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Negotiating masculinity: experiences of black gay men

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Declaration of Honesty

I declare that this mini-dissertation is my own original work. Where secondary material has been used (either from a printed source or from the internet), it has been carefully acknowledged and referenced in accordance with the University of Pretoria's requirements.

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It is through the wonderful grace of God that I have finally come to this perfect silver-lining. This journey would not have been possible without His love and mercy – under His wings, I have found refuge. You are my Lighthouse.

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Montshepetsa bosigo ke mo leboga bosele.

Abstract

South Africa's progressive Constitution remains at the forefront of legislation within the African continent, which emphasise inclusion, freedom and societal acceptance. This social advancement led to the adoption of the Civil Union Act in 2006. This made South Africa one of the first countries to recognise same-sex marriage as well as to bar discrimination based on sexual orientation. Although the Act expresses ideals which strive for human dignity and respect, incidences of hate crimes and discrimination towards members of the LGBTI community still occur.

Sexual orientation continues to be considered a taboo subject, which is often fueled by unsettling stereotypes that justify discrimination against sexual minority groups. Black gay men are a minority based on their race and sexual orientation, this study analyses how they perceive gender and masculinity in particular. The research questions analyse the role of socialisation and other social institutions in shaping ideas pertaining to masculinity through the life-stages of the participants beginning from *boyhood* until *young adulthood*.

Masculinity is analysed using *contextual tools* – which describe sexuality and gender within the South African context, and *conceptual tools* – which provide theoretical explanations relating to masculinity and sexuality. Masculinity will be explored as a dynamic and contextual social construct, which is learned and performed according to one's personal experiences and upbringing. Qualitative research methods were utilised in the form of focus group discussions and supplemented through semi-structured interviews for detailed narratives on the experiences of the participants. The research findings reveal the important role, which primary socialisation agents possess in shaping an individual's understanding of gender and sexuality. The image of a "good black man" remains entrenched in heteronormative ideals, which reinforce homophobic, religious and conservative views. South Africa may have a liberal Constitution but the reality of "coming out" is not without its challenges.

Keywords: Masculinity, sexuality, socialisation, coming out.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Context of this study

South Africa has a past built upon racial segregation and oppression. At the advent of democracy, the face of the black man stood as a sign of power, struggle and courage. The struggle against apartheid amplified the appearance and vigour of countless freedom-fighters and equality activists. There is no doubt that a number of them were – like Simon Nkoli and Beverly Ditsie, homosexual[1]. Whist the contribution of gay activists to the liberation of the country remains vital until this day, their existence seems to be censored and diluted by the very people they fought to attain freedom for (Judge et al, 2008).

The progressive Constitution of the country has in its Bill of Rights human dignity, equality and freedom as its core values. This asserts the non-discriminatory recognition and treatment of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/Transsexual and Intersex (LGBTI) groups. South Africa was one of the first countries to bar discrimination based on sexual orientation as well as to recognise same-sex marriage. These aspirations led to the adoption of the Civil Union Act in 2006. However, notwithstanding these advances, society is paradoxically socially conservative and upholds beliefs, which are predominantly patriarchal, and heteronormative. This manifests in a contradiction between what is expressed by the law and the attitudes of rank-and-file South Africans (Kimmel, 2007; Marais, 2010).

Although rights of the LGBTI community have been positively affirmed by the Constitution of South Africa and by legislation, this is not the case in practice and enforcement. According to Judge et al (2008) there is no question that the powerful doctrines of this country are religious and cultural. Difference in sexual orientation raises questions with regard to notions of sexuality and gender. Judge et al (2008) contend that the Constitution, given this context unfortunately becomes impractical and does not fully guarantee freedom of expression in the everyday lives of those in the LGBTI community. The presence of LGBTI communities pose a challenge to prevailing norms on gender and therefore to patriarchy and its hegemony, hence it is viewed as potentially threatening and immoral.

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[1] The terms "homosexual" and "gay" will be used interchangeably throughout the study

Patriarchy underpins a hegemonic masculinity with heteronormativity often assumed. This establishes a functional gender order. Within this context what is described as "hypermasculinity" or "machismo" is revered. The behaviours that depict hegemonic masculinity are often sexist, homophobic and violent (Connell, 2002; Mkhize et al, 2010). In society the presentation of "machismo" can legitimise a male's identity. Such acts of conformity may assist in the favourable reception of men within society, even by women. Because homosexuality is regarded as deficient, it is perceived to undermine this sense of masculinity. Both heterosexual and gay men may choose to publicly project heteronormative behaviours that emphasise a hegemonic masculinity.

1.2 Describing the study

Compliance to a functional gender order may be maintained by gay black men who seek acceptance. Given this context, the study seeks to explore the extent to which black gay men publicly uphold notions of hegemonic masculinity and compulsory heterosexuality. This will entail an analysis of their views on masculinity and how it can be performed within different contexts according to the prevailing societal expectations. Against this backdrop, this study seeks to understand how a heteronormative functional gender order has shaped black gay men's sense of themselves, particularly with regard to their masculinity and their subsequent sexual practices. According to Kimmel (2007), the family unit is an important primary socialisation agent which teaches and monitors acceptable gendered behaviour, this links with functional roles which are traditionally rooted in childbearing and the gendered division of labour – this means that what is regarded appropriate gender behaviour is culturally determined within society (West & Zimmerman 1987).

The social and cultural scripts for gender roles across institutions in society, reinforces a sense that gendered arrangements are natural and normal (West & Zimmerman 1987). Masculinity is streamed into the consciousness of men through gender roles dictated by society and culture. Functional gender roles, reflect patriarchal notions on the position of the sexes within society. It suggests a clear division of labour between men and women. The key question of this study is *How do black gay men define masculinity?*

Post-apartheid South Africa is a transitioning society which represents a shift to a more inclusive democracy which strives for equality. As a black feminist, human rights are the focus of many of my academic and professional endeavours. Following the commencement of the Civil Union Act in South African's legislation 11 years ago, it seems that the occurrence of hate crimes against both gay men and lesbian women continue to be a major problem (Mkhize et al. 2010). Black gay men were the selected population for the study because of the racial history of the country and less attention within the literature to this group. Black masculinity remains attached to hegemonic ideals which are reiterated by traditional and religious beliefs. Men who are a minority based on their race and sexual orientation were selected because they provide information on masculinity within society as well as the impact of homophobia in it. Transition within South Africa, and the adoption of a progressive Constitution furthermore opened up possibilities with regard to the expression of a sexual orientation previously not imagined.

1.3 Outline of chapters

Chapter 2, *Conceptualising masculinity*, discusses what masculinity is and introduces a number of key concepts such as heteronormativity, patriarchy and hegemony. This chapter introduces the role of masculinity in a gendered society and how perspectives around it are shaped. The conceptualisation of masculinity seeks to understand, describe and analyse what it means to be a man.

Chapter 3, *Contextualising homosexuality and masculinity,* discusses concepts such as patriarchy, masculinity and homosexuality within the South African context. The historical and contemporary overview of forms of masculinity and same sex relationships provides an indication of norms on gender within the society on the one hand and an indication of alternative forms of sexual practices on the other hand.

Chapter 4, *Methodology,* examines the research design and approach taken conducting fieldwork. This chapter outlines the research journey and the challenges faced by the researcher.

Chapter 5, *The Journey: along the pathways of masculinity,* describes the experiences of the participants according to the different lifestages. This chapter also provides an analysis of the data and presents the findings in themes related to the negotiation of

masculinity.

Chapter 6, *Conclusion,* draws all the chapters of the study together and details the significance of the study and the research limitations.

1.4 Concluding remarks

Having briefly set out the context in which the study is located, an interest in masculinity, sexuality has been expressed through the structure of the mini-dissertation. The next chapter explores the manner in which masculinity has been conceptualised and theorised in literature on gender. Whilst it is acknowledged that race – like gender, is socially constructed it reflects a divided reality in the quotidian aspects of people's lives.

Chapter 2: Conceptualising masculinity

2.1 Introduction

Gender relations manifest in an array of institutions in multiple, complex and remarkable ways. Butler (1990: 50) argues that gender is performed and people are merely imitating what they see around them – heterosexuality is therefore the outcome of the myth of originality which comes from the performativity of gender. Masculinity and femininity are heterosexualised because of the oppositions drawn between them (Butler, 1990) and maintained by representing anything other than their difference as "unnatural" (Clark 2001: 560).

2.2 Conceptual notions on gender

There are multiple viewpoints which define what sex and gender is, according to Kimmel (2007) *gender* is a social construct. Socialisation plays a key role in establishing a gendered orientation, which is affirmed in social institutions in society. *Sex* refers to a biological distinction with regard to an individuals' genitalia/reproductive organs in its identification. Therefore, sex is a biological construct which is related to one's physiological structure (genitalia) – this will label an individual as being *male* or *female*. Feminist's criticise drawing a distinction based on sex and gender because the assumption underpinning this "that sex dictates or necessitates certain social meanings for women's experience" (Butler 1988: 520).

The roles attributing a leadership position to men in households (privately) and at the workplace (publicly), grant them more power in relationships. This differentiation reflects patriarchy and fixes sex/gender as unchangeable. Therefore, roles within the family reiterate ideologies which justify men's dominance with reference to traditional/cultural practices. Religion often legitimises these roles as well. In a similar way the dominance of men is often enshrined in the workplace. Therefore, functional gender ideals primarily essentialise the role of males and females in society by linking their sex/gender to unchangeable roles which inevitably lead to a power imbalance.

Feminists argue that the subordination of women is the outcome of the dominance of

men – women's oppression is therefore not only linked to their sex but to the norms which shape views pertaining to their femininity. In Segal's *Slow motion: changing masculinities, changing men* (1990:114) she argues:

> "a 'pure' masculinity cannot be asserted except in relation to what is defined as its opposite. It depends upon the perpetual renunciation of 'femininity'".

The abovementioned quote reiterates the gender power-imbalance which is rooted in socialisation and reproduced through gender mainstreaming. A postmodern approach to gender emphasises that behaviours, norms and beliefs related to masculinity and femininity which are more open-ended and socially constructed (Kimmel 2007, Dunne 1999, Connell 1987, Rubin 1975). Whilst it is useful to demonstrate that gender is socially constructed and therefore not primordial, Butler (1990) argues that postmodern feminism fails to provide a solution to the subordination of women.

To recap, functional gender ideals retain and uphold gender difference through the use of sex roles. Men are therefore ascribed the dominant role in the family. The influence of heteronormativity in the socialisation of men and women plays a key role in the maintenance of sex roles and the expectations that prevail in society and its institutions. Masculinity is often projected as uniform and unchanging and in sharp contrast to femininity. Socialisation entails the process whereby an individual internalises their gender and social position in relation to their surroundings. The inevitability of the socialisation process is unquestionable, but often, masculinity is strongly guided by stringent social expectations because of its centrality in the structure of patriarchy. This is a necessary and inevitable process which every individual will encounter, where they learn the society's expectations and requirements. These expectations are passed on from one generation to another. Socialisation therefore transmits what is acceptable and also expected from people depending on their sex (Gordon & Browne, 1989; Chetwynd & Hartnett, 1978; Scanzoni & Scanzoni, 1988, Segal, 1990; Woods et al, 2002; Martin & Little, 1990; Smith & Daglish, 1977; Reddy, 2001; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Dlamini, 2006; Ratele, 2008; Reid, 2013).

Gender relations are manifested and maintained within societal institutions, the interactions of individuals and their identities – all formed through the process of socialisation. The process of socialisation is formed in relation to an individual's sex, gender, and sexuality and the relationship amongst them. The path that a boy therefore takes to become a man is an institutional voyage that is deeply cultural and normative (Morrell, 2005; Kimmel, 2004). According to Erikson (as cited in Papalia et al., 2009:390) the journey of manhood is important especially during the teenage years. His fifth psycho-social development stage: *identity vs. identity confusion*, characterises the adolescence stage. Socialisation during the preceding developmental stages provides an indication of appropriate gendered behaviour. This therefore becomes a value system which assists individuals to understand who they are. Since adolescence is characterised by sexual maturation, establishing a sexual identity becomes an inevitable process, a rite of passage, which is collective in nature. This process is to a degree open-ended and can cause anxiety and lead to confusion for the individual:

> "…Erikson views development, the major task of adolescence is to develop industry, identity, and intimacy Males in this culture are conditioned to develop industry. Identity is strictly defined and should not be questioned." (Coleman 1981: 215).

Erikson's views on peers, family and society links with the position held by Bourdieu (1984) on the *environment*. The latter is expressed by the term 'habitus', this describes an individual, society (group of people), the environment and *embodiment* - how people carry themselves. Culturally, the world will dictate to individuals how they should live their lives and this is accomplished through socialisation. The 'habitus' will then instill in people the fact that there are costs which are either negative or positive as a result of their behavioural choices. Social practices create the habitus through social values, beliefs and norms and is a product of how life is played out in the 'field' (Bourdieu, 1984; West & Zimmerman, 1987, Loiacano, 1989; Richardson & Jensen, 2003). The field relates to the creation of stereotypes which influence the attitudes of people towards those who they deem 'different'.

Connell (1987) illustrates the close connection between gender and power. She recognises asserting hegemony as the social power of masculinity. The subordination

of women is normalised by various institutions and embedded in religious and cultural dogma. Segal (1990) attributes the subordination of women to a general impotence attributed to *femininity*. Normatively femininity is associated with a nurturing role, and an avoidance of conflict and competition. Those who demonstrate and uphold a hegemonic masculinity isolate subordinate masculinities precisely because of its association with femininity.

Although gender power is synonymous with hegemonic masculinity, it is practiced not only by individual men but by the larger collective, disempowering not only women, but also men with complicit and subordinated masculinities (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). A complicit masculinity refer to males who perform a masculinity which does not fit with the characteristics of a hegemonic masculinity. According to Connell (1987) a hegemonic masculinity legitimises men's dominant position in society (therefore justifying the subordination of women). This inequality is maintained through gendered socialisation, power inequality and the preservation of patriarchy in society. Most importantly, men with a complicit masculinity do not challenge the presence of a hegemonic masculinity, and will therefore benefit from being males in society through the patriarchal dividend. A subordinate masculinity describe men who have characteristics which are perceived to be the opposite of a hegemonic masculinity. Effeminate and gay men are placed within this category because of their alleged emotional and physical weakness.

Connell (2009) positions women in society as typically dominated by men. The power that is awarded to men as a group affirms what she describes as the *patriarchal dividend*. This is an advantage which all men have regardless of the unequal gender order. All men will benefit from the patriarchal dividend because of their sex, but this will not be distributed evenly. Males are further differentiated according to their race, class and sexual orientation. These social constructs as well as their behaviour influence how they are perceived as men.

However, homosexuality jeopardises the domination and assumed supremacy that is to be held by all men regardless of their individual differences related to class, race and social experience (Dunne, 1999; Connell, 1987; Rubin, 1975).

2.3 A reaction to the "gender other": contextual notions

Riggs (1991) describes homophobia as a possible reaction to practices which fall outside heteronormativity. Because people are expected to live according to essentialised sex roles (Chetwynd & Hartnett, 1978), deviation from heteronormativity becomes a social ill which may be dealt with using violence and other injustices. Frequently, the manhood or masculinity of gay men is questioned in light of their sexual orientation. This usually fuels discrimination which may make them a marginalised or vulnerable group in society. Not only is their manhood questioned, but because they are viewed physiologically/biologically as male, they threaten the hegemony of men and that requires a remedial action.

Linking this issue to race, black gay men are denounced by conservative groups, especially religious leaders and policy makers who deem same sex relationships an illegal and deviant behaviour. This is demonstrated by traditional and religious beliefs on gender and power. According to Leatt & Hendricks (2005:303): "even when not organised politically, public opinion in South Africa is overwhelmingly against homosexuality…" I will briefly provide an example using traditional Zulu ideologies on masculinity and its expected expression/performativity.

> "Traditional Zulu patriarchal masculinity is constructed in terms of "dominance, aggression, authority and power, whilst traditional femininity is associated with subordination and passivity" (Leatt & Hendricks 2005: 166).

The abovementioned quote portrays the traditional perception of masculinity as being relational and therefore *different* to femininity. The traditional dogma of many of South African's cultural beliefs are similar with those endorsed by the Zulu ethic group – men are expected to assimilate to these expectations lest they face being isolated and viewed as outsiders. Black gay men are therefore viewed in a negative light because they blur the line between masculine and feminine traits/sex roles which are viewed to be "natural ordained" (Van Zyl & Steyn 2005: 166).

This is also depicted in a negative manner in the media. Riggs (1991: 389) contends:

> "Indeed references to, and representations of, Negro Faggotry seem a rite of passage among contemporary Black male rappers and filmmakers".

Black gay men may be marginalised, assaulted and rejected for their sexual orientation. Certainly, it is made apparent that a black sexuality is always thought of

as heterosexual, because in all that is assumed to be black – homosexuality is an undesired identity. He contends:

> "Hence I remain a sissy, punk, faggot" (Riggs 1991:389).

By repeatedly denigrating the black gay man, their own masculinity is affirmed. These negative ascriptions increase the fear of many black gay men in coming out within their black communities. They may be placed in categories which deem them a kind of "lesser man" (Cooper, 2006; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Van Zyl & Steyn, 2005; Ratele, 2005; Reid, 2013).

