *Studies in Philosophy of Education* 29 (2010): 505-7; Petro du Preez, “A Human Rights Based Curriculum for Religious Schools: The Responsibilities of School Leaders,” in *Effective Leadership for Religious Schools: What Leaders Should Know*, ed. Michael Buchanan (New York: Continuum Publishing, 2012), 53-68.

¹⁶ Andrew Abdool and Marlize Drinkwater, “Guidelines to create a positive classroom climate for Religion Education: An empathetic approach,” *Scriptura* 89 no.2 (2005).

¹⁷ Coralie McCormack and Robert Kennelly, “We must get together and really talk... Connection, engagement and safety sustain learning and teaching conversation communities,” *Reflective Practice* 12, no.4 (2011).

¹⁸ Lew Allen, “From Votes to Dialogues: Clarifying the Role of Teachers’ Voices in School Renewal,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 86, no.4 (2004): 318-21.

¹⁹ Julia Iprgrave, “Dialogue, citizenship and religious education,” in *International perspectives on citizenship, education and religious diversity*, ed. Robert Jackson (London: Routledge Falmer, 2003), 131-49.

reflective-dialogical restorying²⁰ provided the students with the opportunity to engage reflectively with their own religious and cultural identities by way of self-dialogue and expressed through self-narrative. They then engaged separately as men and women in a Community in Conversation (CiC)²¹ and then together in a Community in Dialogue (CiD).²² This provided the opportunity for both men and women to discuss lived experiences and the lack of autonomy that women experience in the decision-making process about bodily self-determination, given the persisting inequalities in power between men and women.²³ As they engaged in this community in dialogue, the strength and potentialities that emerged from these encounters had the potential to be emancipatory and transformational.²⁴ This approach reinforced and facilitated Nicolescu's theory of the Included Middle which conceives "of people moving to a place where they become open to others' perspectives...[valuing] premises and belief systems... letting go of aspects of how they currently know the world."²⁵ This concept was explored in a Community for Transformation (CfT)²⁶ which empowered the students to construct a narrative in which both women and men have some ability to direct future-oriented action.

Empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying

This approach is framed by Hermans'²⁷ Dialogical Self Theory, advocating that individuals do not only live in external spaces, but also in the internal space of their society-of-mind. Possible identity recreation

²⁰ Janet Jarvis, "Restorying for Transdisciplinarity: a proposed teaching-learning strategy in a context of Human Rights Education," *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa* 14 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.4102/td.v14i2.483>.

²¹ Cornelia D. Roux, "Social Justice and Human Rights Education," Annamagriet de Wet and Glynis Parker, "Communities in Conversation: Opportunities for Women and Girls' Self-empowerment," *Gender and Development* 22 (2014).

²² Roux, "Social Justice and Human Rights Education."

²³ Monica Frederico, Kristien Michielsen, Carlos Arnaldo, and Peter Decat, "Factors Influencing Abortion Decision-Making Processes among Young Women," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 15 (2018).

²⁴ Sue L.T. McGregor and Russ Volckmann, "Transversivity: Transdisciplinarity in Higher Education," in *Leading transformative higher education*, ed. Gary Hampson and Matthew ih-Tolsma (Olomouc, Czech Republic: Palacky University Press, 2013), 51-81.

²⁵ McGregor and Volckmann, "Transversivity," 62.

²⁶ Jarvis, "Restorying for Transdisciplinarity."

²⁷ Hubert Hermans, "The dialogical self: a process of positioning in space and time," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Self*, ed. Shaun Gallagher (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), 652-78.

can result from the dialogical self in action. This occurs when the individual moves from one position to another in the self, as a way of gaining understanding about the self in relation to the world.²⁸ An example of this would be a woman adopting a counter-position to both individual and collective religious and cultural discourses that undermine her integrity and autonomy. Self-dialogue can be expressed through self-narrative. Various scholars²⁹ make the link between narrative and agency, arguing that self-narration can help individuals to make sense of their lives – past and present. Self-narrative has a role to play in enabling individual women to discover the degree to which they are entangled with their other (men) and, furthermore, the extent to which it might be possible to become disentangled from their other (men) and thus be freed to build new identities.³⁰ In this sense the self-narrative can be emancipatory and empowering in addressing male hegemony and fragmenting and reinterpreting dominant religious and cultural discourses.³¹ The articulation of this agency, however, depends greatly on the extent and strength of an individual's identity capital.³²

