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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

"You Cannot Be Like That Here": Discourses of Sexual Identities among Urban Ghanaian Families

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Abstract

While social discourses on gender and sexuality have become controversial in the African context, there is a tendency to overlook how the domestic space contrives and participates in such productions. This paper examines the domestic space to reveal the ways that it reproduces, sanctions, challenges, and disrupts discursive productions on sexuality. Drawing on interviews with selected urban Ghanaian families, the paper contributes to scholarship by arguing that the processuality of sexual scripts linked to moral scripts and cultural taboos produces complex tensions and ambivalences, with implications for cultural authenticity, power relations, fear-mongering, and social persecution. The analysis shows that sexuality, much like gender, is deeply discursive, processual, fluid, and shaped by culture and history, requiring scholars to engage in deep reflections on how discourses of sexuality inscribe themselves into the social and moral fabric to shape individual actions and behaviors. Taking evidence from urban Ghana, we argue that an important question remains eminent against the background of transformation for harnessing the potentials of the domestic space, which prescribes gender-specific behaviors and expectations between men and women across families.

Keywords Gender · Sexuality · Identity · Homosexuality · Heteronormativity

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Introduction

This paper examines the stories of young and old generations of members of selected urban Ghanaian families to reveal their descriptions, articulations, representations, and beliefs on sexuality, drawing on the narratives of 20 families from the Wa Municipality of the Upper West Region of Ghana. We seek to engage in critical dialogue with "public knowledge" on the meanings of sexuality and their implications for the expression of forms of sexualities other than a heteronormative one.

A common thread within African feminist theorizing has been a longstanding commitment to questioning how specific notions of gender and sexuality are discursively mobilized, consumed, and deployed in everyday social relationships [6, 22, 25, 27]. Influenced by a Foucauldian reading of the "body" and social subjectivities, African feminist writers and activists have challenged the dominant worldviews, cultural manipulations, and trenchant regulation of the sexualities of people gendered as women, as well as gender-nonconforming people (LGBQTI+) by both macro- and microlevel politics and neoliberal patriarchies [4, 26].

Foucault [11] reminds us that discourses on sexuality and self are thoroughly produced and regulated by the discursive power and knowledge apparatuses which constitute subjects. Foucault's work allows us to interrogate and understand how social subjects in discursive spaces are constituted and the relations of such constitution to the larger politics of knowledge-power, especially what counts as "truth." Against that backdrop, this paper brings to this conversation the aspect of how strong heteropatriarchal ideologies may impact parents' interactions with their children on such a culturally misunderstood and tabooed issue as sexuality. This is because, by exploring the impact of parent–child interaction on the constructions of meanings of gender and sexuality, it becomes possible to foreground children's understanding of their sexualities for engagements that would likely (re)produce, challenge, and (re)appropriate them in ways that are open to the expression of alternative sexual choices and resist dominant ideologies.

Gender and Sexuality Discourses in Ghana

Same-sex sexualities remain a highly incensed and strongly contested topic in public spaces in Ghana—in popular media, partisan politics, and religious preachings. In 2011, when then British Prime Minister, David Cameron, threatened to cut aid to resource-poor countries that do not support and respect the rights of gays and lesbians [3], the then president of Ghana, the late John Atta Mills of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), reacted swiftly by staking a cultural claim to express his unwillingness to trade values for aid. Also, in 2013, former president John Dramani Mahama (of the NDC) remarked that discussing the possibility of legalizing same-sex marriage in Ghana causes more discomfort, panic, problems, and mistrust among the Ghanaian citizenry than any other issue

[18]. Again, on November 26, 2017, the president of Ghana, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo granted Al-Jazeera journalist, Jane Dutton, an interview on the possibility of legalizing homosexuality in Ghana in the near future. In response, President Akuffo-Addo indicated that homosexuality was a sociocultural and political issue that had not attracted a sufficiently strong consensus to impact a paradigm shift toward legalization. Referring to 20th century Western society, he imagines a possibility for such shifts in Ghanaian/African society in the future [21]. His response attracted outrage from several quarters, including religious and political leaders. To most commentators, the president's position on homosexuality was deeply "problematic," "irresponsible," and even "dubious," as homosexuality, imagined as a nonconforming form of sexual pleasure and desire, was unethical and thus a taboo subject to Ghanaians. Political opponents of the NDC called for outright condemnation and resistance of any overtures toward the legitimization of homosexuality in Ghana. They argued that the president's position was borne out of an unbridled embrace of neoliberal values in his attempt to win sympathy and attract Western donor support to fund grandiose political campaign promises. Also, while the so-called religious (Christian and Muslim) cite their Abrahamic doctrines, traditionalists cite their customs and values to condemn and foreclose any discussions on homosexuality to such an extent that one finds a consensus among the varied, and often disagreeing, dominant publics on the subject.