In this context, declaring being a homosexual means being unAfrican and this may also be linked to beliefs which regard such acts as westernised fetishes/practices which are expected from people of the white race. Therefore *sex* is transformed into a racialised phenomenon. Same-sex desire is declared foreign to African culture no matter how fragmented its traditions and beliefs are. Gay sex is transformed into *white sex*. This further extends Ratele's (2005) viewpoint on the racialisation of sex and that of *being*. An individual therefore learns that sexual partnership of people of the same-sex is unusual and unacceptable.

Ratele (2005) describes "sex-uality" (sexuality merely reduced to sexual intercourse) as something that is rooted in one's culture, in how it is done, with an individual of the same or opposite sex and at what time and place it is performed. This is similar to the views held by (Bourdieu, 1984; West & Zimmerman, 1987, Loiacano, 1989; Richardson & Jensen, 2003) relating to society/social capital and gender expectations occurring on the 'field'. The idea that gender is "naturally ordained" is criticised by West and Zimmerman (1987). They reiterate ideas similar to those of Ratele (2005) regarding the idea that "doing gender" is basically a system which aims to ensure that individuals meet gendered social expectations. The latter is described as the "accountability structure" and is embedded in society through everyday interaction. The ideas of West and Zimmerman (1987) can be analysed to essentially point out that gender is "created" by humans. This therefore creates an experience and subsequently, either consciously or unconsciously self-awareness developed in the backdrop of social space, perceived difference and its influences (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Adler & Kwon, 2002; Richardson & Jensen, 2003). According to Ratele (2005: 40):

> "Relations with others ought, therefore, to be viewed as instruments to our own interiors, our own names".

This statement poses the inevitability of socialisation and that *being* is influenced by those who are around you. Masculinity is therefore an experience which may be informed by sex but is strengthened by one's environment.

2.4 Masculinity and femininity

Masculinity is not only socially constructed, but is relational to femininity in how it is perceived and performed. In many ways masculinity is viewed to be the opposite of femininity in that it is viewed to be superior and absolute (De Beauvoir, 2011).

The cultural configurations of masculinity and femininity may as Kimmel (2004) affirmed, increase or decrease gender inequality in society. This is because essentialised views of gender place social sanctions on people which are made rigid and unchangeable. These ideas focus on differences between men and women but neglect differences amongst them. What continues to exist with great vigour regardless, is male hegemony and the stereotypical configurations of masculinity such as aggressiveness, rationality and social dominance.

An example of such hegemony is made apparent by acts such as violence. This is utilised as a demonstration of power; it is displayed to reinforce underlying hegemonic masculinities. In striving for the assertion of power, violence is utilised as a form of rationalised coercion which legitimises the idea that men are dominant and have full rights to exercise excessive power in order to maintain their position. Morrell (1998: 609) contends:

> "…violence is related to or legitimated by gendered practices and discourses, men are far and away the major purveyors of violence"

Hate crimes that are targeted towards gay men are usually inflicted upon them by men who practice a hegemonic masculinity of machismo, chauvinism and are at times driven by traditional dogma. A rationale often provided following a hate crime is that the action taken was to "straighten out" the homosexual. This causes many to avoid coming out to others entirely as they fear being attacked or discriminated against because of homophobia (Mkhize et al. 2010). Almeida et al. (2009) explored in a

school-based survey in Boston (US) how such fears cause higher incidences of emotional distress and suicide ideation among LGBT youth. More importantly, hate crimes serve as a corrective function which reasserts male hegemony in society. This reiterates the intention of "assisting" gay men to regain their *lost* sense of masculinity through changing their current "lifestyles".

2.5 Concluding remarks

The conceptual notions on gender describe the relationality of gender. This is meant to draw the gender binaries which are thought to separate males and females. Masculinity cannot be understood in the absence of femininity (Kimmel, 2007). *Gender* is a social construct which is learned and understood through the process ofsocialisation and *sex* is related to *the body* and therefore one's genitalia. *Masculinity* is a concept which has been historically linked to *heterosexuality* and a reverence of hegemonic masculinity/machismo. According to Connell (1987) a hegemonic masculinity legitimises men's dominant position in society (therefore justifying the subordination of women). This inequality is maintained through gendered socialisation, power inequality and the preservation of patriarchy in society.

It is important to take cognisance in the impact of social context in the creation of value systems (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, Adler & Kwon 2002). The meaning which is placed on masculinity affects men differently. The next chapter describes masculinity and its plurality. It will also delve into the role of social institutions such as the family, religion and the media during journey of self-identifying as a black gay man.

An individual's values (e.g. religion and culture) will inevitably have prescriptions related to gender. The idea of a "good black man" continues to reinforce the undesirability of homosexuality and indirectly promotes homophobic values in society. The differentiation between the "good black man" and the "bad black man" creates an *insider/outsider effect* which reiterates the hegemonic order in favour of heteronormativity. The "bad black man" is therefore perceived to either reject or is unable to fit in the categories which recognise patriarchy and heterosexism as a social norm.

South Africa's history of racial segregation and discrimination has shaped the role of

a black man in society – this does not always portray black homosexuals in a positive manner. This rejection portrays a kind of racial "othering". The stigmatisation of homosexuality will be discussed in the next chapter by highlighting important events in the US and on the African continent. Similarly, contemporary studies on sexuality in South Africa will be explored in order to grasp current matters affecting black gay men in the country.

Chapter 3: Contextualising homosexuality and masculinity

3.1 Sexual exploration: the American sexual revolution

In the occident within the context of identity politics linked to the rise of feminism and the civil rights movement in the 1960s, the "gay liberation movement" emerged. Advances such as the introduction of "the pill" for birth control had led to a change in sexual mores within the heterosexual community. The notion of "free love" and "sex for pleasure" dominated and people were not having sex simply for the purpose of reproduction these changes opened up possibilities of greater sexual experimentation.

On the 27th of June 1969 the New York police raided a gay bar in Greenwich Village as homosexual practices were still illegal. This triggered the Stonewall riot and the rise of the gay rights movement (Armstrong & Crage, 2006). With greater freedom, many began to explore their sexuality and participated in various activities. The frequenting of 'bathhouses', pornographic cinemas and sex/orgy parties made up a life built upon what Crossley (2004) refers to as the 'pleasure principle'. It represented an escape from social norms and the domination of heteronormative beliefs. As liberation was achieved, an unintended consequence was the staggering HIV infection rates. This bewildered some, while many within the gay community denied its existence.

The widespread infection of homosexual men by human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) (initially referred to as gay-related immune deficiency - GRID) led to an increased denial of its effects and intensified the stigma attached to same-sex intercourse (Crossley, 2004). Propaganda on what GRID was or where it came from, undermined prevention and treatment. Because GRID was "conceived" as a gay problem and linked to this minority group – this led to more negative perceptions of the LGBTI community within society. With rising infection rates, mortality rates escalated as well. This reality earned religious figures and other right-wing group's leverage over what they believed to be the outcome of a socially debauched practice which disregarded traditional sex roles. This was utilised as evidence of the destructiveness of same sex practices (Crossley, 2004; Ward, 2005).

In conclusion, the sexual revolution became a 'morally-driven' social movement which strived not only to bring equity and redress to the psychological and social restrictions

which largely characterised the life of a closeted gay man/woman, but stood as a gateway to sexual freedom (Crossley, 2004; Armstong & Crage, 2006).

3.2 Heteronormativity and religion: an African-American experience

Ward (2005: 494) describes the relationship between homophobia and Christian churches with a historically high membership of black congregants as an outcome of three possible explanations: (i) religious beliefs, (ii) historical sexual exploitation and finally, (iii) a race survival consciousness. First, Christian values and beliefs have an impact on the attitudes of religious congregations and their individual perceptions. Scripture is believed to have direct references rejecting same-sex attraction and practice. According to him, homophobic rhetoric fuels discrimination and hate within the church.

With regard to the second possible explanation for homophobia, Ward recognises that the church has for centuries been a refuge for black people against what hooks (1996) describes as the: *white supremacist capitalist patriarchy*. African Americans have endured racial oppression and systematic dehumanization based on stereotypes that proclaim them as primitive and carnal. In some cases this also meant that systematic sexual exploitation was experienced by the racial "other". According to Ward (2005) members of clergy within these churches either exhibit strong homophobic attitudes or completely ignore the issue of homosexuality because they fear it may indirectly affirm beliefs which reiterate negative racial stereotypes about blacks.

The final explanation for homophobia is the striving for racial consciousness with an emphasis on procreation and hence the preservation of blackness. Lemelle and Battle (2004) regards homophobia, especially from the black community to be a moral response to the consequences of imperialism and its effect on black traditions and heritage. Homosexuality is viewed as an import from the West and not engrained within an "African ethos". Being a man becomes a performance of an accepted hypersexuality, misogyny and showcasing aggressive characteristics (Kimmel, 2007; Connell, 1987) in order to fight-off racist stereotyping that is thought to undermine black masculinity.

When strong gender binaries and ideals of heteronormativity are revered, this may be the source of indoctrination which justify the legitimacy of anti-gay attitudes and

discrimination. For a gay man being taught these beliefs and being a homosexual poses a paradox that leaves many skeptical towards seeking strong networks within the church. Ward (2005: 500) links this rejection to difficulties in self-acceptance for queer individuals leading to somewhat of a "spiritual genocide". Individuals who experience marginalisation may seek other avenues in attaining social attachments with others, spaces which offer them not only acceptance but also physical safety.

3.3 Contemporary African perspectives on homosexuality and sexual exploration

The LGBTI movement in South Africa succeeded in the recognition of sexual diversity, in the constitution. This protection against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation enabled them to lobby for the recognition of domestic partnerships. It resulted in the Civil Union Act, which validated established intimate relationships of sexual minorities. In recognition of these advances, the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) held its biannual conference in Johannesburg, during September 1999. This was to support South African activists and encourage an increased interest within black communities (Van Zyl & Steyn 2005).

South Africa has legislation which is theoretically inclusive and favourable but this is not the same reality for other developing countries. In different countries in Africa, same-sex relations were criminalised during colonialism. Following extensive media and academic coverage on the coming out of many people in the west, African leaders' legislation have placed an emphasis on retaining the criminalisation status of practices which fall outside the values of heteronormativity. Ugandan President, Yoweri Museveni has described homosexuals as "disgusting" and a threat to religious and customary heritage (Landau, 2014).

Legislation criminalising homosexuality also led to the increased fear of being "found out" as this held risks of falling victim to incarceration and hate crimes. Secrecy and deceit therefore may be employed to conceal information about one's true sexual identity.

Depending on the beliefs which are held, the state may express or reiterate values which fail to protect the human rights and justice of individuals based on what they acknowledge as "normal" and "abnormal". The impression that regards homosexuality

as sinful or deviant provides individuals justification to discriminate against a sexual minority group with no protection for those who are victims of such abuse (Pratt & Tuffin, 1996).

In an attempt to escape the social stigma that comes with being labelled a gay man, some individuals attempt to gain freedom by immigrating to other countries. Immigration may assist in making one's life more private and will ultimately increase their freedom to express their sexuality if they decide to cut ties from their countries of origin. When moving to another country one may become a complete stranger, starting a life on somewhat of a 'clean slate'.

This increases their opportunity to explore themselves and their sexuality. African culture has many expectations for men and women; this mainly has to do with pro-natality and the family name through procreation and marriage. Coming to South Africa does not make issues of homophobia and discrimination void, but to some extent, provides individuals protection as asserted by its legislation. Social spaces have an impact on the behaviour and attitudes of the individuals living within that space. South Africa has challenges with the enforcement of its progressive laws but is nevertheless in strong contrast to countries such as Uganda, Nigeria and Malawi.

3.4 African notions of masculinity

Whilst South Africa is a country with different races and cultures, patriarchy does not fail to make its way in the ideologies and beliefs of all groups. According to Cooper (2006: 860):

> "…there are two predominant images of black men: one as the threatening Bad Black Man and one as the assimilationist Good Black Man. Both are as much a product of myths about heterosexual black men's gender as they are a product of myths about heterosexual black men's race".

The "black man" is stereotypically ascribed with the role of a *leader* or *the social menace*. During traditional initiation school, a man is instructed on how he is expected to behave, as well as on the person he should strive to become. The process of becoming a man begins with socialisation and crucially, initiation as a rite of passage to adulthood in traditional African cultures. Initiation marks a transition and its practices "gives a sense on how masculine identities are formed" (Morrell 1998: 620). During

initiation heteronormative ideals are laid down quite strongly. After entering adult manhood, fatherhood remains an important rite of passage.

Fatherhood and masculinity are often viewed interchangeably, as fathering a child may be recognised as the basis on which a man's success as a male is legitimised and fulfilled. According to Richter and Morrell (2006: 23) "fatherhood is essentially a human, social and cultural role" with an influence which cannot be ignored. Fatherhood plays a major role in how masculinity is perceived and how it is affirmed. Fatherhood is a logical consequence of becoming a man and it is fundamental to his social status. This strongly underlined by the pronatal orientation of many African societies were offspring is highly valued.

The expectation to father a child is common for most men. This is usually culturally and religiously prescribed (Goldman, 2008). Gay men are inevitably marginalised because their attraction is diverted towards men. The idea that fatherhood and homosexuality are incompatible, is present in the beliefs of many people. Parenting is therefore regarded as a heterosexual experience, this debate is also centered on what Ingraham (1994:169) considers the "heterosexual imaginary":

> "the way of thinking which conceals the operation of heterosexuality in structuring gender and close off any critical analysis of heterosexuality as an organising institution. The effect of this depiction of reality is that heterosexuality circulates as taken for granted, naturally occurring, and unquestioned".

The heterosexual imaginary makes evident the revered separation between masculinity and femininity, and therefore directly has an impact on fatherhood as a social concept and experience.

Many African cultures revere the role of the powerful man, providing father, victorious warrior and ultimately the "strong black man". Gender binaries create sex roles which are inevitably assigned to males and females and this creates notions and beliefs that essentialise the experiences of both men and women. Inequality is then justified on the basis of sexual difference and how sexuality is performed and "labelled" (Butler, 1990; Clark, 2001; Ratele 2005).

Stereotypes and other forms of negative labels and treatment is often targeted towards people who identify as homosexual because they are viewed to threaten the values of

heteronormativity. Surveillance of sexual practices is often used as a mechanism to keep people from deviating from heteronormative values. It is evident that the concept of homosexuality is also continually being viewed as a degenerative influence on traditional African culture.

3.5 Same sex relations in Africa

Historical evidence of LGBTI individuals in Africa has largely been unwritten and contested in traditional and academic records. Dlamini (2006: 128) argues:

> "Because of the length of time that has passed, the degree of disruption, and the scarcity of well-informed written sources for that period, one knows little about pre- colonial religious attitudes towards homosexuality".

Historically, the documenting of same-sex relations between Africans in South Africa are captured within the mine compound context. Moodie et al. (1988) and Niehaus (2002) contend that documenting this counters ignorance and claims that same-sex relationships are completely foreign to Africans.

Niehaus (2002) indicates that sex and power was interlinked in the emergence of the compound. Younger men were often vulnerable to sexual coercion and were coxed into relationships with older miners. Same sex practices or the increase in the occurrence of MSM (men who have sex with men) in this context is in this case attributed to the lack of contact between men and women, within the confines of what Goffman (1961) will describe as a "total institution". The latter characterises a formalised social space which has similar groups of people spending a considerable time within that environment away from wider society - the mining compound is an example of a total institution.

In the absence of women, a man had to affirm his power using force to emulate life at home, usually in the rural areas. This was achieved by taking a mine-wife; who performed 'feminine gender roles' within the compound like: cooking, cleaning and satisfying the sexual desires of the 'husband'. Some mine-wives even wore dresses and behaved like women. These 'wives' were constantly protected from the threat of violence exerted by other men either physical or sexual (Niehaus, 2002).

The phenomenon of "mine-wives" – most of whom were already in relationships or married to women from their homesteads, demonstrates the fluidity of gender and sexuality. Taking mine-wives in the compounds was increasingly practiced and known to miners. Such relationships were not labelled as gay and was emulated heterosexual relationships without labelling it *homosexual*.

Case studies from pre-1994 show that there were same sex practices among black African men. The work of Moodie et al. (1988) and Niehaus (2002) confirm the occurrence of same sex relations historically, albeit in particular circumstances. With a greater coverage on homosexuality in media, there has been numerous narratives which have publicly reasserted the experiences of black gay men.

3.6 Black gay identities: a case study on *ladies* and *gents*

A contemporary case study by Reid (2013) details the experiences of gay black men living in rural/peri-urban Mpumalanga. This case study also highlighted the impact of factors such as class and race. He found a sharp distinction between masculine and feminine roles. Men who were effeminate were automatically assumed to be gay. The latter group were described as the *ladies* and could also be labelled as "gay" or "sisButis" (literally meaning *sister brother*). Effeminate males regarded themselves as ladies and those who had some prestige through their mentorship of younger gay boys or men were called "aunts". Those who did not describe themselves as gay had relationships with ladies, but may also have had "heterosexual relationships" with women. They were described as "straight", "a man", "a gent", "gay butch" or as "somehow bended". Being "straight" meant that the gent could perform masculine roles such as having a wife or girlfriend whilst in a relationship with a *lady*. While a "gay butch" may sound like a bit of an oxymoron, it was a term used to describe a masculine gay man who was attracted to ladies. They could therefore be in relationships with men and women and not identify as "bisexual". Being "somehow bended" was no different, these were men who did not regard themselves as gay, they had wives or girlfriends but enjoyed having "relations" with feminine gay men.