The basic assumption in the concept of identity capital is that every person has it to some extent. "Identity capital" refers to the stock of resources, or "set of strengths" that individuals have when constructing, framing, and presenting their identity in social circumstances.³³ Identity capital comprises two assets, namely tangible resources such as social group membership, and intangible resources that could include the

²⁸ Hubert Hermans and Agnieszka Hermans-Konopka, *Dialogical Self Theory: Positioning and counter-positioning in a globalizing society* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

²⁹ Sarah Nuttall, *Entanglement: literary and cultural reflections on post-apartheid* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009); Mihuel Gonçalves and Antonio Ribeiro, "Narrative processes of innovation and stability within the dialogical self," in *Handbook of Dialogical Self Theory*, eds. Hubert Hermans and Thorsten Gieser (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 301-18; Edie White, *Whiteness and Teacher Education* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012); Mike Hayler and Jess Moriarty, *Self-Narrative and Pedagogy: Stories of Experience within Teaching and Learning* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2017).

³⁰ Nuttall, *Entanglement*.

³¹ Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008).

³² James Côté, "Identity Capital, Social Capital and the Wider Benefits of Learning: Generating Resources Facilitative of Social Cohesion," *Journal of Adolescence* 20 (2005).

³³ James Côté and Charles Levine, *Identity Formation, Agency and Culture: A Social Psychological Synthesis* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishing, 2002), 164.

ability to reflect and negotiate self-identity. The accumulation of successful identity exchanges, i.e. the social interaction of an individual with others, increases an individual's identity capital. Hermans³⁴ contends that it is in an individual's mind that agentic power is created, by voicing implicitly or explicitly, and/or practising a counter-position to dominant religious and cultural discourses. It is the extent and the strength of identity capital being at stake, and it can be argued that as an individual's identity capital increases, they will be empowered to take a stand on issues that run counter to dominant religious and cultural discourses.

Open space stories have the greatest potential for transformation,³⁵ allowing sufficient space for deconstruction and reconstruction of discourses. The possibility then presents itself that as students engage in open conversations, they might restore what they know, as new interpretations are applied in the light of clarified or new understandings of dominant religious and cultural discourses. This can potentially lead to the coproduction of new knowledges as individuals, previously locked into their religious and cultural traditions, embark upon personal journeys of restoring.³⁶ This restoring takes place in and through the following conversations:

- CiC, which provides the opportunity for an informal sharing of information in a safe space. For this reason, men and women meet separately. Informally exchanging perspectives and personal experiences can foster respect, trust, and tolerant understanding as "divergent ways of thinking and speaking"³⁷ are reflected upon. This reflection entails the examination of responses, beliefs, and premises with regard to the termination of pregnancies, resulting in the integration of new understandings into experience.³⁸

³⁴ Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, *Dialogical Self Theory*; Hermans, "The dialogical self."

³⁵ Ina ter Avest, *Voices: Beyond the Confusion of the Encounter with the Other* (Utrecht: Hogeschool Inholland, 2011).

³⁶ Alette Willis, "Restoring the self, restoring place: Healing through grief in everyday spaces," *Emotion, Space and Society* 2, no.2 (2009); Wayne Slabon, Randy Richards, and Vanessa Dennen, "Learning by Restoring," *Instructional Science* 42, no.4 (2014); Laura S. Foote, "Re-storying Life as a Means of Critical Reflection: The Power of Narrative Learning," *Christian Higher Education Journal* 14, no.3 (2015); Ebony E. Thomas and Amy Stornaiuolo, "Restoring the Self: Bending Toward Textual Justice," *Harvard Educational Review* 86, no.3 (2016).

³⁷ McCormack and Kennelly, "We must get together," 522.

³⁸ McCormack and Kennelly, "We must get together."