Such reactions express a dominant heteronormative culture that is diffused and gets infused into public policy and practice. The law (Chapter 6 of the Criminal Code, 1960, as amended by The Criminal Code Act 2003) criminalizes same-sex relationships and discourses surrounding same-sex in Ghana. Like in other West African countries, sexuality remains a cultural issue, although we know little about the impact of heteronormative ideologies of parents in their engagement with young people on the subject of sexuality. Hence, drawing on the experiences of families in the Wa Municipality of Ghana, this article explores this subject to provide insights into existing notions and meanings and their implications for constructing gender and sexual identities with the view of creating spaces for engagements that could help broaden perspectives and shift meanings towards more inclusive and diverse sexualities. The analysis is framed as the following question: How might Ghanaian parent–child interactions be (re)produced to challenge and disrupt the dominant heteronormative discourse on gender and sexuality?

Methods

Participants

The paper is based on an exploratory study conducted in the Wa Municipality of the Upper West Region (UWR). The UWR represents one of the ten administrative regions of Ghana, containing four ethnic groupings, namely the Dagaaba, Wale, Sissala, and Birifor. In recent times, the municipality has become more cosmopolitan and ethnoreligiously heterogeneous, partly due to the inception of the Wa Campus of the University for Development Studies. Despite this growing heterogeneity

Table 1 Sampling of families

Male-headed	15
Female-headed	5
Total	20
Educated (with at least a college certificate)	7
Less educated (with at least high school certificate)	13

across Ghana, patriarchal culture (e.g., heterosexuality, men as head of families, and the concept of marriage) remains a dominant feature. Much like in other parts of Ghana (even among the matrilineal Akan group), traditional masculinity in the UWR endorses patriarchal ideologies [7]. Sexuality is often defined in reference to heteronormativity—male–female relationship, penovaginal sex, and reproduction. Any form of deviation is disapproved of. Parents play important roles in socializing children to embrace dominant values in society, and indeed those on gender and sexuality. The urban setting of the Wa Municipality, with its growing cosmopolitan and heterogenizing cultures, provides a useful context for examining this subject to reveal possible ways in which such trends are affecting and shaping discourses on gender and sexuality. In the face of persisting patriarchal values and ideologies on gender and sexuality, it is critical to examine how children understand their sexuality and are likely to challenge, seek to express their sexual choices, and/or resist dominant ideologies on gender and sexuality.

Grounded in poststructuralist feminist constructions of social realities as complex and differently experienced [13], the paper interrogates dominant perspectives on gender and sexuality among selected families to reveal the ways in which they might challenge, disrupt, and resist popular knowledge on gender and sexuality. In light of this objective, 20 families with diverse socioeconomic and demographic backgrounds and structures in the Wa Municipality of the UWR were recruited to participate in the study using a purposive sampling technique. Since we were interested in a variety of perspectives on gender and sexuality, both parents and their children aged above 12 years were targeted and recruited together in the same family. All the families recruited were indigenes of the region. Announcements were made in churches, and some families were recruited after clearly explaining to them the purpose of the study. Other families were recruited through the mosque and sectional community durbars. All the recruited families agreed to participate willingly and voluntarily after giving oral consent (Table 1).

Interview Procedure

Families who expressed interest in participating were provided with further details about the study. Family-based interviews were arranged and subsequently conducted by the first author. The interviews took place at families' homes, except in a few cases where interviews were conducted outside of the family home. The latter became necessary because such families were occupying a single-bedroom apartment in group housing facilities without privacy. Since we prioritized issues of privacy, using safe spaces outside the home became necessary. Parents were given the

opportunity to select whether they wanted to be interviewed together with their children or separately. This was not only informed by the fact that sexual matters were sensitive and moral, but also because sex education in general had been a poorly managed topic in most Ghanaian families. All parents agreed to be interviewed in the presence of their children. Parents consented to the participation of their wards, especially those under 18 years. Some families described themselves as "liberal" and feminist-informed because they thought that "boys" and "girls" were the same and should be allowed to engage in the same activities at home.