One strategy utilised by the ladies was to become effeminate and perform roles stereotypically allocated to the female sex; they also expressed a wish of exclusively being with men (gents). This gender division mimicked heterosexual relationships and

did not segregate gay men from society at large. Integrating into their townships was achieved by choosing to conform to heteronormative roles, this made it easier for them to "come-out" because their sexuality was somewhat 'obvious' to the community rather than them being recognised as just being gay and marginal (Reid, 2013).

While such romantic relationships were openly expressed, homosexuality was not completely accepted by the entire community. The gents often preferred to continue being in heterosexual relationships with women shoring up their masculine credentials. This created a competition between females and the ladies. Their heterosexual female partners were referred to as "roll-on's" by the ladies – they were simply in the picture supposedly for the social and sexual acceptance of the *gents*. This was not viewed as a problem by many of the ladies. Most just chose to ignore or accept this as a normal dynamic. Reid (2013: 64) contends:

> "Multi-partner sexual arrangements were justified as an expression of male sexual needs (including the 'bisexual' needs of a 'straight' man) and were sometimes arranged in a quasi-formal model of a polygamous marriage…"

Being effeminate assisted the ladies in being accepted in their various churches and families because of their very adoption of feminine roles – they considered themselves as "women". This belief was subject to the wearing of women's clothing (even their respective church attire) and allowing themselves to be subject to the power of their masculine partners. This gender binary also described the nature of desire and power differentiation in the social and sexual relationships of black gay men. It also typically suggested a transgendered sexual identity but this was not recognised, probably because there were no lingual or social definitions for it based on the context of this community (Reid, 2013).

The ladies were like women, vulnerable to similar dangers of rape and domestic violence. They also behaved and maintained a feminine appearance by wearing weaves, braiding their hair and wearing women's clothing. They also performed roles which were stereotypically allocated to women within their households such as cleaning, cooking, and following the orders of their husbands. Like straight men practicing a hegemonic masculinity, gents could bring to their relationships an aggressiveness which asserted their power violently onto their partners. This was maintained through a monopoly on the couple's income and control over the

movements of the lady. In a discussion with a gent, Reid (2013: 63) asked him how he felt when he found out that his partner (Msizi) was cheating:

"Obviously if you are a man you have to prove your powers. I had to beat Msizi".

The quote above reinforces the belief that a dominant male's violence against a woman or a submissive same sex partner is permissible in a romantic relationship. This is justified as a mechanism to keep the partner in their place. Such a practice mirrors heteronormative roles which are bestowed to a man (Kimmel, 2007). One lady describes being in a relationship with a gent to be complicated, especially at the advent of sexual relations between the two:

"It was an awkward situation as a girl. When I was proposed (*asked out*), I told them that I am gay…When I said 'homosexual' they wanted to know what that meant. I explained that they are girls, but with no breasts" (Reid 2013: 116).

Ultimately, ladies and gents socially adopted heteronormative roles and appearances of heterosexuals. Their bodies (sex) emphasised the fluidity of gender and sexuality. Whilst the sexual interplay seemed to be of a homosexual orientation at the surface, it was not always held as so by those it describes.

Reid's (2013) study highlights the complex nature of the identities of black gay men. He draws a multifaceted picture of how gay men negotiate their identities with regard to their gender, sex and sexual identity in rural Mpumalanga. Within this context, homosexuality is not easily recognisable nor socially welcomed by those it is assumed to categorise. In his journey through the townships of Ermelo (including some links with groups from metropolitan areas such as Johannesburg and Durban), he recognises a language and practice among gay men that derives from the norms and values created under that specific geographic location. The terms "gay", "lesbian" or "straight" are often described in ways that may be contrary to the meanings derived from academia or the media. They are instead understood using words which constitute the language and culture of the area.

This case study is similar to that of the mine wives in that a man's behaviour may influence how their gender is perceived but not easily labelled. This makes it acceptable to be in a same-sex relationship whilst not being labelled a homosexual.

3.7 Media and opportunity

The media plays a key role in reporting the experiences of the LGBTI community in both a negative and positive manner.

The term "after-nine" [2]gained popularity during the screening of a drama series on SABC 1 called "*After 9*". The series follows the journey which "China" takes on when he finds himself in a dilemma regarding his sexuality. China is a successful black business man with a very overbearing family some of which are very deceitful and homophobic. He finds himself in a long term relationship with his pregnant girlfriend but also living a 'double life' with his gay lover, "Hector". This series shows the hidden life that some black gay men live outside their heterosexual relationships by focusing on spaces such as gay clubs. It follows China's repression of his true sexual identity denial of his love for Hector.

The screening of the *After 9* series sparked much controversy and got a lot of South Africans talking on social media – its reviews were both negative and positive. The after-nine man is similar to "a situation commonly referred to as "the down-low" in US black media (Ward 2005: 499). This individual is recognised by having relationships with women and affairs (usually sexual) with men in secret. Although popular series depicting concealed homosexual relationships can be dismissed as merely being salacious to achieve high viewing ratings from the public, they can highlight LGBTI related issues in the media as well. Whist on the one hand stereotypical and therefore negative such series place the issue of gay relationships in the public domain. Alternative forms of masculinity convey the possibilities of different experiences which can be explored. It communicates both the stereotypes and the possibilities of being gay.

It is no longer necessary to physically travel to another destination to meet a life partner or build social networks. With the development of information technology, the influence of the internet and particularly that of social networks may provide a discreet and effective way of establishing relationships. The use of dating sites or generally, social media, provides avenues for people to satisfy individual needs and desires in a

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[2] When 'after-nine' is written out it refers to the colloquial term, similar to 'on-the-down-low', and when 'After 9' is referred to it, denotes the popular television series (After 9, 2014)

context where wider societal values are hostile or less receptive to a public expression thereof. Because same sex relationships are not entirely accepted in society, alternative masculinities can be expressed through technological gateways which are both discreet, easily accessible and novel (Hitsch, Hortaçsu & Ariely 2010). According to Du Preez (2009: 36):

> "…use of the term 'technology' refers to a more encompassing human activity, which is contextually bound and yet surpasses an instrumentalist view of technology as providing mere tools for human use"

Such technologies are not "mere tools" in that they may be used for reasons other than having a romantic partner. Domains such as chat rooms and social media sites makes it easier to meet others with a similar sexual orientation, providing opportunity for exploration (Arnett, 1995; Hillier et al, 2012). The media is a relevant socialisation agent (Yawkey & James 1988), especially during this new technological age which has both advantages and disadvantages (Flicker et al. 2004). It bears influence on numerous platforms including social media (Hillier et al, 2012), the music industry (Riggs 1991) and public political discourse (Landau 2014).

In the case of individuals who live in countries which have criminalised same-sex acts, the media offers an alternative which does not require immediate physical interactions. This becomes a viable option for an individual who wants to hide their sexual orientation from others. Though this offers some opportunity, it does not come without some risks. Because of the public nature of social media networks, withholding one's sexual orientation proves to come with many challenges. A life online has consequences which may be similar to those which come with meeting people in traditional methods such as "face-to-face" interaction (Hillier et al 2012). Sometimes the wrong message is conveyed and an individual can be subjected to things such as cyber-bullying which may have a domino effect on their personal and professional lives. The media provides a freedom that is as such, a "double-edged sword" it has both negative and positive consequences.

3.8 Concluding remarks

Social institutions are gendered and the interactions of individuals within them are usually patriarchal (Kimmel, 2007). The African-American and black (African)

experience of homosexuality bears many similarities (Herek & Capitanio 1995; Griffin 2012; Reid 2013; Morrell, Jewkes & Lindegger 2012; Constantine-Simms 2000; Loiacano 1989). Both groups fall within the historical minority and similarities can be found in both in terms of the held importance on religion, culture and pro-natility. The latter has played a major role in how masculinity is perceived and how it is expected to take form. Fatherhood remains central in understanding "manhood" because it is presumed to be fundamental to a man's social status in order for them to prove their masculinity.

In a society valuing heteronormativity, homosexuality is understood as immoral, making discrimination and prejudice against gay men rife. Riggs' (1991) sentiments on homophobia does indeed resonate with what he describes as one of the root causes of homophobia – a possible reaction from people to changes in the expected social and sexual relations between individuals.

The next chapter will outline the research design and approach which were utilised for the study to answer the research questions posed.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The performativity of gender is layered with cultural, religious and wider institutional values which result in the monitoring or acceptance of one's sexual identity. Gender roles are learnt through the process of socialisation. We are therefore streamed by our families, institutions and interactions within these structures to fit within particular gender roles. These roles set expectations on how we must perform as males or females (Kimmel, 2007). Sex roles play a significant part in discourse which promotes heteronormativity. This underpins patriarchy and male dominance which characterises homosexuality as deviant and abnormal. Scanzoni and Scanzoni (1988: 17) assert:

> "gender roles or sex roles are the parts society assigns us to play in the drama of
> life according to whether we entered this life as a baby girl or a baby boy".

It has been argued that masculinity is socially constructed rather than being predetermined. Hence, it is fluid and multiple in nature (Halperin, 2003). Being gay raises questions around masculinity posing a challenge to male hegemony and patriarchy. This leads to strong condemnation of homosexuality and a questioning of gay men's masculinity.

This study intends to analyse how masculinity is perceived and performed by black gay men using theoretical and substantive ideas relating to homosexuality and gender. A qualitative research design, according to Silverman (2010), allows for the expression of subjective experience. Qualitative research delves in the meanings people give to their experience – providing rich, detailed and textured data is therefore essential (May, 2011).

Such an approach provides insights into how social institutions have shaped their perceptions of masculinity by prioritising the "voices" of the participants. This allows them to reflect on the journey's they have travelled though their life course.

4.2 Research questions

This study sets out to explore the experiences of black gay men in negotiating their masculinities. The key question therefore is:

How do self-identified black gay men in South Africa define masculinity?

This question examines the subjective experiences of black gay men and how they perceive themselves not only as black but as men who are homosexual. Riggs (1991) suggests that there are difficulties which black gay men will face as a result of their masculinity being either questioned or denied. Linked to the trajectory of becoming a man and being gay, the following subsidiary questions are posed as well:

- What were their experiences growing up?

This question sets out to explore their recollections of how they were reacted towards, their awareness of being different as well as the expectations others had for them. In light of this, one can ask:

- Do black gay men believe that initiation is an important rite of passage into adulthood as a male?

By asking this question their thoughts on the influence of traditional practices and cultural expectations for black males are considered. (Richter and Morrell, 2006; Mosothwane, 2001).detailed the importance of initiation school as a rite of passage into manhood. This process of socialisation is regarded as key in shaping one's perception of masculinity. Initiation school therefore plays an important role in transferring societal expectations of what a man is expected to be, in particular a father, husband and provider for a family, therefore:

- How do black gay men view fatherhood?

This question explores the participants' view of fatherhood and their perceptions of the role of the *father-figure* in establishing and shaping manhood. During initiation heteronormative ideals are laid down quite strongly. After entering adult manhood, fatherhood remains an important rite of passage. Morrell (1998) describes pronatility as a revered social role in African beliefs, it is also regarded as a gateway to manhood

in various African traditions. A question which then arises is to what extent is that an issue amongst black gay men and a measure of their masculinity for them. It has been suggested in the literature that gender has a performative dimension (Butler, 1988), therefore:

To what extent do black gay men feel compelled to perform hypermasculine roles to pass as a man in a dominant heteronormative context?

This question looks into the extent in which heteronormativity influences the behaviour and beliefs of the participants. Connell (2009) emphasises that men benefit from the patriarchal dividend because of their have access to power which is not afforded to women. This patriarchal dividend will be explored as pertaining to the experiences of black gay men. It will also describe the advantages and disadvantages of conforming to the heteronormative status quo, to the extent that one "passes as straight" to receive acceptance, therefore:

- What are their experiences of being gay?

The social expectations advocated by society towards a man are often relational to those held for women. This question explores the role of the primary socialisation agents as well as peers.

4.3 Sampling procedures

The following selection criteria for participants in the study were set: (1) all participants had to be black (2) self-identify as gay, (3) be out to at least one person and (4) be between the ages of 18-35.

People within the LGBTI community, women and young children can easily be regarded as lacking power and being vulnerable in society. The existent power relations are made apparent for example by hate crimes, corrective rape, domestic and sexual violence. There was a challenge in locating participants for this study because, as stated by Faugier and Sargeant (1997), individuals self-identifying with such groups may risk becoming a target of discrimination in society (Almeida et al 2009).

Snowball sampling assists a researcher to access sample groups which are perceived

to be hard to reach. Because of difficulties relating to locating black gay men who were openly out to at least one individual, this technique was utilised. It was helpful because "initial contact may be with a member of the population who will lead the researcher to other members of the same population" (May 2011:101). Some participants in the table found above were recruited through LGBTI organisations which advocate for equality for sexual minority groups. These organisational networks assisted the researcher to locate potential participants for the study.

4.4 Data collection

Since this study sets out to explore how participants define masculinity, it is best served by a qualitative approach, focusing on in-depth narratives, to highlight norms/values and subjective experiences of the participants. This approach is centered on the *insider's* experiences and requires the *researcher* to be aware of her own worldview. Focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews are flexible and open-ended. The use of these methods are consistent with the research goals of this study through obtaining a narrative of their experience.

4.4.1 Selecting methods

This study applies a qualitative methodology which assists in attaining subjective personal narratives (May, 2011). In order to get participants to talk about their experiences as black gay men, focus groups and semi-structured interviews were undertaken to have "conversations with a purpose" (May, 2011). The researcher's intention set out to utilise focus groups as a research method, with individual semi-structured interviews as a follow-up strategy. This was meant to provide participants the opportunity to express their views on the topic of the study in both the group and interview sessions. Focus groups are defined by Powell & Single (1996: 499) as:

> "…a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research".

These focus group discussions provide insights into the complex and dynamic nature of people's behaviour because the participants are in discussion with each other. A further advantage of using this method is that the researcher can move to the background by fostering discussions between participants who may feel comfortable

enough to speak to others who share similar life experiences. However, clarity can be requested by the researcher within the open-ended context.

In the planning stages, it was anticipated that focus group discussions would have 5 participants per session at a neutral location subject to the availability of the participants. These group discussions were used to explore divergent views and experiences. It was felt that participants who were surrounded by people who shared the experience of being gay would create a non-threatening and safe environment in which they could express their views. During focus group sessions, the researcher set out to the role of a moderator, facilitating the discussions and when necessary – to probe and receive more information from participants relating to the topic. As planned, she also attempted to encourage free-flowing conversation though observation during the sessions and using prompts which enabled the participants to talk freely. Morgan (1996: 133) contends:

> "An important theme that reappears in many of these uses of focus groups is their ability to 'give a voice' to marginalised groups"

An advantage of using this method was that the researcher could move to the background and foster discussions between the participants without interference. But this was also a disadvantage of using focus groups, because the research method relied on participants reporting on their own experiences (Powell & Single 1996).

4.4.2 Recording, transcription and prompts

The key questions of the study were informed by the outlined focus group prompts (video clips and newspaper articles) and interview questions (*see Appendix on Interview schedules for the detailed list*) There were three video clips, they were based on three topics but had many similarities. The first was an interview between CNN reporter Zain Verjee and Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni. In this clip, the criminalisation of same sex relationship is explored within the African context.

The second clip is taped in the US during a gay pride event. It particularly focuses on the issue of immigration by African citizens to the US in order to escape the criminalisation of same sex relationships in their native countries. It also exposes the risks of "being found out" and discusses the deaths of LGBTI individuals through

hate crimes.

The final clip covers the idea that continues to be held which recognises homosexuality as a western experience which is deeply unAfrican. The participants receive a brief history on sanctioned African/traditional practices which express same sex desire but are overlooked and recognised as acceptable.

In addition, articles reporting on coming out, homophobia and anti-gay laws were read by the participants for comment and further discussion (*see Appendix D for the articles*). The interviews were mainly undertaken in English or Vernacular (Setswana), these were dependent on what the participants felt comfortable to use. After permission was granted, the researcher obtained the audio of the sessions by recording them onto a device for verbatim transcription with some minor language editing for readability. The Vernacular transcriptions were translated to English. The transcriptions of the sessions were analysed, and the participants were identified using pseudonyms. The themes of the study were, as previously mentioned, informed by the key research questions. The researcher also led a debriefing session at the conclusion of all the sessions, this was characterised by the discussion of what had been deliberated upon and the lessons-learned.