- CiD fosters the opportunity in which the “other” is disclosed to his/her “other” (woman/man) in a dialogue which includes a rhetoric that questions and a rhetoric that reveals respect and inspires reciprocal exchanges with tolerant and empathetic understanding and collaboration initiatives for transformation.³⁹ Conversations could be designed around unpacking the lived experience of religious and cultural discourses and the implications for female bodily self-determination, and more specifically the termination of pregnancy.
- CfT⁴⁰ aims at exploring how, in this case, new knowledge could inform respect for women’s reproductive self-determination autonomy.⁴¹ CfT could identify challenges and possibilities for constructive engagement that could lead to new layers of consciousness⁴² which have the potential to lead to the recognition of women’s rights of equal citizenship with men.
- Self-dialogue (to an internal audience) is expressed as self-narrative (to an external audience) in the spaces created by a CiC, CiD, and CfT. As students explore how their religious and cultural identities intersect with the human right to bodily self-determination, the possibility exists for restorying to take place.

Methodology

Located within a feminist research paradigm,⁴³ a narrative research design⁴⁴ has provided the space conducive to the exploration of the ways in which the participants construct, interpret, and give meaning to their subjective experiences with regard to bodily self-determination. Feminist research, while addressing the assumption that there are structural gender inequalities, seeks to deconstruct commonly held discourses.⁴⁵ Unequal power relations existing as a result of gender inequality and the way in which women are represented and positioned

³⁹ Jarvis, “Restorying for Transdisciplinarity.”

⁴⁰ Jarvis, “Restorying for Transdisciplinarity.”

⁴¹ Rebecca J. Cook and Bernard M. Dickens, “Human rights dynamics of abortion law reform,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 25, no.1 (2003).

⁴² White, *Whiteness*.

⁴³ Claire M. Renzetti, Daniel J. Curran, and Shana L. Maier, *Women, Men, and Society* (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2012).

⁴⁴ David Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2010); Lawrence Newman, *Social Research Methods* (New York: Pearson, 2011).

⁴⁵ Beynon-Jones, Toerien, and Macleod, “Articulating reproductive justice.”

in society, are addressed.⁴⁶ Narrative inquiry as a methodology within narrative research⁴⁷ supports the exploration of narratives which are socially constructed. As such, narratives can be reinterpreted and have an emancipatory function, transforming individual lives and the broader culture.⁴⁸

This research project was located at a South African University in the College of Humanities, and more specifically in the School of Education. 39 Black⁴⁹ African Bachelor of Education Honours students, ranging from their mid-twenties to 50 years of age, and registered for a module called “Contemporary Issues in Life Orientation,” agreed to participate. Data was generated during the final block session of this module. The ethical code of conduct and requirements set for narrative research by the tertiary institution’s ethics committee, was adhered to. Participants signed consent forms and were assured that their anonymity would be protected and that pseudonyms would be used when citing their responses. While the position of the researcher in feminist research is typically that of an “insider,” in this case, the researchers who co-teach this module, adopted the position of insider/outsider.⁵⁰

The data collection process took place on five levels. On *level one*, participants engaged in self-dialogue. They were asked to respond to three questions, providing the opportunity to consider the dominant individual and collective religious and cultural voices informing the

⁴⁶ Christine E. Bose, “Intersectionality and Global Gender Inequality,” *Gender & Society* 26, no.1 (2012); Seema Vyas and Henrica A.M.F. Jansen, “Unequal power relations and partner violence against women in Tanzania: a cross-sectional analysis,” *BMC Women’s Health* 18 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-018-0675-0>.

⁴⁷ Corinne Squire, Molly Andrews, and Maria Tamboukou, “What is narrative research?” in *Doing Narrative Research*, eds. Molly Andrews, Corinne Squire, and Maria Tamboukou, (London: Sage, 2008), 1-26; Steven Chase, “Narrative Inquiry: Multiple Lenses, Approaches, Voices,” in *Qualitative Educational Research*, ed. Wendy Luttrell (New York: Routledge, 2010), 651-9; Jean Clandinin, Shaun Murphy, Janice Huber, and Anne M. Orr, “Negotiating narrative inquiries: Living in a tension-filled midst,” *Journal of Educational Research* 103 (2010); W Luttrell, *Qualitative Educational Research* (New York & London: Routledge, 2010).

⁴⁸ Squire, Andrews, and Tamboukou, “What is narrative research?”

⁴⁹ While the authors do not endorse politically racial classifications, the term “Black” has been used by some scholars to refer to “Africans,” “Indians,” and “Coloureds.” In this study the participants were Black Africans.