Pseudonyms have been used throughout this article to protect the identities of participants. Each family interview session lasted between 20 and 60 min, and audio was recorded with permission from all participants. The majority of interviews were conducted in Dagaare (local dialect), and a few others in English based on participant preference and interviewer discretion. The average size of a family/household was five, with the largest being eight. The average age of respondents was 30 years, with the oldest being 50 years old.

The interview questions covered a range of topics relating to discourses on gender and sexuality within the family space; For instance, parents were asked to share their views, feelings, and reactions on a scenario in which their children would grow up to express nonconforming gender identity and whether such newly acquired sexual identity(ies) would be welcomed. Questions posed included: Do you, as a parent, feel comfortable conversing with your children, especially on sexuality, and to what extent are you comfortable doing this? Do parents think children should have an opinion on their own sexuality, and to what extent is this allowed? Specifically, children were asked: "Do children think the fact that you are a boy/girl affects the way society expects you to be like?"

Data Analysis

In this study, we are interested in how some selected Ghanaian families engage with "talk," discourse, and language as a powerful analytical tool for generating locally grounded knowledge on gender and sexuality. The interviews, transcription, and coding were done by the first author using a line-by-line coding style. With the help of the codes that were developed, all other authors helped in drafting the manuscript after a rough sketch had been presented to them by the first author. Since the first author was responsible for conducting the interviews and drafting the codes, it was considered useful for him to draft the paper. He compared parents' views with the views and beliefs of their children with the aim of ensuring validity and reliability of our findings. A critical discourse analysis was used to foreground the narratives of the participants/families. Discourse analysis as a gender-critical, analytical lens allows us to explore, analyze, and engage meaningfully with language as deployed by different participants [28]. Consistent with feminist reflection on how gender is socially constituted and performed over time and space [5, 23], critical discourse analysis facilitates critical and in-depth examination of the ways in which the social world of men and women is constantly contested, negotiated, and configured [28]

through talk, as well as how language serves to reinforce problematic constructions of gender and sexuality.

Results

The findings are structured into two main sections. The first section problematizes cultural influences on the production of gender and sexual binaries. It focuses on religion and dominant gender binaries. The second section seeks to understand what caregivers (kin, parents, chosen family, etc.) think about socializing younger people (younger adults/adolescents) in terms of gender diversity and sexualities and their role as parents, i.e., "parenthood."

Problematizing Cultural Constructions of Sexual Binaries

Religion and Cultural Taboos

This section deals with how families use religion and culture in reproducing heteronormative cultures.

In almost all of the 20 families interviewed, there were instances in which sexuality was constructed within the framework of biology—as something given by God, with the proper context for fulfillment of sexual desires and pleasure being [heterosexual] marriage; For instance, "manhood" (euphemistically referring to the penis) was commonly associated with the category of men, while "womanhood" (the vagina) was associated with women. The participants perceived that these features had distinct uses and utilities. Andy, a religious leader and father of six children, explained that:

> God created man and woman and instructed them: go, procreate and fill the earth. This is what the Bible tells us. We all know that anybody created with a 'manhood' is a man, anybody with a 'womanhood' is a woman and they must fulfil this natural mandate.

Salome, a mother of seven children, a nurse practitioner, and head of the family, also corroborated the creationists' story that situates gender identity within the biological dichotomy: God created man and woman in his own image. Producing children is a combined project of a man and woman.

Asked whether the essence of sex is to produce children, Salome explained further: "Certainly! Men and women are created to continue the work of God… procreation."

In other families, cultural surveillance was pronounced. Different forms of surveillance were used to perpetuate a heteronormative culture, as illustrated by Brian:

> As for me, I am not a serious church person, but I think children should take seriously the teaching of their parents and church leaders. They [parents] gave birth to them and they are interested in the good of the children. At birth, you're identified as either a boy or girl. Now you grow up and come back to

> tell me [your father] that you're not a boy? Society expects me to act like a 'real man' and father. I always teach my children the right thing; that you're a boy and not a girl and you must act as such. Have you ever seen a 'goat becoming a sheep'? No!