The researcher understood that the nature of the topic influenced the selection of an appropriate research methodology as the content would be based primarily on the lived experiences of the participants. These narratives were shared during the focus groups. These focus groups are "…a form of group interview that capitalises on communication between research participants in order to generate data" (Kitzinger 1995:299). Semi-structured interviews were also organised to get in-depth information from the participants. After the data was collected, themes were outlined according to the research questions, the experiences and knowledge gained by the researcher. Below is an extract detailing some of the highlights and challenges faced by the researcher during the process of field-work.

4.4.3 Conducting the research

There were three focus group sessions, one paired-interview and six individual interviews held for this study with a total of eighteen participants. An ice-breaker to

introduce the participants was planned in each focus group session. Its purpose was to ensure that the participants felt comfortable and relaxed. In addition, the video clips which had relevance to issues relating to black homosexuality, homophobia and sexuality served as prompts to trigger spontaneous discussion by the group. A list of short questions (*refer to Appendix C*) based on the content of the videos served as a reference to prompt further discussion were required.

Below is a demographic table with the details of the participants per session:

Demographic Table[3]				
	Name	Married/Single	Nationality	Location of session
Focus Group A	Timothy	Married	Nigerian	Pretoria
	Sean	Single	Zimbabwean	Pretoria
	Kim	Single	South Africa	Pretoria
	Mbanda	Single	Zimbabwean	Pretoria
	Reggie	Single	Congolese	Pretoria
Focus Group B	Kev	Single	South Africa	Pretoria
	Sipho	Single	South Africa	Pretoria
	Mandla	Single	South Africa	Pretoria
	Fred	Single	South Africa	Pretoria
	Tiisetso	Single	South Africa	Pretoria
Focus Group C	Lerato	Single	South Africa	Pretoria
	Michael	Single	South Africa	Pretoria
	Ken	Single	South Africa	Pretoria
Paired-interview	Katlego	Single	South Africa	Johannesburg
	Zandile	Single	South Africa	Johannesburg
Individual interviews	Larry	Single	South Africa	Pretoria
	Rue	Single	South Africa	Pretoria
	Ronald	Single	South Africa	Pretoria
	Lerato	Single	South Africa	Pretoria
	Michael	Single	South Africa	Pretoria
	Ken	Single	South Africa	Pretoria

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[3]The total number of participants is 18

They were free to take copies of the articles after the focus group discussions for their own use. The focus group discussions had a lunch break half-way through the session (approximately after an hour into the discussion) - all the sessions were catered. The provision of catering was an attempt to create a conducive environment for free-flowing conversation. Six individual interviews and one paired-interview were structured according to a list of interview questions (*refer to Appendix C*). The latter was characterised by questions which were semi-structured, flexible and open-ended. This is consistent with the research goals of this study.

4.4.4 A brief methodological diary

Subsequent to receiving ethical clearance to begin the fieldwork process, I leapt at the opportunity of finding participants, especially because I had been involved in seminars, attended youth group sessions and had membership in two LGBTI societies around Pretoria consistently for almost two years. In spite of my involvement in LGBTI societies I had to work hard to receive call backs from potential participants. I built relationships with the participants via social media and follow-ups through phone calls before meeting them. This was done mainly to achieve rapport and to spread awareness of the study without sensationalising the topic. I emphasised the aim to study the process of coming out, emerging sexualities and how they relate to their sense of masculinity.

Focus group discussion A: Whilst organising my first focus group session I met my key network contact, a researcher and Master's student in his thirties through a lecturer at another university by conversing with him through online messaging and phone calls. I was pleased when he agreed to assist me to find participants for my study and even though he was a bit curt and difficult in the beginning, I managed to secure five men to attend.

He could not join the session as he exceeded the youth group age range (18 – 35). The majority of the participants lived in Johannesburg and were unemployed. All transport costs for participants who were travelling by public transport to the focus group or individual interview sessions was covered by me for their convenience. I was notified when it was received and the next day they made their way to Pretoria. I picked up one of them at the university's sports grounds. He was visiting a friend but I reimbursed him for the transport fees nevertheless. When arriving at the session

they seemed comfortable and most of them spoke freely.

After consistently being an attendee of the LGBTI youth group meetings I had established a friendship with the Health worker/counsellor at the organisation. He mentioned my study to the group (after a youth meeting on a Saturday). Two people expressed interest to participate. One of them agreed to attend the second focus group session with a friend while simultaneously asking the friend to spread the word about it. I managed to secure five participants but two cancelled at short notice.

Focus group discussion B: The second focus group discussion was constituted by university students - two had lecturing positions as well. On the day of the session, an hour before commencement an individual who heard about the focus group session from a friend expressed an interest to attend. He insisted, via SMS I ask him to attend the session. I did so as a sign of courtesy. After making all my confirmation calls the participants all arrived as expected. One invitee who previously confirmed his participation, did not arrive and his phone was off. I found this group to be far more assertive and informed about gender concepts and theories.

Focus group discussion C: The process of organising the third focus group session lasted for almost three months without success. When I finally contacted someone in Pretoria (female), she offered to help – she had a nephew who was openly gay and asked him to assist me in arranging this focus group. When I called him, he was very polite and willing and ultimately organised the attendance of four other participants – I kept in contact with him until the morning of the session to maintain communication. Up to 10:00 am, on the day one participant cancelled to attend a "social". On the day of the focus group session he told me that there was a change of plan in the transport arrangements. I would have to get help from someone to fetch one participant in one area of the township. I arranged the logistics and all of them arrived at the venue. The session was at a family member's home. They were away, which enabled me to use the space to accommodate the participants. The session was lengthy and informative. After the interviews they wanted to stay longer and bought wine and talked about parties and dating. When they were ready to leave I dropped them off at their respective homes and was invited to a party by one of them.

The interviews assisted me to obtain narratives from the participants in a personal manner. These sessions provided me with the opportunity to discuss certain topics

spontaneously only utilising the interview prompts when I felt the discussion became too open-ended.

Paired-interview: There was only one paired-interview which took place and this was scheduled at the residence of the two interviewees. They were colleagues at work and shared the apartment together, presumably not as a couple but as good friends. They were kind and were excited to be a part of the study. One was very much introverted whilst the other was outspoken and confident. He insisted I asked him questions about "why men cheat", and that a discussion had to be held on the matter. I agreed and we talked more on this and many other topics.

Individual-interviews: The first individual-interview was the outcome of a planned focus group discussion which did not materialise – only one out of the five participants arrived. One claimed to have broken his leg on the morning of the session, two of the participants had their phones off and one participant said he was busy at the last minute. I accepted the apologies as I made it clear to all the participants that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the research at any stage without any consequences.

All the food was bought and ready, he apologised for what had happened even though he had nothing to do with it – it seemed as if he felt compelled to help me as much as he could. We decided to continue, changing the session to an individual interview. After the interview I continued to see this participant at the LGBTI youth meetings and we talk from time to time.

This second individual interview occurred at a restaurant over tea. The interview went really well. We grew up in the same area and were members of the same church. We still keep in contact.

I meet the third individual interview participant through a colleague and set up a meeting the same week I contacted him hoping not to get a cancellation. We had an online conversation and agreed to meet at a restaurant in a mall in Pretoria. After the interview he requested that I ask him more questions, I followed through and after doing so we had a light-hearted discussion on gender and sat together for some minutes before we went our separate ways.

After completing the three focus group discussions and first three interviews, I felt

comfortable with my method and how the interviews were undertaken. I obtained the confidence to approach people and preserve through the cancellations and the snubs. My fourth, fifth and sixth individual interviews occurred after the final focus group discussion.

The diary above illustrates the challenges that I faced to find participants for my study. It was clear from the beginning that my topic concerned people from a minority group but I realised things about my own personality as well. Firstly, I had to be aware of issues relating to reflexivity. As a woman, I was aware that the participants were gay males which may grant me the unfortunate role of being perceived as the "outsider". To achieve effective and swift rapport, I utilised qualitative research methods which provided the participants the opportunity to communicate in an open-ended manner. Being an introvert and reserved around people affects one's confidence to approach people but with increasing difficulty in getting them to converse with me. I became more consistent and heightened my networking skills, inevitably I was introduced to participants who were available and could organise the interviews. In the end consistency ultimately proved to be the lesson. I became relentless and kept approaching people and in the end my work earned me access within various social and youth groups. The snubs furthermore underlined to me the sensitivity of the topic as well as the vulnerability of the participants. I always accepted that if they changed their minds on participating, I respected their decision without exerting any pressure.

4.5 Ethical considerations

A consent form and information letter (*refer to Appendices A and B*) were given to the participants for completion before proceeding with the focus group and interview sessions. In this information letter, potential participants were reminded that their participation in the study was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any point without facing any consequences. Permission was also sought from the participants to record the interview sessions for transcription purposes. Pseudonyms[4] were created by the researcher to refer to the narratives of the participants in order to protect their confidentiality. The researcher approached this by always assuring the participants of their rights and provided information on who she was and why she had chosen the topic - this made them feel more settled and

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[4] *see* Appendix E for the participant profiles

comfortable to participate (Salkind, 2009).

Some participants appreciated the opportunity to talk about these issues and their similar experiences. The latter consisted of a discussion about the lessons learnt from the session and what could be helpful to understand moving forward. The role of the researcher consistently focused on the well-being of participants (Ellis 2007), if some issues were deemed sensitive; the participant had the option to cease to discuss the details of their experience. The findings of this study also respected their right to privacy and was not meant to be utilised for any reason which was not stated in the Information Letter (Zimmer 2010). The participants were also reminded of their personal contribution to the study, their rights to confidentiality and also any other ethical considerations which informed the study. Information on the counselling services offered by LGBTI organisations was also mentioned for participants who sought further psychological and emotional assistance.

4.6 Concluding remarks

The brief methodological diary reflects the journey through the field work process by recounting the achievements and challenges which were encountered during the research study. The researcher utilised research methods which were appropriate with the research questions and sample group selected for the study.

Chapter 5: The Journey: along the pathways of masculinity

5.1 Introduction

The recollections of the participants are to an extent shaped by their present circumstances. The narratives of their past experiences growing up reveal a lot on how they situate themselves with regards to issues of masculinity and what it means to be a man. The themes in this chapter express the growing sense of "difference" amongst the participants in their perception of their masculinity.

5.2 Boyhood: early recollections of "difference"

While thinking back on growing up a number of the participants recalled incidences which made them feel different to their peers. For many reflecting back this "difference" was based on how their behaviour was seen as being feminine by family and friends within specific spaces. These experiences made some of the participants emphasise the importance behavioural self-monitoring increasingly took on in order to hide what was perceived as unacceptable behaviour (femininity) as they became aware of it. Those who experienced feelings of "being different" were socialised in what was considered appropriate gender behaviour. Such awareness uncovers the gendered expectations held by the participants' primary socialisation agents.

5.2.1 Being in the family and early recollections of gendered relations

The participants who were inclined to be more feminine in their expressions were often allowed some leeway as young boys. Their behaviour at this stage was regarded as cute and harmless. As they entered public spaces (such as primary school) they were expected to emulate the social behaviours learned through the process of socialisation on sex roles, put simply – the accepted performed masculine patterns of behaviour. Early childhood therefore granted them more leeway in terms of how they could behave, but as they grew up, people's sentiments changed. With the growing expectation from family on conforming to how "to act right" as boys, an increasing awareness of their difference emerge and this inevitably led to behavioural self-monitoring. Timothy reflects on becoming aware of how he was perceived and how he was expected to behave in order to receive approval from others:

> "I really worked on it (*masculine behavioural traits*). Because I then got to a stage whereby like people were not complimenting me again. I think they were like "hmmm woman, hmmm woman"…I think when I was growing up it was sweet there were much compliments but while I was growing (*older*) it became…like hmmm…hmmm people were now getting irritated" - Timothy

Timothy's recollections also highlights how adults, specifically family members increasingly became uncomfortable with expressions of feminine behaviour, especially when other people started noticing it and to question it negatively. It may be that the behaviour remained unchanged or grew stronger over time, confirming to family that this was not just a *cute phase.*

Like Timothy, Katlego recalled his growing awareness of expectations of how he should act. He dealt with this tension by fluidly moving between being girly and boyish. In contrast to Timothy, he did not feel the need to hide his femininity around family members because they were more accepting. He altered his mannerisms to ensure his acceptance. Katlego found that his own family understood why he could not get along with the other boys and rather preferred the company of girls:

> "…even if I played with my male cousins, they'd always treat me like the girl cause…I was more in touch with my feminine side then…" - Katlego

Michael also described his family – especially his mother – as embracing his femininity as a phase. He claimed her approach to raising him was similar to how a girl child would be treated:

> "…I had long hair my mother used to love doing my hair, like relax it and braid it"
> – Michael

He shared accompanying his mother to work once, and being checked by a group of women undressing him to reveal whether he was really a boy. He believed that his genes made him become more feminine and this was something he could not control. Sipho, who grew up in a rural area claimed he faced no resistance from his family for trying on women's clothing and then walking around the village dressed up:

> "But I think that's from the fact that, and I see that a lot of effeminate boys growing up, it's when you do what I did also, I used to dress up and put on my sister's hair and we did all those girly things and my parents were fine with it. I used to wear

my mom's clothes, play around the yard; no one had an issue with it. Because I think that the time, I didn't think, they took it seriously they just see it as a phase, you understand" - Sipho

Like Michael and Sipho, Ken shared his recollection being free to express his effeminate behaviour within his family home. They did not respond negatively and did not label it as deviant. Because of this, his chores within the household were diverted to the duties ascribed to women (e.g. cleaning, cooking and washing the dishes). This led to him sharing household responsibilities with his sister:

"For me at home it has never been a problem because I grew up with my sister and we used to love playing all those girly games, we would all cook, we would all cook and my mother could see that her son is gay. And when she would call me, when she would call me, she would love to say *girly boy*" - Ken

Household chores are often gendered. Whilst for some of the participants their femininity led family members to gradually delegate stereotypical female chores to them, Zandile did not view the allocation of those roles to him a consequence of his perceived femininity but rather due to his obedience:

"I mean when it came to chores in my house I was one of the obedient kids who always did what is expected not necessarily because I was gay but because of the way I was raised as well" – Zandile

Those who felt comfortable around their family and faced limited stigma were able to experiment (feminine hairstyles, clothing etc.) with confidence. Due to a myriad of differences relating to family background, culture and class not all the participants consciously self-monitored. Such active policing of behaviour usually followed incidences where their behaviour was deemed inappropriate and unacceptable which led to them being reprimanded. Timothy altered his behaviour as he became aware of the expectations of others. Whilst Kim realised that he was perceived and treated differently, he had no idea why this was so. With hindsight he contends, had he known the root of people's negative treatment towards him, he could have hidden his femininity without getting noticed.

Some of the participants were easily accepted by family for how they behaved while others had to compensate for their femininity by a marked increase in stereotypical

masculine activity. For them it became a double-bind of either being true to themselves or conforming to the expectations of others (and the existing sex roles and norms).

5.2.2 Early recollections of being in Primary school

During the primary school years, most self-monitored their behaviour to meet expectations but to different degrees as the gender lines become less fluid or progressively more solid under different contexts. Kim shared his memories of self-monitoring his mannerisms, specifically in perfecting his "masculine walk":

> "So one day I remember I stood at the mirror and I told myself, "okay how do I walk?" I look, "why do you sway when you walk?" So I checked how I walk, I see this bending, I now change it. So I just worked on it worked on it…to be straight acting" - Kim

By conforming to the norms and expectations of those around him, in spite of feeling different, Kim adapted to what was deemed acceptable behaviour for a boy. Katlego also recognised his femininity as detrimental due to how he was treated by his peers in school. He therefore restricted his "girly side" to time spent with immediate family and close friends.

The bathrooms at primary school, segregated by sex, heightened the anxiety of some of the participants. It clearly inscribed *the body* in a very intimate way. Many were weary of the possibilities of being "discovered" as being *different*, even when that *difference* was not completely understood. Katlego recalled his discomfort in this space:

> "…I was always so scared from Primary…I've always been so scared of going to the bathrooms or…just being, I felt uncomfortable you know…just males in one room and everything" - Katlego

The bathrooms magnified the differences between boys and introduced an element of how one could "measure up" and effectively fit in. His anxiety resulted from feeling that he did not *fit in* with the other boys.

Michael's experience was different, being perceived by others as androgynous, he consistently faced questions about his gender, like when a new pupil (boy) was introduced by the teacher to his classmates in primary school:

> "…there was this other guy who came in the middle of the year and because at school I had long hair my mother used to love doing my hair, like relax it and braid it. So the other guy, we sat together in groups of 6, so the other guy they asked him who he wanted to sit next to…he said he wanted to sit next to that *guy who looks like a girl* but he sat…he went under the table and tapped me in my private area to feel what I had [laughs with others] You understand? So uh that thing only occurred after a while because I'm thinking I'm wearing a shirt and trousers so if he wanted to see something why didn't he go to a girl or something?" - Michael

Whilst he claims being comfortable with his androgyny, he equally felt pressured to behave like other boys and in turn became recognisably more aggressive towards other students as a way to affirm his masculinity by playing rough (in the context of *breaking rules*).