⁵⁰ Maki Motapanyane, “Insider/Outsider: A feminist Introspective on Epistemology and Transnational Research,” *Atlantis* 34, no.2 (2010).

internal positions which they hold in their society-of-mind with regard to the termination of pregnancy:

- How would you describe your personal religious and cultural identity?
- How does your religious and cultural discourse speak to the way in which you view the issue of terminating a pregnancy?
- What do you think are the rights of the female, the male, and the foetus, when it comes to terminating a pregnancy?

It is on this level that the participants negotiated their self-dialogue and considered or adopted counter-positions to dominant individual and collective voices in their religious and cultural discourses, as they engaged their dialogical self in action.⁵¹ Their self-dialogue found expression in *level two* where they wrote their self-narratives. According to Gonçalves and Ribeiro, this self-narrative is “the outcome of dialogical processes of negotiation, tension, disagreement, alliance, and so on, between different voices of the self.”⁵² Ellis⁵³ contends that the self-narrative, or writing for the self, can be therapeutic as it causes the individual to pause and to think about their positionality in relation to, in this case, the termination of pregnancy. This can also be empowering, as their writing exposes a new sense of consciousness and a greater sense of control in the present and for the future.⁵⁴

At *level three*, the participants were separated into two groups – one for the men and the other for the women. In each group, or CiC, they were afforded the opportunity to share their written reflections orally in response to the questions provided for levels one and two. Sharing their self-narratives provided the opportunity for them to individuate as “equal... dignified partner[s] in constituting reality and constructing the world.”⁵⁵

⁵¹ Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, *Dialogical Self Theory*.

⁵² Gonçalves and Ribeiro, “Narrative processes,” 302.

⁵³ Carolyn Ellis, *The ethnographic I: a methodological novel about autoethnography* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Creek, 2004).

⁵⁴ James Paul, Larry Christensen, and George Frank, “Accessing the intimate spaces of life in the classroom through letters to former teachers: a protocol for uncovering hidden stories,” in *Stories out of school: memories and reflections on care and cruelty in the classroom*, eds. James Paul and Terry Smith (Stanford, CT: Ablex publishing Corporation, 2000), 45-63; Hayler and Moriarty, *Self-Narrative and Pedagogy*.

⁵⁵ Anne Becker, “Identity Premised on Equality of Difference as a Fundamental Human Right,” in *Safe Spaces: Human Rights Education in Diverse Contexts*, ed. Cornelia D. Roux (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2012), 83-96.

At *level four*, the participants – women and men together – entered into a CiD that fostered reciprocal exchanges with tolerant and empathetic understanding. The researcher facilitated the responses of the participants who were asked to discuss their responses from the CiC.

At *level five*, a whole group discussion (CfT) took place with the aim of exploring how their substantial attitudes towards the termination of pregnancy could inform their situational or professional practice.⁵⁶ Constructive engagement such as this has the potential to lead to new layers of consciousness,⁵⁷ as the participants consider self-respect and own positionality, and inspire reciprocal exchanges with empathetic understanding. This could potentially lead to the emergence of collaborative initiatives for negotiating entrenched positions and restorying for transformation. The researchers guided the discussion at level five with the following three questions:

- How has your participation in empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying impacted your understanding of the right to bodily self-determination, and more specifically the termination of pregnancy?
- Evaluate the efficacy of empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying for the transformation of attitudes and for better understanding of your “other.”
- How do you think empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying could possibly be an effective strategy to use in a classroom setting with learners?

Findings and Discussion

Drawing on the work of various scholars,⁵⁸ narrative analysis was employed as a tool of analysis. All five levels of empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying are implicit in the discussion which follows. The written responses (level two) and audio recorded conversations at levels four and five were crystallised⁵⁹ to lend authenticity.⁶⁰ Various threads

⁵⁶ Jennifer Nias, “Changing times, changing identities: Grieving for a lost self,” in *Educational Research and Evaluation*, ed. Robert Burgess (London: Falmer Press, 1993), 139-56.

⁵⁷ Joy Ritchie and David Wilson, *Teacher narrative as critical inquiry: rewriting the script* (New York: Teacher’s College Press Columbia University, 2000); White, *Whiteness*.