Joe, Brian's first son, 16 years, agreed and explained further:

> Look at me (pointing to himself), my sexuality is determined at birth. Society knows that I am a boy and not a girl through my appearance. So, if I'm a boy and I'm seen going out with other boys at some point in time, say at 20, people will ask me questions. Society expects to see me act in certain ways, like a boy's ways of doing things…going out with girls at that age [20].

Josephine, twin sister to Joe, somehow disagreed and created an impression for alternative sexual possibility:

> Okay, also look at me (pointing to herself). What tells you that my being a girl automatically means that I should be like this or that sexually? It should be about my choice, you know! But that is not what is happening here. Even if you want to be a different person, the heat from society will be too much for you to bear. You know people like talking about things that shouldn't matter to them. People poke their nose where they're not supposed to. You should just be who society wants you to be. But if I am a girl and feel like being a boy, does this concern anybody?

The above narratives are emblematic of voices from many conservative families. Most participants constructed men and women as essentially different with fixed and naturally binding sexual functions. The narratives of these families should be read in light of their backgrounds, religious teaching, socialization, culture, family structure, and most importantly discursive notion of parenthood. Most parents presented themselves as answerable to society on how they should coach, and nurture specific forms of sexuality and gender identity deemed culturally acceptable. Heteronormativity emerged to be the culturally preferred choice of expressing desirable sexuality. The dominant perception that being male or female is naturally or biologically given and that one's biological sex is allied with one's sexual identity enables parents to socialize their offsprings into a predetermined heteronormative gender and sexuality regime. This is in spite of findings that point to some potential attempts at disrupting the dominant values/norms/normalcy and naturalness of sexual binaries. One of the female participants, Josephine, for example, argued that sexuality should be a matter of choice and society should not reduce matters of sexualities to binaries. Her question, "But if I am a girl and feel like being a boy, does this concern anybody?" is a critical attempt to unsettle and disrupt the cultural hegemony of a heterosexist culture. Josephine's comment gestures toward critical discussion about the feasibility of embracing diverse sexualities beyond binaries.

The findings also provide some narratives to support existing work on how belief in and worship of God (e.g., religious beliefs) not only remains an important element

in the production of sexualities but also in their "performance" (behavior). As noted by Michel Foucault and Michael Kimmel, religion as an important product of culture which perpetuates and reproduces discursive notions of sexual identity has well been theorized and remains an important factor legitimizing certain practices while discrediting and repudiating other forms of sexualities as "illegitimate," "improper," and "unacceptable."[1]

"A man is a man forever and a woman, woman forever"

Based on several observations throughout the transcripts in which problematic constructions of sexuality and gender identity were deployed, we were interested in exploring the position of families on the possibility of embracing alternative forms of sexual identity.

Interviewer: How will you feel if one day your son/daughter tells you that his/her sexuality is different from what you imagined? Will this be welcome by you?

Salome: No no no!!! In fact, CAPITAL NO!!! This is not possible…. Ah, I will personally not allow this. How will I [Salome] allow this to happen under my watch? You know our culture does not allow this. I am a Christian. I am even a leader in the church. If I allow it, how will society see me [as mother and family head]?

Grace, daughter of Salome, corroborated this further: "The Bible even preaches against this thing. This thing of same sex is so wrong. My pastor taught me that God hates it and will punish anyone doing it. Me, I would not allow it, too"

Salome continued:

> You see, we need to teach our children that the practice of same-sex is wrong and unacceptable here. I have been teaching my children about this. My sons, for example, are 'manly men'. I mean, they all have girlfriends. At a point in time, I noticed that they were naturally curious and always wanting to be with the opposite–girls.

> Dan: How can I wake up one day to tell my father that I'm not a boy? Then what am I? You and I know very well that once you're born a man, you are a man forever. But come to think about this whole thing of same sex, this is just not proper.
> Mary: I do not believe this can ever happen to my daughter. It was on TV, I heard that some women can decide to be different from their biological selves. But this thing of being different from what everybody knows you to be is abnormal.
> Interviewer: Why do you consider this as an anomaly? What makes it an anomaly?
> Mary: Me, when you are born, you're either a man or a woman. Do we have anything different from this? If I give birth to a girl and one day she tells me that she's different from the girl I know her to be, why would I not think that it's an anomaly? Ah, these days, I just cannot understand what is happening…? Where are we going to with this thing of same sex? Gosh… (Silent).
> Interviewer: So, tell me when you heard it on TV, what was your feeling?