> "…I was feeling lightly like a girl but mostly I felt like a boy because I stayed being naughty and enjoyed playing in a rough way and doing all those rough things. So yeah I loved the experience in a way." - Michael

Furthermore, in spite of often feeling *lightly like a girl* Michael always defended his friend, Lerato (also a participant) and often came to his defence during physical altercations. Lerato agreed with Michael, and confirmed that his effeminacy made him the target of bullies:

> "…hence I told you that in primary (school) I was the naughty one. But he (*Lerato*) was the quiet one, so if they bullied him or anything I was always there to beat them up…" – Michael

Fred also made sure that he behaved in a manner which was considered appropriate for those around him. He described his time in an all boy's boarding school as being fueled by anxiety because of the risk of being bullied. Although he was perceived as the "most masculine" in his group he was acutely conscious of the ill-treatment that his effeminate friends received. He recalls this as a time literally encompassing what "survival of the fittest" meant. During the week, his school had them assigned to seats in the dining hall and on weekends the students could sit anywhere they wanted to. For him and his friends, things were completely different:

"…so people were like scared of us as a group initially and this is when we were trying to fit in and people would move away from the table…like literally would not want to sit with us" - Fred

When his friends attempted to sit in their assigned seats the other boys afraid of being tainted, asked them to leave. He felt that the other boys behaved in this way because they may have said to themselves:

"…*we do not want to be associated with what you are known to be*. I would have people even come to me and be like "why do you even hang out with those guys?" you know…but you do not understand and obviously I wasn't able to say that at the time we could not even say gay for goodness sake, we had like codes and little signs for it" - Fred

His statement makes it clear that being recognised as "one of them" meant possibly being gay and this was not a desired attribute. He also highlights being aware that he was "different" but had no vocabulary to describe it because he did not understand it. He and his friends had "codes and little signs" that they used when they were separated through the seating designation rules in the dining hall – possibly because none of the other boys spoke to them during this time. The other students would throw water at him and his friends and say that they were not at the *Milan fashion week* and that such encounters could also become violent:

"And sometimes it got physical and people would come and push you around a little bit and you would have to fight back and sometimes the person is way older so you cannot fight back and they would be like "why are you like this man?" so yeah it's been there" - Fred

He recognises the fact that his experience in school would have been better if the school had stepped in to protect him and others like him, but it chose to ignore what was happening. According to him, counselling was offered but did little to assist them practically or with preparing them for life after school.

5.2.3 Concluding remarks

Early childhood recollections of difference began to take place within the family network. The participants became aware of their difference as reflected through their 'playtimes' with relatives and close friends. During this time, their behaviour is often

overlooked as cute and harmless which is therefore marked by a limited or lack of rebuke by family members because of their feminine behaviour. In primary school, a division between the boys and girls is established and learned. The bathroom is an example of a single-sexed environment which emphasises physical differences (linked to genitalia) between the boys and girls. This also affects how basic descriptions of masculinity and femininity are perceived during this age. Behavioural expectations from peers introduced a need for self-monitoring for some of the participants as they wanted to avoid being bullied and isolated by the other pupils.

The memories shared by the participants on their experiences of difference do not necessarily mean that all of them were feminine in their mannerisms. It neither suggests that all gay men are all essentially inherently feminine. This section described how societal expectations shaped the way individuals saw themselves and their masculinity by either accepting or rejecting the existent sex norms.

Many participants experienced a *double-bind* with regard to how they perceived they ought to behave (an expectation held by family and friends) versus how they personally felt. Most made the decision to rather conform to the expectations of others (especially of family members) fearing isolation and being viewed as outcasts.

Family members and close friends characterise one of an individual's vital primary socialisation agents. The values and beliefs that are entrenched into a person during their upbringing will often have a long-lasting effect which will inform their decision-making and thinking until they are adults. During their socialisation, practices and values relating to gender (sex roles) prescribe what is appropriate for a male or female. When behaviour was recognised as "deviant" from the norm, most of the participants utilised self-monitoring in order to mask their *difference*.

5.3 The teenage years

During the teenage years the policing of gendered behavior becomes considerably important due to the influence of their peers. This phase is also the start of an individual's sexual maturity and an expected interest in the opposite sex. Therefore the increasing need for behavioural self-monitoring in order to "fit it" with their peers becomes more apparent.

Zandile described going through a hard time because boys who were perceived to be effeminate were continuously mocked and bullied at his school. He explains his attempt to "pass as straight" to avoid physical fights and verbal confrontations, which may have exposed his "weaknesses":

> "…I didn't like to get into that because I get quite emotional and when I do you will see that this guy is gay. [Laughs] Ja, I'm not hiding it I mean people will know…that I'm gay now…I'm saying as a person I'm emotional so when I express my emotions I would do it in a *homosexual way* where you will see the element of gay (*stereotypical feminine behaviour*) coming out you understand" – Zandile

Because Zandile stereotyped himself in this way, he had to avoid being targeted as gay, effeminate and weak. Ronald admitted to facing some difficulty getting along with his black male peers (aside from the girls). Being from the suburbs he was not influenced by *loxion kulcha*/black pop culture – its language (slang) and mannerisms ("the cool kid", idolising gangsterism etc.). He did not fit in with the cultural practices and was inevitably isolated and ignored by the black boys in his school which made him a target for bullies. This is similar to the sentiments held by Riggs (1991) on "black pop culture" and the kind of behaviours which are deemed "hip" or acceptable. Because Ronald did not speak or behave in this manner he was side-lined and isolated by the black male students in his school and became more comfortable when he was around his female friends:

> "…I never had boy-friends…I always had girl-friends, uhm hence I was teased a lot for having girl-friends cause I could relate more to girls than boys." - Ronald

In contrast to Zandile, Ronald decided to play rugby - a contact sport, to demonstrate his masculinity and therefore to be able to fit in. Whilst most preferred closer friendships with girls, they simultaneously felt a need to conceal their difference either by avoiding detection or by taking on a stereotypical masculine role. Fred also recognised sport as a key indicator of a boy's masculinity in school. He described the person who made it on the rugby first team as *the cool guy* at school, this was the face of what "a real man" is. On the outside, he and his friends pretended to strive to be a reflection of such an image but as soon as they were alone they were free to behave as they wanted:

> "…we could go to our room and play Beyoncé" - Fred

As teenagers, most of the participants dealt with feelings of wanting to *fit in* with their peers at school. Grappling with whom they were romantically attracted to heightened feelings of difference. Two participants unsuccessfully attempted to come out to family members during this life-stage. The brushing off of their disclosure and denial of its significance by family reaffirmed the power of the heteronormative ideal of masculinity.

At the age of 15, Ronald shared information relating to his sexual orientation with his grandmother and subsequently his uncle who also dismissed his feelings as a phase which will come to pass. While talking to his grandmother he recalled:

> "I remember this day and I was, cause I was really confused cause like you know what, I think I'm bisexual and she's like: "why do you think so?" like no just there's some things been happening in my life and then she said: "no, you're not, you're just going through stages in life…" - Ronald

Even though he and his grandmother shared a very close relationship, the matter was never spoken of again. He then attempted to come out to his uncle who responded in a similar way to his grandmother had. His uncle was an individual who he often sought "manly" advice from, and whilst he responded saying that the topic of his sexuality would be raised at a later stage, perhaps when he was older, it was not discussed again. This frustrated him:

> "uhm we never talked about it again and then I feel like they've forgotten that I was once tried…so from that experiences like you know what, I'm not gonna tell anyone what's going on in my life if, if you wanna ask me if, are you like this? Come to me, ask me, and I'll tell you. If I feel comfortable in talking to you I'll tell you hey, this is what's going on in my life, if I didn't I'll deny it or I'll be like *please forget about it*, it's nothing to do with you." - Ronald

Ronald therefore learned through experience that he was not to raise the issue and that when he did, it was ignored or denied. Larry's disclosure was also instantly dismissed in a similar way. In his early teenage years, he recognised his attraction to men. Adopted as a teenager he feared his step-father with whom he had no emotional attachment. He related to his step-father only as a strict disciplinarian who definitely would have had a problem with his attraction towards other boys. After a complicated initial attempt to come out, he remembered feeling isolated and forlorn – he decided to keep his thoughts and feelings to himself.

For many of the participants, given the constraints within the immediate familial and community contexts, there was a performative element to this (passing as straight) and an importance placed on pretending to have romances with girlfriends or a constant deflecting of questions relating to their dating life.

5.3.1 Initiation schools

Sipho was the only participant who attended initiation school. It was a common practice for young men to go to initiation school in rural Limpopo. He contended that he had no difficulty integrating with others during initiation school. In effect, he had mastered the processes of passing as straight.

A majority of the participants expressed an allegiance to conservative religious beliefs. This is the source of their values and has been instilled in them since childhood. Christian beliefs are at times in opposition to traditional cultural practices. Initiation is a rite of passage which may be understood to clash with monotheistic religious beliefs, given its recognition of traditional African beliefs such as communication with one's ancestors and the acknowledgement of spiritual forces.

The participants who did not attend initiation school alluded to the fact that it was never perceived as necessary by their families because of their Christian beliefs. They also believed that they had not attended initiation school because of the areas they had resided in during their upbringing – though some mentioned that they were from rural areas. During the field-work the participants in the sample all resided in urban areas in Pretoria and Johannesburg.

The common view held by these participants was that it was unquestionably risky for gay men to go to initiation school. For the others the possibility of being out or sanctioned, was a perceived threat and therefore an incentive to avoid attending initiation school and other single sex environments as well. Ken felt that feminine boys would be a target for ill-treatment and bullying from the other boys to the extent that they may actually be treated like they were women:

> "They will call you *auntie Sophie* there…and auntie, and things like that and they
> would make him cook and stuff like that…" - Ken

Although only one participant attended initiation school, most were already aware at this age of their own perceived "difference" and the risks of being themselves around their peers.

5.3.2 Concluding remarks

Growing up there were instances where some of the participants may have had innocent bonding experiences with other males but not in an explicitly sexual way. For most, the opportunity to explore sexual relationships arose in contexts where they moved out of the direct ambit of their family as a result of migration.

5.4 Young adulthood

During the young adulthood phase there are increased opportunities for sexual exploration and freedom. During this life-stage, one's education, residential area and financial stability may grant them access to express themselves in different ways. This opportunity may have previously been limited by the presence of strong connections to the primary socialisation agents such as the family and church which one regards as areas to hide their sexual orientation. During young adulthood, the participants still self-monitored their behaviour but most still chose to hide who they were to family. Because of an increased importance placed on secrecy, the media provided opportunities for the participants to meet new people.

5.4.1 Freedom in new social spaces

Sean described his first sexual experience with a man – his roommate - within the context of residing within the University residence. In his room, he was able to express affection and sexual attraction towards his roommate without being apprehensive about explaining it to other people. What began as an ordinary drunken night between friends was the inception of a romantic and experimental relationship which was hidden within the bounds of their residence room. Sean regarded the acts that took place as 'sweet' and new to him, but contends that it always felt natural:

> "Then one day it happened that we went into our room and we slept on the same bed. That's how everything started. So we, and I think [I] was the first one to start if I'm not mistaken [Laughs] I think I'm the first one to start because I start by touching his dick, I remember, it was very nice" – Sean

In a similar vein, Reggie recalled travelling to Brazil to further his studies. This provided the opportunity of anonymity which enabled him to explore his sexuality. He developed a close friendship with Carlos, a married migrant he shared accommodation with. They began watching pornographic films together then started frequenting gay clubs. This led to their sexual relationship:

"…he put in that porno movie so we start watching till around 01:00 then that guy was touching me" - Reggie

5.4.2 Print and social media

Although they may have felt isolated in their attraction to other men, public knowledge on homosexuality was disseminated through media reports and social media. Timothy relates how he came across a Nigerian gossip publication called *Hints Magazine.* The story entitled: "*I caught my husband sleeping with another man*" made him aware of his surroundings and the possibilities of an alternative to heteronormativity. According to him, *Hints Magazine* and *Best Lovers* were subsequently banned by the Nigerian state because of its salacious coverage of sex amongst other gay and lesbian activities. Becoming aware of the LGBTI community and dating portals enabled him to meet his South African husband online:

"I met him on Facebook, we were friends…I noticed that okay this whole thing is becoming stronger, it was going stronger. Okay why not come here?" – Timothy

Social media offered some a gateway to meet potential partners and provided an opportunity for increased anonymity. Katlego met the man he had his first sexual experience with on a gay chat room:

"My first time like I have to be honest I was 20 when I really started but I made sure that I payed for all those years…that I made sure, I met him through the social networks and everything then he came to my place the same day…he took me to his place and that's the first time ever we…I didn't know what happened…I met him the same day around 14:00 it was 14:00 or something and then around 17:00 I was in his place having sex" - Katlego

Whilst social media enabled participants to break free from the social/environmental constraints in which they found themselves locked in, it also increased their opportunity to attain anonymity and to explore. Some pointed to its drawbacks as well

- for Sipho online dating sites or the chat rooms, reiterate and strengthen stereotypical notions of the LGBTI community and oversexualise gay relationships.

> "I think it's problematic and that's why I didn't do for instance the online dating and all these sites where we meet men and stuff like that. Because a lot of what happens there is purely sexual…" – Sipho

His rejection of being labelled online (by people who presumably share his sexual orientation) is constant with his need to maintain a queer perspective which he has read widely on with regard to his sexual behaviour and identity to society as a whole. By removing himself from these sites he reiterates his rejection of sex roles and the stereotypes held that all men who are homosexual need partners only for sexual engagements. Sipho avoids sites which will regard him as something that contradicts his identity as queer, this makes him very cautious of being possibly viewed in a stereotypical manner.

5.4.3 Concluding remarks

Young adulthood is a period of gender exploration and sexual experimentation. This marks a phase which the sexual preferences of the participants was perceived and practiced. The need for anonymity becomes essential for sexual expression without facing the risk of "being found out". The opportunity of immigrating to a different country grants some individual's the freedom to explore their sexuality by avoiding incarceration (if same sex relations are criminalised in their country of origin) and from being stigmatised by close family and friends. The media also provides a discreet gateway for meeting new people but carries the risk of unwanted sexual labels (e.g. top, bottom etc.) which essentialises the roles of individuals within romantic relationships.

5.5 Barriers to coming out

Whilst moving away from immediate family members enabled many of the participants to seek an opportunity to explore their sexual curiosities and desires, they still faced constraints with regards to full disclosure of their sexuality.

5.5.1 Family matters and pro-natality – "passing as straight"

The expectations of family members which relate to traditional values of what it means to be a man (e.g. having a girlfriend/wife, having children and getting married) continue to influence the act of behavioural self-monitoring as expressed during this theme by the participants' decision to *pass as straight* to family and colleagues whom they have not disclosed their sexuality to. Most of them were not fully out to family members, they believed that this posed a risk of them possibly facing rejection/stigma leading to them being disowned.

> "So there are those in the family that are hard-core when it comes to those kind of things and they expect you to do the whole girlfriend thing and you know it wasn't my thing…" – Zandile

Mbanda is one of nine siblings in his family, when his younger brother got married before him he describes how it had a ripple effect on his life:

> "…it's difficult, for me it's difficult...in my family we are nine boys. And I feel like my parents they were trying to get a girl child. That's when they ended up having so many kids. So my young brother got married. I think he impregnated something like four girls. So last week my elder brother was sending me messages asking me: hmmm do you have a child now?" - Mbanda

The fact that his younger brother got married and had four children of his own, indirectly affected Mbanda and raised questions surrounding his romantic relationships as well as his ability to demonstrate his masculinity. The expectations that his family have for him are amplified because of the success his younger brother demonstrated in fathering children.

Given these challenges and expectations, Mbanda introduced his boyfriend as his girlfriends' brother whilst visiting family in Zimbabwe.

> "I just said it's my girlfriend's brother. So they were so happy about it, they even gave us a family car to drive around. So now they are busy asking: "When is the girlfriend coming?", "Do you have a child now?" - I'm not responding" - Mbanda

The treatment that he and his beau received during this visit confirmed the importance of these expectations. Being honest about who his 'friend' was would have resulted in

rejection. But within African traditional culture introducing a partner to family is an important moment. It is linked to prospects such a marriage and the birth of a child. There is a perception amongst the participants that if they assert their homosexuality their families would be humiliated by their coming out.

Most acknowledged a persistent need to be accepted by their family members. This led to managing their relationships by hiding their preferred sexual orientation and fabricating details of heterosexual romantic relationships like in Ronald's case, having a heterosexual relationship with a woman in spite of his preference for men. Ronald generally felt uncomfortable discussing his sexual orientation with others and admits to not being judgemental to those who lived as after-nines as a kind of "double life":

> "…I feel like I didn't have to come out to anyone, that's my perception…what goes on in my life it has to do with me" - Ronald

Reggie also expressed his frustration at the belief that gay men were not real men and did not deserve to be fathers or were not able to procreate. He went as far as sharing information of his sexual prowess with the focus group participants, which according to him far exceeded that of straight men.

> "I didn't choose to be gay…they must know it's about what I feel. I sleep with girls and can do better than those that say they're straight [Laughs] but it's not what I feel. I didn't enjoy." - Reggie

Most participants shielded their sexual orientation from family members while a few had no fears of coming out. Ken's family accepted his feminine behaviour as a child, and even as a man who is clearly effeminate, he has no issues disclosing his sexual orientation to them. Ken also shared his family's acceptance by referring to his brother who after three years of him not seeing his family, nonchalantly inquired whether Ken was gay or not. Ken offered this as an example of his great relationship with his immediate family.