⁵⁸ Jaber Gubrium and James Holstein, *Analyzing Narrative Reality* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009); Chase, “Narrative Inquiry;” Luttrell, *Qualitative Educational Research*; Silverman, *Doing qualitative research*.

⁵⁹ Kobus Maree, *First steps in research* (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 2007).

⁶⁰ Newman, *Social Research Methods*.

emerged on how the religious and cultural identities of the participants intersect with the human right to bodily self-determination and influence attitudes towards the termination of pregnancy.⁶¹ It became clear that while the Bill of Rights⁶² stipulates that a woman has a right to bodily self-determination, religious and cultural discourses often override that right and are considered by most participants to be a tool that silences women, precluding them from making personal decisions about terminating a pregnancy. The women were of the opinion that they are expected to do as their religion/culture prescribes, out of respect for their elders. Lungi (a female) expressed this as follows:

I feel and know that some parents (especially in our African culture), if they know that you are pregnant, can even chase you away from home. There is no space to discuss what you are going through and how and why you are pregnant, let alone what impact in your personal life can this said pregnancy do to “you” as a person, not the wider community. Therefore, I think sometimes decisions are taken as one is forced by circumstances...as long as it is within the 12th week, termination can be done.

One of the men (Bheki) dispelled this notion, however, contending that the termination of pregnancy is an indication of an immoral society:

People are hiding behind religion and culture as being oppressive to women and now the “rights”...human rights, but the truth is that we are losing our morals and culture.

Both men and women acknowledged that a foetus has a right to life and that the women should take responsibility to ensure that termination takes place only in cases where the mother’s life is endangered, and in cases of rape and incest:

My personal worldview strongly stems from my Christian faith...God. I would rather stand with God and be judged by the world, than to stand and be judged by God...I believe that no pregnancy should be terminated, a child is a gift of God. There will always be options to share in the raising of that blessing (Bongi – female).

⁶¹ Mojapelo-Batka and Schoeman, “Voluntary termination of pregnancy;” Beynon-Jones, Toerien, and Macleod, “Articulating reproductive justice.”

⁶² Republic of South Africa, *The Bill of Rights*.

As males we agreed in view that a foetus has a right to life. Abortion can only be based on the constitutional values or under certain circumstances like rape and incest or ill-health. Other than that, abortion is wrong because there are contraceptives which are free (Jacob – male).

The predominant responses from the men were that they were excluded from the decision-making process to terminate pregnancy. They argued that they are powerless and voiceless in matters pertaining to the life of the foetus and that their rights as “fathers” are violated when women, often secretly, make the decision to terminate a pregnancy.

For some cases I can say termination of pregnancy is right like rape, incest, the severely disable infant; other than that I feel that “father’s” wishes about the unborn baby are not considered and they are silenced by the law and policies (Lawrence – male).

Several female participants passionately described their lived experience of pain and abandonment, having gone through with the birth of a child only to have their partner abandon them as soon as it became evident that the man would need to provide for the child. Most of the times the men left them for another woman.⁶³ Often women struggle “alone,” often feeling judged, embarrassed, guilty, and shameful about the decision they have made to terminate a pregnancy.⁶⁴ For this reason, terminations are often carried through in secrecy. The narratives of these female participants included stories of low self-esteem, depression, and health-related issues. In particular they referred to the stress associated with socio-economic difficulties and the responsibility of raising a child as a single woman without support. The women expressed anger at gender inequality and the unfairness when, in most cases, they had to suspend their studies while the men continued and succeeded in their studies without any encumbrances, and failed to meet their responsibilities to the child they had fathered.

The female participants referred to psychological and emotional stress as follows:

⁶³ Cf. Catriona Macleod and Jateen Hansjee, “Men and Talk about Legal Abortion in South Africa: Equality, support and Rights Discourses Undermining Reproductive Choice,” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 15, no.8 (2013); Bloomer, O’Dowd, and Macleod, “Breaking the silence;” Beynon-Jones, Toerien, and Macleod, “Articulating reproductive justice.”

⁶⁴ Mojapelo-Batka and Schoeman, “Voluntary termination of pregnancy;” Beynon-Jones, Toerien, and Macleod, “Articulating reproductive justice.”