[1] See references relating to [12, 16].

Mary: Terrible! You cannot be like [homosexual] here. It is evil. Me, how can I accept it? What will people think about me?
Interviewer: So, you think it is a practice you will never encourage your children to do?
Dan: Certainly! Religious-wise, God hates this thing of same-sex.
John: How can I encourage them to do the wrong thing? A boy usually introduces his girlfriend or fiancée to his parents. Why don't these people do same? It is just unacceptable (father of Mary).
Brian: Those people who are doing that are possessed by a spirit…the spirit that misled Adam and Eve in the garden.

These interviewees' understandings are located within closely interwoven discourses which inform their perceptions of sexual identities—discourses of cultural heterosexual orientations, religious beliefs, and heterosexual socialization on the properness of sex and socially appropriate expression of sexuality backed by their own conviction. Interestingly, these participants strongly articulated that homosexuality is wrong, improper, and unacceptable. In their imagination as parents and, presumably, well-trained children, they majority sought to preemptively produce a specific form of knowledge which privileged a heterosexist culture while repudiating homosexuality. For those majorities, sexual love and pleasure could only be fulfilled in a heterosexual marriage and children ought to be socialized in this regard. Gender-nonconforming identities were perceived to be demonic, abominable, and antisocial, warranting rejection and sanctions. The act and practice of same-sex relationship arguably invited curses on the family and country as powerfully captured in the comment "God hates this thing of same-sex." Yet, within that same context was the voice of dissent. That different, nonconforming voice offered the possibility for dialogue in spite of the dangers of sanctions.

Disrupting the Gender Binary Narrative: What Have Parents Got to Say?

There were debates and contestations across families about the acceptance of gender and sexual diversity. In particular, some debates attempted to reconcile sexual diversity with religious and societal beliefs. Some families contested the existing sexual regime and its associated unfriendly attitudes and beliefs as "old fashioned," a call for deconstruction. Such families, with an average size of three, subjected taken-for-granted discourses on sexuality to scrutiny that shook the binaries.

Challenging Cultural Taboos on Sexuality in a New Era

Although most participants foregrounded their narratives on the "properness" of sexuality within a heterosexist culture, there were also those who thought otherwise. Culture functions to produce what some perceive as [sexual] "perversion." For example, in a family of two children, Aaron, a lecturer and head of the family contended:

> Over here, children are not allowed to discuss their sexuality. They are taught to know one sexuality… they are either boys or girls and nothing more. But I think this is just unfair. Society should allow children to discuss and choose whatever they want for themselves. My parents didn't teach me this, but as a father today, I teach my children some of these things. As a father, I do not need to assume that my children's sexuality is what I think, as they grow. We're in a new era; an era driven by technology, and parents must teach their children what the right thing is. I always tell them to be careful, because the boys can easily make girls pregnant, which will bring shame to the family. The girls too can fall prey to those 'zipless' boys.

While buying into ideas that situate sexuality as much more complex and fluid, Candida, a mother of two, argued that parents should be more critical and concerned about the sexual diversities that their children are likely to embody:

> I think parents have a major role to play in this whole thing of sexuality. Parenthood is about one's ability to listen and learn from the feelings of their children. This is central in good parenthood. To be a good parent is to be able to know how your child feels when you force him/her to live like something they don't want. This is something I encourage other parents to do.

Abel is a 12-year-old son of Aaron. He waged into his father's description of social norms as deeply unfair and harsh, which invites deconstruction. Abel pointed out: "Society has not been fair to all of us. We are all victims of a harsh system. Society[ies] always want[s] us to abide by the dominant norms regulating sexuality. Me, when I grow and get married, I will teach my children to seek their own interest."