If one's family is aware of an individual's sexual orientation, meaning that they are free to express themselves openly, this clearly impacts on how the participant deals with societal expectations while being secure in the knowledge that they will receive familial support regardless of the received feedback from others.

5.5.2 Religious beliefs

There was ambivalence amongst the participants pertaining to the position taken by religion with regards to homosexuality. Whilst many welcomed religion in their lives, it also left them feeling like outsiders in their communities. Timothy was raised in a very religious family; he experienced tension between his sexuality as a gay man and being the son of a well-known religious figure.

> "…okay I come from this very religious family, dad is a…has a post in church and growing up you were all expected, as a girl you were expected to have a boyfriend and as a boy you were expected to have a girlfriend, cause it [same sex relationship] is sin so you have to keep yourself like that and grow old" - Timothy

The participants who were religious stated that they were often questioned by people around them on how they could be both religious and homosexual. Fred went to an all boy's faith based (Anglican) school, he remembered his time there as difficult and filled with anxiety because of the bullying he experienced. Fred briefly recollects his experience with depression and active self-monitoring during his time in high school:

> "…my friends and I went through serious depression and just not knowing how you fit into the world because people can be mean, because everybody sort of like becomes one person in high school"

Ronald recalled introducing his mother to his girlfriend at the time. He admittedly described this relationship as undeniably unromantic. He recognised that the only reason he got a girlfriend was to prove to his family, friends and his congregation that he was straight, their relationship would also be viewed as real because his girlfriend was a very active member of the church. Through this façade, Ronald managed to keep peoples' prying questions of his sexuality at bay. He believes that this was taken well by his peers at church but his mother did not seem entirely accepting of the relationship. Though she had never had a conversation with Ronald about being gay, she remained apprehensive about his relationship with this specific partner and with other women in general.

Ronald mentioned being surprised at his mother's reaction, he perceived her to be overtly suspicious and unsettled with the idea of him having a girlfriend even though this was widely accepted for boys of his age. He stated that she was more concerned

about questions surrounding what drew this particular woman to her son – he perceived this as a clear sign that his mother already knew that he was gay. The fact that the woman was an active member in their family church made no difference to his mother's dislike towards her.

> "I'm like no I think my mom knows. Every mother knows what is going on in their child's life you know…like I grew up in her eyes, she saw the things that I used to do." - Ronald

Even when Ronald pretended to be straight, he still faced challenges in asserting his masculinity. He mentioned hearing rumours of people in his religious circle discussing whether he was gay or not, but none of them ever asked him this directly. Ronald valued his religion and linked it to his identity. Other participants were reluctant to be involved in religion because of their negative experiences:

> "We didn't go to church that much because they mock us every time. Because when you enter everyone turns around and look at you" – Lerato

As an effeminate man; Lerato felt that having people stare at him when he attended church made him feel very uncomfortable. He felt that he would "stick out" amongst the congregation because he does not pass as straight and his effeminacy would then not be hidden from others – this would immediately out him to others as gay without him having the opportunity to conceal this information. To illustrate how they are treated differently, Larry relates that people in the congregation often stared and gossiped about an effeminate man. He states that being effeminate would obviously highlight an individual's sexual orientation and this was regarded being against African values and expectations:

> "One time at church, there came this guy who was very feminine to join our church. Look he was not even trying he was just there you didn't need to ask the question…The painful part with us black men is that we are told from growing up never should a man date another man, it is wrong. It's not our culture it's not religion and God doesn't like it" - Larry

Linked to Larry's experiences is how Ken was perceived in his church. According to him, when they (congregants) identified someone as gay they would orient that person

on *what a man should be* as a way to monitor their behaviour to conform to their own expectations:

> "Now you were making them want to pray for you and tell you that you have a demon, that you are demonic. So we are going to pray for you, you are a demon and that thing is going to come out" – Ken

On the day of his confirmation, Michael recalled how the pastor changed the course of his sermon and began to share his thoughts on homosexuality. He perceived the behaviour of the pastor to be deeply unacceptable and felt compelled to defend himself:

> "Recently I made a statement because I am always in trouble. *The priest said this before we even read the* 10 commandments, started this topic that gays whatever whatever whatever, so when it was my turn to do the 10 commandments so I just stood up there *forgetting that* it is a temple of worship and said to the priest: "you know what, you have a fucked up life *because what you are saying* you are reading it from black and white, nobody knows that is true. So you go to school to be a priest, it doesn't come to you, *so you are fake so didn't come tell me that because I will give you what you won't like*" [5](Italics translated) –Michael

His public response shocked the church and he walked out in the middle of the sermon after having his say. The pastor later apologised. Michael maintains that what he did would make people hesitant to bully him in the future. He therefore finds himself a religious man who faced intolerance for an orientation he believed he did not choose. The participants reconcile such stereotypes in two ways, either by conforming to the expectations of others or by rejecting them completely. All the participants believed they were normal.

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[5] "Recently I made a statement because I am always in trouble. *Moruti o thomile this before re tlo bala di*10 commandments, started this topic that gays whatever whatever whatever, so when it was my turn to do the 10 commandments so I just stood up there *ke lebetse gore* it is a temple of worship and said to the priest, you know what you have a fucked up life because *nthwe o e bolelang* you are reading it from black and white, nobody knows that is true. So you go to school to be a priest, it doesn't come to you, so *o fake so o ska tlo mpotsa tsona tseo because ke tla go fa motete*" - Michael

5.5.3 Social media and dating: the risks

The internet grants people the opportunity to experience things outside their immediate environment and explore their sexuality as have been suggested, but this comes with risks of possibly being found out. When Mbanda's brother saw a post on his social network profile of another man complimenting him on his looks, he immediately contacted him in disbelief. The comment read:

> "Nice lips, I wish I could kiss those lips" - Mbanda

Because of the public nature of social networks, withholding one's sexual orientation proves to come with its own challenges. Because he did not want to delve deeper into the reasons behind this brazen post he opted to act completely baffled about what he's brother was talking about. But his brother became more persistent and wanted answers:

> "Then he said how can someone comment on another man saying…and I said I didn't know, I didn't see that…(*before*) he dropped the phone he said to me, call me when you want to talk to me. So I did not speak to him…he called me after eight months…" - Mbanda

Mbanda who had already led his family on by introducing his boyfriend as his girlfriends' brother was put in a difficult position and ultimately had to accept getting his brother upset rather than exposing his true sexual orientation. Discontinuing communication with his family is what he feared the most but during this time, staying in the closet continued to be extremely important. The expectations that his family had for him made him conceal his sexual orientation publicly. Some of these expectations were grounded in religion. Since he was from a religious family, he felt compelled to remain discreet. Mbanda was more concerned about his reputation within his family networks and ultimately how he would be viewed by his community back home as well as the impact his publicly coming out may have had on the standing of his family in the community. He is very attached to his sister and the two share a very strong bond. He mentions her on two occasions during the focus group session:

> "I am close to my sister. At some point I feel like, let me just tell her what is happening. Then I feel like I might drive her away from me because in our country

(Zimbabwe) that thing, it's something else…If I come out, I might lose my sister, I might lose my mom and life won't be easy for you when you are just now living *nje* (like this)" - Mbanda

Social media may grant one a *virtual community*, but for some this will never be enough to sustain them as individuals in need of connections which go deeper than the internet. Blood relations were consistently viewed as important by the participants. Their activity online was recognised as a risk by potentially causing ruptures within their familial and social relationships if they were exposed. This double-bind created an opportunity – *forming new networks* and a constraint – *potential familial rejection.* There was also an attempt by the participants to avoid being "pigeon-holed" and being labelled negatively.

5.5.4 *"Who's the man in the relationship?"* – Sex roles, MSM and after-nines

The occurrence of stereotypes about members of the LGBTI community usually denigrate them by linking their sexuality to perversion. Some of the participants mentioned constantly being asked "who the man in the relationship was". They believed this to be shaped by the wider assumption held of homosexuality by people.

Ken shared some of the names given to people who were perceived to be gay in his community:

"Growing up I knew a gay person as gay or a transgender (*moffie, trassie, magwetsa – literally translated as "the receiver"*) someone without tops-bottom, versatile. And it means when you are versatile you are a gay that you sleep with a man and that man will sleep with you but I didn't know, it's the world today" - Ken

He refers to these names as "*the world today*" which underlines his feeling that labelling evolves over time according to the held perceptions of people within that context. Some thought that the phenomenon of the top, bottom and versatile embody a trend which made meeting a prospective lover easier, according to how they viewed themselves and their preferences. For example, some of the participants alluded to the fact that if an individual was to recognise themselves as a *top* (masculine, aggressive, dominant) they were stereotypically viewed as more likely to go for a *bottom* (effeminate, passive, submissive).

> "They just want there to be positions, I am top, you are bottom. And if I am top I am the man" – Ken

Descriptions such as *top*, *bottom* and *versatile* were examples of labelling within homosexual relationships/community. For others, these were constricting sexual labels which are used in an active or passive way (or a variation) within sexual relations which were not granted open recognition and acceptance in society. In this respect, it was seen as replicating the heteronormative conventions with all the associated power dynamics and related consequences. Whilst many of the participants recognised this drawback they insisted that these labels were not to be taken seriously as they were merely individual preference and said nothing about the individual. Rue resisted such labelling and argued:

> "…for example let's say you are a bottom they assume you were asked out and then people start asking you this question, it's an inappropriate question like: *who is the man or the woman in the relationship*? which is a terrible question to ask, it imposes heterosexual standards or norms of homosexual relationships and that's a problem." – Rue

Rue clearly rejects not only the assumed differences between males and females, but also the stereotypes held about same-sex relationships which maps heteronormative roles on to them. Labels such as whom the role of a "top" or "bottom" is in his opinion a symptom of an overall expectation from society which promotes heteronormativity.

Many acknowledged the common view held by the majority of the participants which labelled the actions of homophobic men as a response to their own homosexual desires. Their actions were therefore perceived as a type of defence mechanism which was an attempt to conceal their fears of being "found out". The participants who reiterated this belief also stated that homophobic men were possibly "acting out" their "homosexuality" in hidden spaces (like after-nines).

According to Katlego and Zandile, the after-nine man is identified as a bisexual man who wants to enjoy the benefits of sleeping with women but escape the prejudice that comes with having sexual relations with men. Other narratives on the after-nine man are linked to promiscuity and unfaithfulness:

> "They are selfish, I want to tell you one thing about bisexual guys they're very

arrogant, they're very stupid and they are weak…the people who do hate us the most they're bisexuals. People who hate gay people without any reasons in most cases they are gay" – Katlego

Katlego has an ambivalent position with regards to after-nines, at times he introduces them as bisexuals or as gay men who refuse to come out. His roommate Zandile does not view after-nines in this ambivalent way. Zandile refutes the existence of *bisexuality*:

"Question for me is, are they really bisexual?" - Zandile

What remains consistent is the views of most these participants is that one cannot 'play for both teams', they do not accept anything outside the homosexual and heterosexual divide to be real and authentic.

"And it's very little if it ever exist very little bisexuality really" - Zandile

Zandile deemed sexual intercourse as an activity that can be engaged by people of the opposite or same-sex but only one (sex) is capable of being a life partner. He believed that the process of coming out as bisexual is easier than coming out as gay. It was a route that he himself utilised as a buffer from social isolation. He believed that bisexuals were on a journey of coming out as homosexuals. After-nine men were routinely viewed as closeted gay men within other interviews. Sean described his sexual relationship with 'straight' married men as more frequent than those with openly gay men:

"I have got twenty-two numbers, I can even call them now and say, "How are you? How is your wife? How is your kids?" [Laughs] - Sean

Katlego also joked about the dishonesty of the so-called 'straight men' that often frequent his home:

"These men, after-nine men, I have them, I'm sure I have more than twenty, and I met them every now and then they will come" - Katlego

He further shared his opinion on married after-nines:

"The only thing I can say now is the same man that you have your husband the man who's married…who has that kind of dignity and respect from his people or whatever I'll tell you, my phone is full of them" - Katlego

Katlego's prowess to attract men, underlines his hypersexuality and machismo and that is how he "flaunts" his masculinity – by bragging about his promiscuity. The latter is a behaviour/practice which has stereotypically been attributed to straight men. Katlego basis his promiscuity to his desirability which is the reason behind why married heterosexual men are attracted to him. Kim also shared his experiences of dating after-nines who had romantic relationships with women at the same time. He showed little if any empathy for being aware of the existence of a girlfriend when pursuing or accepting passes from men:

> "…its unfair yes but then…what you didn't know won't hurt you I guess, I'm sorry but then it's true" - Kim

Kim understood the decision to date women publicly and men in secret to be rooted in the expectations his family has for him as a man:

> "I didn't blame them (*after-nines*)…its really tough, especially in the world that we living in now to come out…especially when your family expects…something from you like maybe a grandchild, a wife when you come from traditional families. I'm not gonna judge them." – Kim

Kim's compromise was to secretly engage in same sex relationships and publicly satisfy the expectations of his family by having a girlfriend as well. Ronald also openly shared his views that after-nines were not to blame for living their supposed double lives because it's a situation which is forced upon them by their family members. It was clear that the majority of the participant's undermined bisexuals' and after-nine men's masculinity because they considered themselves as *real men* who weren't afraid to come out at least partially and date solely within their preference. The masculinity of an open or out gay man is therefore regards superior to the masculinity of a man who lives out his preferences with men secretly.

5.5.5 Critiquing and resisting sexual/gender labels

The decision to practice behavioural self-monitoring in order to conform to societal expectations creates a *double-bind* effect. This will be analysed in this theme by interrogating the strategies adopted when living out the *expected masculinity/masculinities*. Ronald described facing labelling from others as affecting him negatively because it could limit his chances of acquiring healthy relationships

with those around them, especially in the case of romantic relationships:

> "at the end of the day that top bottom thing is only a sexual uhm status… at the end of the day we both men, you understand – one cannot be superior to the other, unless we have some kind of power or whatever but then it's just like, women and men, we both equal in a relationship." – Ronald

Ronald's rejection of this labelling was linked to his critique of the inequality it conjured up. He referred to the relationality of gender and the existence of power relations which granted some people more dominance over others in society. Rue uncovered how labels within same-sex relationships actually work against the building a healthy sex life:

> "They come into a relationship where I am a bottom and that's that and that does a disservice to sexual exploration and sexual service and how two couples should explore their sexuality and their sexual play together." - Rue

A response which was an extreme shift from the majority of those resisting gender/sexual labels came from Reggie. When probed on whether he had plans on getting married in the future Reggie ironically stated that this would not happen as he viewed homosexuality to be grounded on the act of sex – not marriage. He explained:

> "Normally when you think gay life the big point is sex…sex takes a big place" - Reggie

He also admitted that he did not find anything offensive when people reduced homosexuality to sex, he remarked further on the subject saying:

> "Yes i(t)s a sex life" - Reggie

Reggie regarded marriage as something which worked best in a heterosexual relationship. According to him, males are incapable of being monogamous this is why being gay can be easily reduced to sex. While most rejected such stereotyping, some of the participants welcomed sexual labels. For example, if a participant was regarded as a "top" he viewed himself to be more masculine than a "bottom", therefore meaning that he would most likely play a dominant role within the relationship.

5.5.6 Class, dominance and the patriarchal dividend

Katlego contends his ability to express himself freely as an individual is guaranteed by his social class status. His lack of concern for the opinions others may have regarding his sexual orientation is a consequence of the financial means he has at his disposal. He asserted discrimination towards homosexuals is rooted in illiteracy, poverty and unemployment. Zandile also felt secure in his sexual orientation as a tax paying, active contributor to South Africa's economy not dependent on social grants. They both believed that the reason why homosexuals were so "successful" was because they were hard workers and did not feel entitled like "poor" homophobic individuals.

Tiisetso rejected playing a passive role in his romantic relationships because he felt accomplished/confident given his level of education and social class. As a lecturer maintaining a "masculine personality" was beneficial even though he admitted that his behaviour was somewhat effeminate and therefore people around him could easily presume him to be gay. Referring to his interview (applying for a lectureship) he contended:

> "And obviously the panel could actually pick that up as well. And when I started, my first encounter with my students they were like oh, maybe within a week the word was out that they had a new gay lecturer because that is how I presented myself. And I didn't actually see anything wrong with the fact that students went away and said there's a new gay lecturer because I also don't actually have a problem with them depicting the fact, trying to like negotiate the fact that I am trying to negotiate my sexuality was because I wanted them to see the person that I am but the most important thing that I wanted with my class was for them to actually understand that I am their lecturer and that this is the position that I actually need from them…But it's not that I'm subconsciously trying to say that I'm a straight acting, because immediately when I say hello my guest can just be okay this is a gay person. But I try so hard that my appearance does not necessarily scream gay" – Tiisetso

Tiisetso ultimately decided to be open with his students and felt that this decision built a stronger relationship between them. While it is apparent that Tiisetso did not actually come out to his students, he felt that he had no issues with the attention which surrounded the subject of his sexuality. He also expressed a desire to remain

authentic to his true self and that this would not decrease the respect he received from others.