[L]ooks can be deceiving (outside appearance): you can look at the female and think everything is all right, hence what she is feeling is emotionally deep. You are left to decide alone...sometimes what you are undergoing cannot be discussed even with your partner if he is still around, as some of the male counterparts do not stick with you when you are pregnant (Zanele – female).

When a woman is pregnant, she undergoes a very lonely journey...There is no support...pre- and post-pregnancy; if you are pregnant you have to take HIV tests alone, fearing for yourself and the unborn baby, and the so-called father is nowhere to be found. There is a clinic on campus and community/public clinics/hospitals, but there is no support or time for counselling for women. This directly impacts on self-esteem which sometimes escalates to stress and depression (Agnes – female).

Both the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Amendment Act, Number 1 of 2008⁶⁵ and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol)⁶⁶ explicitly recognise that the right to a woman's health includes access to the safe and legal termination of pregnancy. These documents state that the right to decide whether or not to have children is fundamental to a woman's physical and psychological social health and well-being. However, this choice is countered by most religious and cultural discourses. This results in women's reluctance to choose termination for fear of being recognised, stigmatised, and ostracised. The women were in agreement that a woman who chooses to terminate a pregnancy is most often judged and shunned into isolation. Termination of pregnancy is considered taboo in society. If the woman has undergone a termination, there are rituals that need to be performed, including cleansing ceremonies, to prevent negative consequences for both the individual and the community.⁶⁷ According to Princess (female), her religion and culture do not permit the termination of a pregnancy. She states:

Our parents have power over what we believe in as our rights...they can easily chase you away from home if you are pregnant. Culturally, if you abort the baby you have to find someone to cleanse you. It is bad luck, but also it depends...therefore certain rituals have to be done because

⁶⁵ Republic of South Africa, *The Bill of Rights*.

⁶⁶ Romi Sigsworth and Liezelle Kumalo, "Women, peace and security. Implementing the Maputo Protocol in Africa," *Institute for Security Studies*, Paper 295, July 2016.

⁶⁷ Cf. Mojabelo-Batka and Schoeman, "Voluntary termination of pregnancy;" Beynon-Jones, Toerien, and Macleod, "Articulating reproductive justice."

that is the same like having a miscarriage and spiritually that baby is growing and it should be regarded as such.

Research confirms the findings from female participants that decisions to terminate pregnancies are kept secret to avoid judgement, alienation, and the loss of respect from elders in the community. It became clear that women are not supposed to question religious and cultural discourses. As the women engaged in their CiC, the identity capital of individual women increased as they drew on the tangible asset of their membership of a social group of women.⁶⁸ This identity capital was consolidated as they reflected upon and negotiated their self-identity, adopting definite counter-positions to religious and cultural discourses. This is evidenced by the response of one of the participants (Nomsa – female) who suggested that an empathetic, supportive response should be extended to a woman who has chosen to terminate her pregnancy.

For me, firstly, the foetus has a right to life, and therefore I believe that it takes a very brave person to terminate pregnancy and to never regret that decision, because every action taken has consequences. Respect of an individual's decision is important...As women, we felt that for women, responsibility is the first action to think thoroughly about, and women have the right to terminate a pregnancy...My body, my choice.

The CiD provided the opportunity for the participants to dialogically challenge the gender inequalities that were raised by the women in their CiC. Women were able to tell their “other” (men) how they felt and to express their frustrations and anger at the injustice of this inequality. The accumulation of successful exchanges in the CiD with their “other” (men) continued to increase the women's identity capital. Participants said that they benefited from the dialogue in a safe, supportive, and accessible space, and were empowered and gained confidence as they voiced their opinions and shared their lived experiences without being judged.⁶⁹

The strategy allows people to open up, share with one another, and the goal is to learn and acquire new knowledge...one's story can help or groom somebody and my story can also groom the “other”...I think these dialogues should happen in wider communities as well as in the wider university community...for other students to benefit as well (Maureen – female).

⁶⁸ Côté and Levine, *Identity Formation*.

⁶⁹ Gilbert and Sewpaul, “Challenging Dominant Discourses;” Herold, Kimport, and Cockrill, “Women's Private Conversations.”