Niebonma, a-15-year old daughter of Zak, also argued for a more liberal and open society, a society in which people as citizens were able to express unconstrained freedom, voice, and choice regarding their individuality and sexuality. She explained further:

> For me, I think society should just allow me to be whatever I want to be like. Like, I always feel like, like being a boy. Sexuality is about your feelings and nobody else should dictate this. You should be free to decide what's good for you as a citizen.

Solo, a 17-year son of Vim, thought that issues about one's sexuality are about personal happiness. He, like his colleagues, encouraged the youth as a generation to invest productive energy in championing a new era of sexuality; an era variance to the "old-fashioned" version of sexuality, as illustrated below:

> We the young generation need to think differently from our parents. Our parents belong to the past and the future lies in our hands as youth. We all know the things that make a man, and those that make a woman, but see, I don't think that these things should be contained strictly in a box. If I want to be, or act like a girl, allow me to be. Period! Boys are culturally expected

> to dress in a specific manner and girls modeled in specific styles. But these things should not be a knee-jerk thing.

Alban vehemently disagreed with his 20-year-old son's, Ziem's, description of the embodiment and practices of past generation as "old-fashioned," and also his ideas on feminism, advocacy for women's rights, as worth embracing. Eventually, both parents and children agreed that people in the contemporary era who still think like their counterparts in the past are "old-fashioned," as illustrated by the comments of Ziem below:

> In my mind, I think we all need to be a bit more critical as youth rather than being glued to that "old-fashioned" style of things. Who even told you that, me, I want to be a man merely because of what my body possesses? It is about my feelings [as a citizen] and not any other person's. Society should just allow me to be what I want.

Narratives that sought to disrupt dominant cultures were situated within the larger politics of "state–citizen struggle." The issue of sexual citizenship and fluidity was a dominant theme among participants who expressed dissenting views. Participants' reference to the term "modernization" ("We're in a new era") with its attendant technologies and liberal stands (for those who identified themselves as gender-egalitarian and feminist-informed families), this allowed them to contest gender binaries; For example, the narrative that "My parents didn't teach me this, but as a father today… I do not need to assume that my children's sexuality is what I think as they grow" is very much feminist-informed and provides both parents and children (especially the adults with sexual/gender awareness) the space to redefine the concept of parenting and parenthood. Abel, like his peers, for instance, was of the view that society was unfair with its fundamentally heterosexist ideologies and argued that "we are all victims of a harsh system." Although he acknowledges that such societal ideologies are coercive due to the pressure to conform ("when I grow and get married"), he also notes that "[he]I will teach my [his] children to seek their own interest." These sentiments point to some contest between societal control/pressure over sexuality and individual agency in (re)producing/abiding by the dominant norms on sexuality.

Discussion

In this paper, we have attempted to interrogate the language of compulsory heterosexuality by confronting dominant discourses of men and women in selected urban Ghanaian families. A common thread connecting the narratives of the majority of these families is that an essentialist, heteronormative perspective on gender and sexuality is likely to be (re)produced regardless of religious persuasion. While we are cautious not to overgeneralize our findings, there is possibility for commenting on sexual identities and orientations within modernizing and liberalizing urban Ghanaian contexts. While the context of the study is inarguably urban Ghanaian and our participants self-identified as heterosexual, patriarchy is a widespread defining

factor that cuts across cultures (even among the matrilineal Akan) to privilege the dominant heteronormative ideologies. However, our findings point to promising directions where education can propel new meanings of sexuality and the production of sexual diversity.

Consistently, evidence as contained in this study does not disrupt significantly the normalized binary discourse on gender and sexuality except in a few families. Our analyses revealed that most parents and even children assumed that heteronormativity was a given, the preferred sexual identity. However, the fact that we can talk about preferences points otherwise, with room for contest and possibility. There are cracks, no matter how small, in taken-for-granted assumptions of the heteronormative, which opens possibility for considering alternative or even diverse sexual choices.

Families of smaller sizes (on average four) and educated beyond secondary school were more likely to embrace diverse discourses on gender and sexualities compared with families that had larger size (on average six) and were less educated. Some young adults/adolescents from families identified as "feminist-informed" (open to sexual choice and gender-aware) contested and resisted the existing sexual binaries compared with their peers in strong patriarchal and gender-conservative families. Hence, the finding that families with low educational qualification and conservative religious background had strong interest in reproducing a heteronormative culture confirms the literature. Such parents' vested interest in modeling the sexuality of their children in line with a culture which endorses patriarchal and heterosexist ideologies should be read within the broader politics of masculinities and femininities. The concept of "parenthood" and the discursive social expectations ascribed to the position of a mother and father remains contested in imagining alternative sexualities.