Others faced a different reality, Ken's narrative shows that without a strong educational background, dating someone who was academically accomplished forced him to take up a passive role in the relationship. He shared experiences which left him feeling disrespected by his boyfriend and linked this treatment to the fact that he was unemployed and came from a poor family:

> **"**Then, when we got home, we got into another fight and he said to me "Ken you have nothing…" And I wondered if he was really taking advantage of this thing that I don't have anything" - Ken

Ken was emasculated by his unemployment status put him in a weaker position in this relationship. Because his ex-boyfriend was educated and came from a middle-class family he took on an aggressive role and Ken admitted being forced into playing a passive role in the relationship. Differences in income and education may have provided an opportunity to be the "real man" in a relationship. Being the *provider* meant an opportunity to take on a dominant role.

5.5.7 The heteronormative script: Am I a real man?

Masculinity is negotiated through many domains such as appearance, social class, education, place of residence or even how an individual talks and behaves. It is thus negotiated by the participants in ways which are related to their means of accessing some kind of social power. One may choose to behave in ways that describe a machismo personality but be a "bottom" during sexual encounters. It is this fluidity which showcases the many ways which labelling fails to acknowledge the endless possibilities of human interactions and self- consciousness. Traditionally, the family is an institution that is argued to entrench and maintain imbalanced power-relations between men, women and children. The imbalances are reproduced within the gendered society. The man is stereotypically assigned the role of a provider, protector and leader, this idea is maintained though heteronormative relationships. This serves as the heteronormative script of what a man is in society.

While growing up, the participants strived to "fit in" in order to make friends, find romantic partners or earn the right to have a place in various institutions. As one

becomes a grown man, the lessons which they have mastered as a young boy and teenager, assist them to "play their cards right" in order to integrate into society in ways which suit their needs and aspirations. As Zandile became older he felt the need to recognise instances which compelled him to portray a hegemonic gender identity. He states that there is a misconception held by people that gay men are "plastic men" and will always live in victimhood. Being at risk of physical harm will not have him walk away in silence, he states that:

> "I'm a type though, I weigh my options if I look at you, and I look like I can carry you I will take you on" - Zandile

Katlego disagrees with this option and mentions that he avoids physical confrontation and would rather walk away.

> "I don't fight, period" - Katlego

By fighting Zandile explains that he does this to prove he is still a man regardless of his sexual orientation:

> "I do, I attack, I don't care like I need to prove that I am gay and I'm still a man" - Zandile

For Zandile, being prepared to stand your position as a man meant that one had to reinforce the image of an aggressive individual. The act of violence is in a nutshell being aggressive, confident and assertive. So proving that you are not a "plastic man" will mean that one will uphold the traditional heteronormative standards of being a heterosexual male.

Zandile also reflected on the discourse around the sex roles. He believed that his role as a man was more important than his sexuality hence he conformed to the societal expectations for heterosexual men. This meant that he had no problem reacting in an aggressive manner if he felt provoked by an act of disrespect or potential violence. In contrast, Reggie was more prone to being oblivious to such situations because he agreed with stereotypes held about gay men. For him his sexual orientation is the key component of his identity, rather than the notion/expectations of what it meant to be a man. He made a remark on gay marriage which created quite a stir in the room:

> "And for me until today for my friends I do not believe in gay married men to men because I don't take it as a part of life" – Reggie

> "That one for me, I cannot just come out to tell my mom and this because myself I don't believe on the concept (*marriage for homosexuals*). I just take gay life as the sex life…" - Reggie

According to him, this is not an issue for heterosexual couples as they do not have problems of "infidelity". It's almost as if he was oblivious to the unconventional and expansive behaviours (especially sexually) of heterosexual men. He described thehomosexuals as overly sexual which may also create the opportunity for more undesirable stereotypes about them being viewed as "perverts", "child molesters" or "paedophiles" to fester. The participants were shocked at how he could directly correlate monogamy to heterosexuality, and same-sex relationships to hypersexuality. It is as if he "rightfully" takes back morality to the heteronormative only.

Unlike Reggie, Kim's future plans revolved on building a family and finding a life partner. He reflected on a proposal he once received from his lesbian friend who asked if he was willing to father a baby she wanted. Although he declined, the two remain friends and both share important social standings within the church. He believes that the fact that he was offered the chance to father a child shows that he is still a man and had the ability, as any other straight man – the ability to conceive.

Kim viewed all men as being equal, regardless of their sexual orientation. His perceptions were mainly influenced by his constant referral to the similarities of the biological sex of all men, he used this to reject the label which homosexuality received for being *different*. Rue shared a very different sentiment to this and rejected biological sex completely by stating that it was irrelevant:

> "Biological gender? I think it's a, not just trivial but arbitral classification." – Rue

Rue intellectualises gender in his problematisation of his masculinity and sexual identity. For Rue gender does not mean anything, linking his arguments to queer theory. The perspectives that institutionalise gender are viewed by him as repressive and patriarchal, they serve to preserve the existent power relations which are undeniably homophobic and sexist. He finds that completely disregarding their presence is not only him revolving against institutionalised sexism and other forms of

discrimination – he wants people to be whoever they want to be without being labelled.

> "My main problem is not necessarily how society treats the other…it's how this other starts internalising all this negativity into establishing a negative self-image and that's the clean damage of masculinity how it damages the self of the individual." - Rue

While others view gender as a construct that describes how an individual is socialised by their society, Rue views it as unnecessary in the development of a self-concept and in the construction of one's self-consciousness. He believes that an individual *must be* whoever they want to be regardless of the messages which are consistently presented by society on who they should *aim* to be:

> "I think in the South African society broadly speaking it is reductionist and terribly stereotypical and has a terrible understanding of gender and they have a misguidance of what is gender and I think it is problematic because it is rooted in two things that are misguided." - Rue

He proclaimed that "negotiating masculinity" was nothing more than conforming to fit into heteronormative ideas. He denies this outlook because he felt that it is without a history, empty of socialisation and other environmental factors which proves its necessity. His radical interpretations make him sharply different from many of the other participants – he wants to be uprooted from what people think he is, only to plant something else that's new, that only he can understand and fully accept. When I asked him if he is a radical, he seemed slightly uncomfortable with this (perhaps because it in itself is a "label" which in this instance, would not suit his political and psychological outlook).

5.5.8 Concluding remarks

This chapter outlined the opportunities and challenges of coming out. Whilst adulthood granted many of the participants the freedom to be in romantic relationships, they still faced stereotypes within the gay community. Labels such as the "top" or "bottom" were not always welcomed because of their resemblance to heteronormative gender roles. The latter tends to find a subordinate masculinity to marginalise. For the majority of the participants bisexuals and after-nines were perceived to be invariably weak and less courageous than men who were out. Heteronormative ideals relating

to masculinity were regarded – in some cases indirectly – as a desirable trait. Such ideals lead many of the participants to self-monitor their behaviour in order to fit in.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Summary

The responses of the participants to the key question of the study[6] uncovered how defining masculinity and describing what being a man entailed, demonstrate that even as adults who have come out at least partially, many are still influenced by traditional values/beliefs on what it means to be *a real man*. These perspectives dominated the perceptions of the majority of the participants on gender and sex roles. Socialisation therefore played a major role in the construction of values which became increasingly difficult to avoid during adulthood. The findings also portrayed the long-term effects of intergenerational norms on sex roles and hegemonic masculinity. Although technological advances have made social media accessible to many, encouraging a greater degree of individuality, enabling participants to connect with others who may share their interests, heteronormativity remains pervasive with regard to beliefs regarding gender, sexual expression and identity formation. This inevitably allows for the identification, performativity and individual self-monitoring of gendered expressions which confirm to heteronormative ideas to escape familial rejection and becoming a societal pariah.

Most of the participants feared openly asserting their sexuality around family members. Only one participant held onto queer theory perspectives on gender which seemed quite radical compared to the other participants. He did not see the relevance of gender labels, but this was also consistent with his overall disregard of macro-level institutions such as religion, cultural/traditional practices and heteronormativity. Their sexual orientation fueled their fear of being found out, hence intensifying the importance of concealing who they were to others. Although many stated that they were against heteronormative roles, they still held on to labels (e.g. top and bottom) within their romantic relationships. Their romantic/sex relationships (e.g. top, bottom, the after-nine man), followed a heteronormative division into a more dominant male and submissive female role. This is not unlike the mine wife role in the past (Moodie et al. 1988; Niehaus, 2002) albeit not as emphasised, nor unlike the *lady* and *gent* division more recently in Reid's (2013) study.

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[6] "*How do self-identified black gay men in South Africa define masculinity?*"

The majority of the participants maintained a view that bisexuality did not exist but was a way men who were less courageous than themselves dealt with social pressures – they were largely recognised as **"sell outs"**. The practice of creating a dichotomy between "us" and "them" creates an effect which deems the other unworthy or of "being real men". This is rather ironic because it has also been the basis of a lot of the participants' difficulty in integrating into their own families, social spaces and society as a whole. There is an increasing need to affirm ones masculinity by rejecting that of others. Within what is classified as subordinate masculinities, certain power relations further marginalise certain participants, though the *patriarchal dividend* assists all men. The latter is social power which is attained by all men regardless of their sexual orientation. The responses of the participants detail a persistent need to be above some *type of man*, in this case the *after-nine man* and those who identify as *bisexual* were sidelined as weak men who lacked authenticity and courage to come out as gay to society.

The adoption of the Civil Union Act did not necessarily provide much change to those within the LGBTI community outside granting them the rights to a legal marriage. This illustrates the perceived abnormality which is conferred to homosexuality. Advocacy for equality remains an issue which is dealt with increasingly on virtual communities online through platforms such as social media. When there is a perceived view of *difference* towards a certain group, this has wide scale consequences which affect their development throughout their lives in both the private and public sphere. Finally, South Africa's LGBTI community is in many ways still a minority group which is faced with many obstacles and dilemmas most notable those relating to stigma and discrimination.

6.2 The significance of the study

The adoption of the Civil Union Act in South Africa in 2006 was a breakthrough in the diversification of laws that cover all people regardless of their age, class, sexuality and race. This was created to bring progress, acceptance and tolerance but it is unfortunate that such an action is not always viable in the quotidian aspects of a citizen's life. The LGBTI community remains a minority group which faces countless challenges within our patriarchal institutions. The state proves to be a very powerful organ which can either produce progress or build a solid foundation which is

predisposed for intolerance, chauvinism and injustice.

This study documented the recollections of the participants' life throughout their boyhood until adulthood. These recollections pertained to their perceptions of masculinity and their experience of it. The narratives provide a better understanding of the importance of individuals' primary socialisation agents and how these influence how gender is perceived. An individual's sense of masculinity is therefore based on their socialisation and environment, this serves as a signifier of what kind of behaviour is deemed appropriate for a man to express. Self-monitoring is a strategy to navigating through societal expectations which make it difficult to escape the heteronormative mould. A majority of the participants faced some conflict in response to the expectations their families had for them and decided to conceal details of their sexual orientation. Religious beliefs and the media restricted them from completely coming out in society. Finally, fears of being "found out" led many to find independence through their relocation to different areas. While South Africa's constitution remains one of the most liberal in the world, the adoption of its laws is more successful than the implementation thereof.

6.3 Limitations of the study

The selection criteria set for sampling ensured that only young black men who identified themselves as being gay, were being studied. This category did not necessarily mean that all the experiences of the participants were the similar, differences amongst them did exist. Sexual orientation was not understood in a singular manner by the participants, nor was the concept of *masculinity*. The participants differed in age, nationality, class, culture and educational achievement, making their personal experiences diverse and complex. Because this is a qualitative study, the findings cannot be measured nor viewed as being the general experience for all black gay men. The recollections of the participants are subjective and based on what a participant remembers and therefore decides to share during the focus group or interview sessions. However, these recollections underline the challenges black gay men face in openly expressing their sexuality. Their narratives are marked by the continued influence of heteronormativity in society.

This remains a small-scale study in which eighteen participants reflected on the

expectations they faced with regard to their gender whilst growing up and how they negotiated this experience. It is not possible to cover the ambit of all black gay men's experiences, and there may be some bias in the non-probability snowball sampling method which was used. What these narratives nevertheless demonstrated was the context these men faced and how they dealt with such experiences.

6.4 Concluding remarks

This study explored the different expressions of masculinity under varying contexts throughout one's life until adulthood. Societal expectations are first established through the socialisation process, this is the primary context which one's family carry great importance. Throughout this process, other important social spaces such as the school, the church and friendship circles instill values relating to the performance of gender and sexuality. The journey of one's perception of masculinity begins whilst they are a child until adulthood. This journey is inevitably influenced by wider social institutions which are dynamic but dominate in their acknowledgement of heteronormative principles and values. Patriarchal values are central in what a man is and how they are supposed to behave. Heteronormativity continues to be linked to a hegemonic masculinity which invariably expresses ideals which are homophobic, conservative and traditional. The process of coming out is not an inevitable process for those who are in same sex relationships – the meaning of "homosexual" is in itself contextual and therefore carries more definitions which generally fall within the category of MSM.

Gender is a performance (Butler, 1988) which is shaped by contextual factors (Kimmel, 2007) that are transferred to an individual through the process of socialisation (Scanzoni & Scanzoni, 1988) making masculinity a difficult concept to fully understand. The study documents how the behavior of an individual who recognises himself as being "different", affects how he self-monitors his behaviour when they are around different groups of people. This invariably leads to endless possibilities which will require an individual to self-monitor their behaviour to portray an accepted "type" of masculinity. Self-stereotyping is also a possible phenomenon for an individual who is a member of a sexual or racial minority group. This creates a greater emphasis of "othering" people who may not adhere to what may be considered acceptable such as in the case of bisexuals and after-nines within the LGBTI

community. It is clear from the narratives of the interviewees that a hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity continues to have an impact on how they view their own behaviour, personal beliefs and sexuality – including those of others. A hegemonic masculinity bears existence in the gay community through one's behaviour, personal beliefs and sexual preferences.

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Appendices

A Information Letter

Title: Negotiating masculinity: experiences of black gay men

I am a Masters-degree student at the University of Pretoria in the Sociology Department (specialising in Gender Studies). South Africa has a progressive Constitution which in the Bill of Rights prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. However, there are instances reported in the media, which point to the condemnation of same-sex relationships within communities.

This study seeks to explore the experiences of black gay men in their communities and in society. I am particularly interested in how they view their own masculinity, and how they experience other people's perceptions of it.

You can assist by agreeing to be interviewed; this will entail being a part of the focus group discussions administered by me, acting as the moderator as well as an individual interview also. The duration of the interviews will be between 1-2 hours on different days. Your participation in this study is voluntary and at any point during the interview may you decline to answer a question or decide to withdraw your consent. Issues of confidentiality, the right to privacy, dignity and respect are paramount. Confidentiality will be maintained by the use of pseudonyms.

I furthermore seek your permission to tape record the conversations. This is purely done for ensuring accuracy. If you are willing to take part in this study please give your consent by signing the consent form below. If you have any queries please contact me on my cell on: 072 854 9844.

The data from this research study will be stored for 15 years in the Department, where it will be used for dissertation and for publishing an article.

Yours Faithfully

Keketso Matlebyane…………………………………..

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

B Consent Form

Title: Negotiating masculinity: experiences of black gay men

I, (Full name of Participant)…………………………………….….have read the attached information letter and understand fully the nature of the study and its interrelated goals. I recognise that I can withdraw from the interview at any stage.

By signing below, I fully consent my participation in the study.

Signature (Participant)…………………………………………………

Date……………………………………………………………………..

Signature (Researcher)………………………………………………..

Date……………………………………………………………………..

Note: this informed consent form will be kept separately from the typed interview transcripts in which pseudonyms will be used.

C Interview schedules

Focus group discussion prompts:

- Tell me about your experiences growing up as a boy
- When did you realise you were attracted to men?
- What are the general perceptions/misconceptions held about gay men in your community?
- How do you feel about the idea that homosexuality is a choice?
- How important is the role of being a father?

Interview schedule:

1. Firstly, are you out to your friends and family? If so, how was the experience of coming out?
2. Would you say your views differ from others?
3. What does it mean to be a man?
4. Are you a father? If so, what are your experiences of being a black gay parent?
5. Do you believe that one becomes a "real man" only once they have a child?
6. What is your view of the perception that homosexuality is a sin or is "unAfrican"?
7. Have you ever been a target for discrimination, prejudice or hate crimes in society because of your sexual orientation?
8. Have you ever attended *initiation schools* or anything equivalent to that as a young man?
9. Would you ever describe yourself as "macho"?
10. Would you say you come across as a "straight-acting" man?
11. Why do you think black men would choose to remain in the "closet"?

D Articles

SA responds to anti-gay laws by 'taking note'

25 FEB 2014 20:36
Shaun De Waal

The department of international relations has released a carefully worded statement about a number of countries' new anti-gay laws.

In a statement released a day after Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni signed a new law severely criminalising homosexual acts, South Africa has responded to what world leaders have called odious legislation that contravenes basic human rights.

The issue was highlighted at the Sochi Winter Olympics too, which took place in the context of protests against Russia's recent law making "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships" illegal, as well as Nigeria's law banning any form of gay partnership.