I must say that the strategy is therapeutic. One learns to get the perspectives of others and realise that I am not alone, I can survive. If what I do is a sin, then I will go to church, apologise to God, and move on with my life because if there is no support, I have to find ways so that I do not bring a child in this world who is going to suffer (Agnes – female).

Having participated in empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying, the participants related that they were far more aware of their self-dialogue and were sensitised to the possibilities of their dialogical self in action, as they adopted counter-positions to the dominant religious and cultural voices in their society-of-mind. They expressed their self-dialogue (level one) in their self-narratives (level two). Ellis⁷⁰ and Lawler⁷¹ consider this to be therapeutic, emancipatory, and empowering in addressing male hegemony and fragmenting and reinterpreting dominant religious and cultural discourses leading potentially to new layers of consciousness.⁷² The CiC and CiD provided the opportunity for the participants to think critically about the complexity of power relations that operate to perpetuate religious and cultural norms and understandings with regard to the right to bodily self-determination, and more specifically the termination of pregnancy.

The CfT (level five) provided the opportunity for the participants to think critically about processes of socialisation and to discuss and begin the process of deconstructing the same. While the participants (both men and women) were aware of how their particular contexts can shape their behaviour, engaging in this strategy assisted them to see that they can be agents of change. The strategy opened up a space for constructing a narrative in which they have some ability to direct future-oriented action. This is expressed by the participants as follows:

I think that this methodology is helpful, constructive, and transformative in that it gives you an opportunity to sit back and self-reflect on the topic and further gives you a particular worldview to think about other people as well and understand their actions (Nonjabulo – male).

It teaches us not to be judgemental, whether female or male (Bongi – female).

⁷⁰ Ellis, *The ethnographic I*.

⁷¹ Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*.

⁷² Ritchie and Wilson, *Teacher narrative; White, Whiteness*.

The methodology allows you, and especially us as males, to understand the female side of the story. At the same time it allows every one of us time with yourself, and discussions allow you to make a choice to change or not to change your attitude (Spha – male).

I found this strategy to be helpful especially in levels 1 and 2 where one had to listen to different voices before one takes a decision...it gives you possible ideas to question yourself to say: “What can you change?” “How can you do that?” “Why should you act in that particular way?” (Sabelo – male).

[T]his strategy stimulates the mind and gives us many possible ideas leading to critical thinking and to question yourself for better understanding, and the probing questions assisted...it has a potential to be transformative (Agnes – female).

The participants collectively agreed that this strategy could be an effective tool to employ in their professional spaces to enhance teacher-learner relationships. Their views included the following:

As teachers, we need to do what is just with our learners...social justice...We need to teach them and expose them to such issues (Bongi – female).

The strategy transforms the way you perceive issues and other people. We need to go out there as changed men and women so that we will be transformed parents to our children (Andile – male).

In the classroom, empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying has the potential to assist in the teaching-learning process with regard to human rights education. Participants suggested that empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying could be used to engage with various human rights issues.⁷³ They were of the opinion that this approach could be beneficial, not only in a classroom, but also in the broader community, and that it has the potential to be transformative for the wider society.

Conclusion

This article contributes uniquely to the ongoing gender and religion discourse, by offering a methodology which encourages, in this context, pre-service teachers “to see the world through the lens of [their ‘other’]... providing space within which to grow [their] capacity to communicate

⁷³ Cf. Jarvis and Mthiyane, “Conversing at the intersection.”

across boundaries.”⁷⁴ This methodology transforms classroom practice into classroom praxis which is both reflective and reflexive, internalising new knowledge so as to inform new action.⁷⁵ Empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying created an opportunity for self-dialogue and self-narrative to be communicated in a safe space, within a CiC, CiD, and CfT. Students considered the disjuncture between religious and cultural discourses and the right to bodily self-determination. By challenging male hegemony and the effects thereof, students increased their identity capital, and this has the potential to be personally empowering and socially transformative. The findings of this study inspired the researchers to continue to create safe spaces for pre-service teachers to explore conversations at the intersection between their religious and cultural identities and human rights issues.

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⁷⁴ McGregor and Volckmann, “Transversity,” 62-3.

⁷⁵ Cornelia D. Roux and Petro du Preez, “Clarifying students’ perceptions of different belief systems and values: prerequisite for effective education praxis,” *South African Journal of Higher Education* 30, no.2 (2006).

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