


**WOMEN'S NEGOTIATION OF
ALTERNATIVE
SEXUALITIES IN THE WESTERN CAPE:
A CAPE TOWN CASE STUDY**

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The logo of the University of the Western Cape, featuring a classical building with a pediment and columns, rendered in a light blue color.

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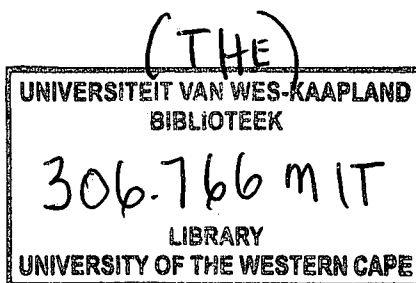
Women



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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this mini thesis, *Women's Negotiation of Alternative Sexualities: A Cape Town Study* is my own work and no part of it has previously been submitted.

Sharrone Mitchell

July 2011

Signature

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ABSTRACT

This mini thesis is an exploratory study of the lived experiences of bisexual and lesbian women in the Western Cape with regard to how they claim agency and negotiate their individual sexualities. Using mixed methodologies this study aims to look at the ways in which bisexual and lesbian women negotiate their sexuality in a landscape dominated by heterosexual discourses. Also considered are the contradictory ways in which these women assert their roles as lesbians and bisexual individuals and how these roles serve to simultaneously reinforce and challenge the dominant order of heterosexuality. The conflicting views of the respondents are documented which further demonstrates the complexities surrounding sexuality. This research identifies and explores both international and local research already conducted on alternative sexualities and address the lack of black researchers' conduct of these studies on the African continent. The study also records an acknowledgement of the researcher's reflection that she too holds contradictory views on some of these issues.



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INTRODUCTION

In this introduction, I briefly locate the rationale and objectives that inform my study while also referring to previous research conducted to rationalize my research. I have located my study of lesbians and bisexuals in the Western Cape in the context of theoretical discussions about and the growing research on same-sex relationships and homosexual identities, especially in South Africa. As indicated, an exploration of these fields requires attention to both South African and international studies. I will show how global studies, especially theoretical work on gender and sexuality, can inform serious, critical and sensitive academic investigation. I also draw on the growing range of African studies, especially South African, in anchoring my case study of lesbians in the Western Cape and in exploring distinct traditions and arguments about gay and lesbian identities in African contexts.

This chapter also indicates the importance of sensitive methodological approaches to my subject. For this reason I will draw on Zethu Matebeni's (2001) arguments about situated knowledge. In her study of black lesbians in Johannesburg, Matabeni argues that as a researcher one should negotiate one's own position as the researcher's identities and sexuality continue to be influenced by the people who inform the research. She also shows that relationships in the field bring hierarchies of knowledge and power into play which is not necessarily discussed in the field. I agree with Matabeni (2001) that these are major challenges because the researcher inevitably undertakes work that is informed by many identities and roles besides being a researcher.

Like Matabeni (2001), for example, I strongly experienced hierarchies of knowledge and power during the course of my research. These became evident when some of my respondents asked me questions about issues pertaining to lesbian and especially bisexual lives, same-sex marriage and intimacy, amongst others issues. It was clear that the assumption was that I was the expert and informed producer of knowledge – not only about them but also for them. The assumption was also that I had wider contacts and networks. Matabeni (2001) has also commented extensively on the current context of studies of gays and lesbians. While conducting her research, she highlighted that the 1996 Constitution and the Bill of Rights have defined sexual practices, identity, and freedom of expression as protected rights accessible to all citizens. Yet, despite some of these advances, critical work on lesbians or women's same sex relationships has been relatively neglected.

Mary Hames (2003) presents a similar argument when she states that women's organizations and academic programmes in South Africa have steadily moved to research, education and training in the field of masculinities, a pattern which tends to reinforce heterosexual biases in a heteronormative world. At the same time, lesbian and gay studies are increasingly found on the backburner. According to Hames (2003) this in itself is a trend indicating that gay and lesbian issues are far less important than the issues that affect heterosexual women and men. She highlights a marked silence about gay and lesbian rights that has become transparent even in the very latest repositioning of the 'women's movement'.

Hames (2003: 13) state that 'Lesbian and bisexual women have long tended to be silent about their sexual identity' and that the main reason for this is the prevalence of homophobia which takes on many forms. Peer pressure to be heterosexual and fear about identifying as a lesbian or bisexual make these women postpone embracing a sexual identity until they leave the academy. It is not unreasonable for these women to be secretive about their sexual preferences and identities because of their fear of being attacked, raped or beaten up'.

According to Hames (2003) the above facts reflect the inability of lesbian and bisexual women to articulate their distinct political struggles and rights in the face of heterosexism within structural sites including women's organizations, educational institutions, religious organizations and many other spaces to which they may be connected, but from which they tend to be alienated because of their sexual orientation. This study therefore aims to show how lesbian and bisexual women claim agency in other safe spaces even in the face of all the difficulties they face on a daily basis within the structures, places, organizations and institutions specifically mentioned by Hames (2003).