The carefully phrased department of international relations and co-operation statement on Tuesday did not mention Uganda by name, saying only that South Africa took "note of developments regarding the situation of lesbians, gays, bisexual, transsexual and intersex persons (LGBTI) worldwide", and that the South African government would, "through existing diplomatic channels, be seeking clarification on these developments from many capitals around the world".

It went on: "South Africa views the respect for the promotion, protection and fulfilment of human rights and fundamental freedoms as a critical pillar of our domestic and foreign policies; hence they are enshrined in our Constitution. South Africa believes that no persons should be subjected to discrimination or violence on any ground, including on the basis of sexual orientation."

The statement noted that in South Africa "we also have challenges of our own in this regard", saying the government had "decided to adopt measures aimed at significantly enhancing our protection mechanisms aimed at curbing violence against the LGBTI community". The statement did not say what those measures were.

Museveni signed the controversial Bill, which was passed by Uganda's Parliament in December, into law on Monday. Earlier, Museveni had delayed signing the Bill, while he asked an expert panel to advise him on the proposed law. The panel concluded that homosexuality was neither a disease nor an "abnormality", and should not attract any additional legal sanction, but the ministerial report to the president on the panel twisted its conclusions to support greater criminalisation of homosexuality. Uganda already has colonial-era laws relating to sexual crimes.

The Associated Press reported the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission has warned that "experience from other jurisdictions with similarly draconian laws, such as Nigeria or Russia, indicates that their implementation is often followed by a surge in violence against individuals thought to be lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.
"The Ugandan government has not indicated any plans to counter such violence or to investigate potential allegations of abuse."

In a confusing speech on Monday, when he signed the Bill into law, Museveni blamed "Western groups that are fond of coming into our schools and recruiting young children into homosexuality and lesbianism, just as they carelessly handle other issues concerning Africa". He said he was concerned about homosexuals "promoting" themselves, and about "exhibitionism", which he felt "should be punished harshly in order to defend our society from disorientation".
He warned about "wrong practices indulged in and promoted by some of the outsiders", especially oral sex, because "the mouth is not engineered for that purpose" and it was "very unhealthy".

Shaun de Waal has worked at the Mail & Guardian since 1989 and is now the editor of the paper's comment and analysis section.

Uganda president: Homosexuals are 'disgusting'

By Elizabeth Landau. Zain Verjee and Antonia Mortensen, CNN

Updated 1403 GMT (2203 HKT) February 25, 2014

Ugandan President: Being gay not a right04:20

Story highlights

- People who perform same-sex marriages could face up to seven years in prison
- Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni signed an anti-homosexuality bill Monday
- The White House says Museveni took his country a "step backward"
- Museveni changed positions on the bill several times before signing it

President Yoweri Museveni, who made anti-homosexuality laws in Uganda much tougher Monday, told CNN in an exclusive interview that sexual behavior is a matter of choice and gay people are "disgusting."

After signing the bill that made some homosexual acts punishable by life in prison, Museveni told CNN's Zain Verjee that, in his view, being homosexual is "unnatural" and not a human right.

"They're disgusting. What sort of people are they?" he said. "I never knew what they were doing. I've been told recently that what they do is terrible. Disgusting. But I was ready to ignore that if there was proof that that's how he is born, abnormal. But now the proof is not

there."

Museveni had commissioned a group of Ugandan government scientists to study whether homosexuality is "learned," concluding that it is a matter of choice.

"I was regarding it as an inborn problem," he said. "Genetic distortion -- that was my argument. But now our scientists have knocked this one out."

Dean Hamer, scientist emeritus at the National Institutes of Health, wrote an open letter to the Ugandan scientists in the New York Times last week urging them to reconsider and revise their report. Among his responses to their conclusions: "There is no scientific evidence that homosexual orientation is a learned behavior any more than is heterosexual orientation."

Museveni, whose public position on the measure changed several times, signed the bill into law at a public event Monday. The bill was introduced in 2009 and originally included a death penalty clause for some homosexual acts.

Gay Ugandans committing suicide

Ugandan pres. rejects Western criticism 02:08

Ugandan tabloid prints list of 'homosexuals'

The nation's Parliament passed the bill in December, replacing the death penalty provision with a proposal of life in prison for "aggravated homosexuality." This includes acts in which one person is infected with HIV, "serial offenders" and sex with minors, according to Amnesty International.

The new law also includes punishment -- up to seven years in prison -- for people and institutions who perform same-sex marriage ceremonies, language that was not in the 2009 version of the bill.

Lawmakers in the conservative nation said the influence of Western lifestyles risked destroying family units.

The bill also proposed prison terms for anyone who counsels or reaches out to gays and lesbians, a provision that could ensnare rights groups and others providing services to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

The White House issued a statement Monday: "Instead of standing on the side of freedom, justice, and equal rights for its people, today, regrettably, Ugandan President Museveni took Uganda a step backward by signing into law legislation criminalizing homosexuality."

The statement continued: "As President Obama has said, this law is more than an affront and a danger to the gay community in Uganda, it reflects poorly on the country's commitment to protecting the human rights of its people and will undermine public health, including efforts to fight HIV/AIDS. We will continue to urge the Ugandan government to repeal this abhorrent law and to advocate for the protection of the universal human rights of

LGBT persons in Uganda and around the world."

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay also denounced the law, saying it institutionalizes discrimination and could promote harassment and violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

"This law violates a host of fundamental human rights, including the right to freedom from discrimination, to privacy, freedom of association, peaceful assembly, opinion and expression and equality before the law -- all of which are enshrined in Uganda's own constitution and in the international treaties it has ratified," Pillay said in a statement.

Museveni also told CNN that the West should not force its beliefs onto Ugandans.

"Respect African societies and their values," he said. "If you don't agree, just keep quiet. Let us manage our society, then we will see. If we are wrong, we shall find out by ourselves, just the way we don't interfere with yours."

He also said Westerners brought homosexuality to his country, corrupting society by teaching Ugandans about homosexuality. The West has also helped make children at schools homosexual by funding groups that spread homosexuality, he said.

Attitudes against homosexuality are prevalent in Uganda. A 2013 report from Pew Research found that 96% of Ugandans believe society should not accept homosexuality.

Thirty-eight African countries have made homosexuality illegal. Most sodomy laws there were introduced during colonialism.

Even before Museveni signed the bill into law, homosexual acts were punishable by 14 years to life in prison.

Ugandan gay rights activist Pepe Julian Onziema told CNN's Christiane Amanpour that some gay people in Uganda would rather kill themselves than live under the new law.

"Prior to the bill becoming law today, people attempted suicide because they are like, 'I'm not going to live to see this country kill me -- so I would rather take my life.' "

Many have already left the country in fear of violence, Onziema said, and among those who stay, many are stopping their activism.

Onziema, however, says he is not afraid. He says he won't let the law take away his voice.

E Participant Profiles

Timothy

Timothy is a Nigerian man who is frank about his use of social media in meeting prospective partners in the past. Facebook assisted him in ultimately meeting his husband – a South African gay man online and he later moved to this country to strengthen their relationship and create a better life for himself and his family. During the focus group session, he light-heartedly made use of feminine names to call the other men such as "aunty", "diva" etc. His behaviour and appearance was not effeminate but he sporadically behaved in a stereotypically feminine manner - "camping" – this was expressed with his hands, facial expressions and at times when he referred to himself as a "she". Notwithstanding this, Timothy came across as a straight-acting man until he entered the seminar room where the focus group took place. He admitted to regulating his masculine performance and claimed that he had shifted his feminine behaviour away from the public in favour of a "mainstreamed masculinity" (e.g. by his walk, tone of voice and clothing etc.) to help him integrate into different spaces much easier without facing discrimination.

Sean

Both of Sean's parents have passed away and he has siblings who are living in Zimbabwe. He believes that he always knew that he was different and after his first sexual experience in University, it was the beginning of a new world for him. Homophobia was deeply disturbing to him and he struggled to understand the basis of hate for something he believes he had no control over. He mentioned that he did not choose to be gay and feels comfortable with his decision to move to South Africa and not stay in what he views as an oppressive Zimbabwe environment.

Kim

A man of few words, Kim is an introvert and student with ambitions of becoming a doctor in Cuba. He is petite and strikingly good looking. He also told the group that sex is not an important thing in his life; they all stared at him in a swift silence then insinuated that he was too young anyway. His family meant a lot to him and he

constantly made reference to them and his challenges as a black man living in a suburban area.

Mbanda

Mbanda is a Zimbabwean man who migrated to South Africa for employment in order to find opportunities that allowed him to support himself and his family. When he arrived in South Africa, he lived with his cousin and shared his experience of immediately being offered to come along to a "bath house" in Johannesburg; he was shocked when he found out what it was and refused to go. He is also very reserved and cares deeply about his family; he has not come out to any of his siblings but suspects that they already know. He views South Africa as a place of endless possibilities and a refuge from the harm which could have been inflicted on him for being a gay man living in Zimbabwe.

Reggie

All the way from Congo, Reggie is a man in training to become a chef and had travelled the world more than the other participants in his focus group discussion session. He was equally unapologetic and completely honest about his sexual affairs with married men who seemed to be at his "beck and call". He regarded the black women of South Africa to be in an easier position to get manipulated by men – either sexually or emotionally.

Kev

A lawyer and student, Kev is an intellectual who was recognised by other students during his time in high school as being exceptionally bright, this made him popular in that sense. He negotiated his masculinity through academic excellence and this allowed him to be granted acceptance by the other students including his teachers. He reiterates the relational aspect of gender and how sex roles are often heteronormative. I have also heard Kev speak while attending seminars on gender research, he is worldly, opinionated and a brilliant young man.

Sipho

A member of one of the Royal families of Limpopo, Sipho is a student who has a strong traditional background. He was the only participant amongst the other members of the

focus group who had attended initiation school. He ponders on this time as a period of uneasiness for his family because he was a very soft and sickly child. He finds relationships which are centred on social media to be typically driven by sexual expectations and exploitation; this has since limited his presence on online chat rooms.

Mandla

Also one of the intellectuals of the group, Mandla is a lecturer and is friends with Kev. He excelled in school and this served as a basis to negotiate his masculinity. He was a part of the top five achievers in school, was the president of the SRC and had membership in the debating team and drama club. He received a lot of affection from his teachers and seems to have been very popular even when questions surfaced about his sexuality. He confesses to being a bit of an "elitist" in how he selects his partners - young or old - this individual would have to be a learned man. He referred to the performativity of gender and his awareness of it as a way that guides his behaviour in response to whom he is around. Because he is a lecturer he feels that in order to gain respect he will have to react in a conformist and mainstream masculine manner. Respect is in this sense synonymous with hegemonic masculinity, its associated attitudes and practices.

Fred

Fred and I are acquaintances; we met during the youth group meetings at an LGBTI centre. He is a very well-spoken and talkative individual who shared a lot of his personal experiences during the focus group session. He has a bubbly personality and was overall very cheerful throughout the interview. His experiences in high school, especially those during lunch time were for him and his friends what he described as "survival of the fittest". The other students wondered what his reasons were for hanging out with effeminate men, and the assumption was that he too must secretly be a homosexual. At the time, he explains that he was in fact the most "masculine" looking of all of his friends. The bullying and humiliation fueled the chances of being in physical altercations where he admits to beating up a few people and also getting beaten up himself.

Tiisetso

When I met Tiisetso I was very much taken by his confidence and demeanour. He began his career working for the police service as a financial clerk. During the session he was in the process of completing his Master's degree (which he later on received). He shared to the group a story where a sexual encounter left him vulnerable to HIV infection. He thought it best to open a rape case in order to receive Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) medication, at that time it was not as easy to get. When the lady who was taking his case laughed to his face, further publicly mocking him in front of the entire office, he threatened to notify the station commander to the shock and dismay of the officer. When he finally did, he realised how serious his lie was and how it could affect the life of another individual. It was a hard lesson that made it clear to him not only the difficulties in receiving PEP medication in post-democratic South Africa but also the manner in which rape is not handled as an important social problem in our country.

Lerato

Lerato is from a township in Pretoria, when we met he's appearance immediately caught my attention for how completely effeminate he was. When he arrived at the venue the other participants seemed very pleased to see him, he had a very outgoing personality and settled in quite quickly. He believes that while he was a teenager, he did not have a name for his attraction towards men but always knew he was different. The teachers gave him far more trouble than the students but he mentions being proud of his sexuality regardless of his negative experiences.

Michael

I met Michael through his aunt. He's an experienced dancer and gymnast and because of this, was very well-travelled. He is known by his nickname "Lebo Mathosa" which was apparently given to him during his time as a choreographer for the late South African Kwaito singer, Lebo Mathosa. He also claims to have danced with her at the peak of her career. Michael was well aware of his good looks; he had beautiful skin and a face that almost resembled that of a woman. He was pleased with his androgynous look and found it no surprise that he was considered to be very attractive by his community. While in school, he recalls an instance where he was with his mom

at her place of work and a group of women checked his genitalia to see if he really was a boy. He pleasantly reminisced about how he grew his hair long (which was still long and in cornrows during the interview) and how his mother would look after him as if he was a young girl. He regards his mother as a "monster"; their relationship continues to be strained because of his sexual orientation and according to him, makes her mistreat him. He mentioned that he lived as a stranger in his own home and that hardly anyone will talk to him. He had plans to move out of his home soon.

Ken

Ken is from an informal settlement in a township in Pretoria. He says that his sexuality is not an issue to his family and that they have come to accept him as he is. He shared his plans of one day founding an NGO for vulnerable children, even though he has not received any tertiary education, he does not feel that it will hinder his plans of being successful in the future. He mentioned that his background often forms stereotypes about the type of person that he is based on his social class – this is not accurate and is something that he continually faces.

Katlego

He was a part of the dual-interview with Zandile. The interview took place in a flat they shared in Johannesburg. When I arrived, Katlego was standing by the door and was pointing to his wrist (signalling his watch) and told me to hurry up, he was going to a *chesa nyama* and could not wait to go out partying. My walking seemed to escalate into running as I was invited in, along with my friend who introduced us. Katlego has a very bubbly, fun-loving personality and was constantly talking about his love for parties and social events. During the interview he talked about his upbringing in a township as well as his loving family but also about the gloom of being bullied in school, and being judged by a close friend who was embarrassed about his sexual orientation. Katlego lost his virginity at the age of 20 with someone he met online and knew for only three hours. He says that he enjoys his life and is fed up with homophobic individuals – including politicians.

Zandile

He was a part of the dual-interview with Katlego. The interview took place in a flat they shared in Johannesburg. Zandile is a very handsome man; he mentioned that he never

really had a problem getting attention from women. He grew up in Pretoria then lived with his foster family in the Western Cape when his mother struggled to raise him. The expectations his family had for him showcased many heteronormative principles and practices which held hegemonic masculine traits as desirable and appropriate. He describes his ability to deliver a strong punch, much like every other straight man as confirmation that his sexuality doesn't make him weak. He mentioned that he cries when he gets angry and frustrated, that he believes, is what makes it obvious to people that he's gay. While he follows biological perspectives on how an individual becomes gay (genetics), he stands firm against bisexuality and labels it an excuse for promiscuity and infidelity.

Larry

Larry is a man who I met during the youth group meetings at an LGBTI centre. He lived in an orphanage until he was adopted. He and his adopted father did not share a close relationship as it was centred on discipline, while he felt he needed support and sincere conversations on life and its challenges. He does not describe himself as straight acting or effeminate but believes he has a very fluid masculinity. He negotiates the latter by choosing to be cautious of those he allows in his personal space including the subject matter of their conversations. He has suffered from homophobia at the hands of family members and is apprehensive about talking about his sexuality with them. His struggle is also fueled by the questions he receives about his love life, he comments on this practice as being one-dimensional and a double standard which benefits heterosexual males. He has plans on getting married and having children but because he will not date a woman and bring multiple partners at home – where it is assumed that they are having sexual relations – he faces stigma because of his sexuality while his male peers are praised for their behaviour regardless of how they treat women.

Rue

Rue is a young man who describes his sexual orientation as simply being "queer". After his parents divorced he lived in several places – even living outside South Africa for quite some time. He is eccentric in his lifestyle and personal values. He recognises his attraction to members of the same sex as trivial and as meaningless as eye colour. Rue is also a student in Mathematics and even though he is very informed about

gender theory and LGBTI social movements, he does not recognise himself as an activist.

Ronald

At the time of the interview Ronald was a third year student in Theology. He has aims of becoming a preacher after the completion of his degree. He lives in a commune and describes himself as a loner in the household but has friends that understand his "weirdness". He was raised by his mother and grandmother but lived with them along with his aunt, uncle and cousin. His home was made up of a majority of women and he believes this has nothing to do with the fact that he is gay. Growing up, Ronald was bullied throughout primary and high school because of being perceived as "different". This has made him more careful of whom he chooses to let into his life, as well as whom he comes out to. He has not come out to anyone in his family as yet but believes that they already know. His ambitions of becoming a preacher in church has made the issue of his sexuality a very sensitive subject and has made it bound with secrecy and denial – he questions how his strong religious values will be in parallel with his life as a gay man.