However, it is noteworthy that the findings also suggest that there is no absolutely conservative family and completely "feminist-informed" family, as complex trends of arguments on gender and sexuality were found in the families. Another caution is that, while the findings highlight that sexuality and gender identities are socially constructed and fluid over time, which resonates with the existing literature, e.g., [6, 15, 23–25, 27], a highly restrictive societal surveillance is also pervasive in the context of this study.

However, it can be said that, within the context of this study, discourses on sexualities and gender identity constitute powerful zones of continuous (re)negotiation for both parents and children. Sexualities become enlivened and contested in an ongoing negotiation for freedoms, choices, voices, and rights within the broader framework of culture and religion, where notions of masculinities and femininities are discursively framed and deployed both as points of access and as barriers to diverse sexualities for differing sexual constituencies. Our findings suggest that most families are most likely to perceive sexuality within strict categorizations and even homogenization [4]. African scholars such as Jane Bennett, Sylvia Tamale, Kopano Ratele, Serena Dankwa, Rachel Spronk, among others, in their studies, take on the subject of the construction of sexual desire seriously and as such pave the way for much needed public education. From our findings, the participants indirectly sought to define and deploy cultural hegemony to foist

masculinity and femininity as rigidly oppositional and mutually exclusive. This view is consistent with recent studies, e.g., [9] where women were said to have viewed the properness, desirability, and authenticity of sex.

One striking point that also needs to be highlighted is how parents communicate with their children and the content of such communication in different families. Without doubt, the content and frequency of communication between parents and children on sexuality and gender identity are shaped by, first, the extent of parents' own sexual knowledge; second, the gender and age of the child and what is necessary to learn at specific times; third, parents' level of education and economic status. While our findings are consistent with those of Lehr et al. [17], parental interactions and engagement with their children on sexuality is largely pragmatic; That is, boys and girls are to behave responsibly and carefully in order to avoid bringing shame to the family. Girls are taught how and when to avoid coming into contact with "zipless boys." Boys, on the other hand, are encouraged to control their "zips" in order not to bring shame to their families. Such articulation is ,problematic as it seeks to set a battle of "boys against the girls" [19, p. 126, 20]. This produces stereotypical attitudes and notions of sexuality as something supposedly initiated and driven by boys [14].

A major concern that emerged from this study is the position of patriarchal mothers. In several families, patriarchal mothers were consistently found to favor heterosexist ideologies. Largely, such women became deeply complicit with patriarchal discourses that police gender and sexuality among men and women. Family headship has come to be associated with patriarchal authority and responsibility. In families where women exercised authority in family affairs (being the heads of the household), they vigorously condoned the "harsh" patriarchal system to perpetuate gender binaries and modeled their children in line with these binaries. Clearly, patriarchy is not exclusively the reserve of men, and while men generally have more access to patriarchal privileges than women, the reverse holds valid, too. In fact, in families in which women embody patriarchal attitudes on gender and sexuality, no such women were far from imagining an era in which sexuality could be discussed beyond the binaries. Our analysis, carefully situated in culture, shows that, where women tended to benefit from the position of real/proper femininity—being a "wife" and "mother," such women tended to embody problematic discourses on sexuality.

The findings suggest that the way in which sexuality is likely to be understood and expressed is shaped by the interplay between culture, religion, and education (sexual awareness). Therefore, persons (gender advocates, policy think tanks, and government) interested in promoting comprehensive sexuality education for young people in Ghana should first work to educate their parents (using the media, e.g., radio and TV) about the growing awareness of young people about gender and sex due to technologies. Sexual awareness in Ghana is generally high, and young people are aware of their sexuality (see [1, 2, 8, 10]), although the majority holds closed rather than divergent views. This opens the possibility for further engagement. However, awareness and understanding of sexual diversity, even if nominally, does not necessarily lead to healthy and safe sexuality. However, the existing awareness can provide a useful platform or point of reference for problematizing dominant notions

of gender and sexuality in the ways that they (re)produce negative platforms for exclusion and domination.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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