Researchers like Cheryl Potgieter (1997) conducted studies on women in same-sex relationships before Hames and Matabeni, with the findings of her study also identifying a relative neglect of research on the multi-faceted lives of black lesbians in South Africa. Potgieter (1997) agrees with Hames that even though research is increasing, there is virtually no research that documents how black lesbians challenge traditional roles and discourses

related to their views on motherhood and women's roles for example. She suggests that we need to move beyond the descriptive aspect of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersexed identities to a more considered analytical engagement in this field. According to her, therefore, the problem is not so much that there is no work, but that much of the work focuses only on certain aspects.

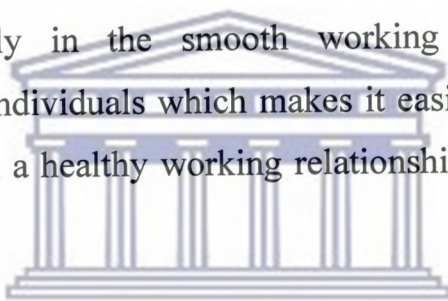
Natasha Distiller's (2004) work, for example, illustrates the focus on victimization. She notes that in South Africa, being a black lesbian is seen as treacherous, as destroying the nuclear heterosexual family, and as un-African. She argues that as part of many African traditions there are expectations that African women must have children and procreate with a male partner who is to be the head of the family. Failing to conform to these expectations, results in lesbians and bisexuals being perceived as deviant.

For many, homophobes, the hostility towards lesbians is extreme violence in the form of so-called 'curative rape', supposedly to erase lesbians' desires for other woman. Curative rapes are used by homophobic individuals, men in most instances, to transform these women into 'authentic African women who are appropriately feminine, mothers and men's property. The research on lesbians' victimization in the face of growing instances of curative rape is therefore politically important.

The research emphasis on lesbians' victimization remains an urgent priority and politically relevant given the increase of homophobic violence, especially curative rape. Recent examples reported in the Pink Tongue, a gay monthly newspaper, include the murders of an Ekurhuleni lesbian activist and a 13 year old Pretoria lesbian in June 2011. However, I aim to expand this focus by addressing the multi-faceted lives of a group of lesbians and bisexuals with particular relevance to ways in which they struggle to defy heterosexist policing of their life-styles, self-expression and sexuality.

The textual work of Non Governmental Organizations (NGO's) in the field of alternative sexualities proves to be one of the arenas most strongly generative of discourses on the vulnerability of black lesbians in South Africa. Ndumi Funda, a community worker in the Gugulethu Township, has for example established a safe haven for black lesbians in the townships who have been victims of hate crimes including curative rape and assault due to them living as open lesbians in their respective communities. Many of these women has subsequently been alienated and ostracized by their families and communities since lesbianism is seen as unAfrican among many black communities, especially in townships and rural areas. This particular safe haven provides black lesbians with nursing care as well as counseling and support groups where they can interact with other black lesbians as a means of gaining a sense of belonging and becoming more assertive in the negotiation of their sexuality and living openly as lesbians.

The Triangle Project, an all inclusive gay and lesbian organization based in Mowbray also serves the gay and lesbian community with health care, support groups, counseling and an extensive library focused on gay and lesbian material to motivate awareness on gay and lesbian issues. This service proves essential especially to individuals who are in the process of coming out of the closet or who has suffered the rejection of their families and communities after coming out as lesbian, bisexual or gay. The personal growth workshops offered by this organization has proved very successful in making other organizations and people in different work spaces more aware on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersexed issues. This service proves vital especially in the smooth working relationships among heterosexual and gay individuals which makes it easier for gay and lesbian individuals to maintain a healthy working relationship with their respective colleagues.



Nadia Sanger and Lindsay Clowes (2006) study of lesbians in Mitchell's Plain concluded that there is a lack of knowledge concerning the ways that specific societies feel about and treat lesbians and gays due to the paucity of research concerned with lesbian experiences (internationally and locally) in particular communities. She argues that because communities offer different forms of support or no support at all for lesbians in their communities, it would be interesting to explore how colored or black lesbians experience expressing their sexuality in different contexts, and how this compares with the experiences of white lesbians. This is especially due to the fact that the informants in her study clearly believed that black and white lesbian and gay lives were experienced differently.

In line with these findings, this study tries to address gaps in existing research, which tends to generalize about lesbian and gay experiences in South Africa, and to deal mainly with the extent to which lesbians are marginalized, victimized and often physically violated. The study is therefore motivated by the fact that South African research on women's sexuality primarily focuses on how women are socialized into dominant sexual identities and gender roles. Relatively little positive and constructive exploration of their defiance, acts of subversion, or forms of self-affirmation has been developed. The work that has been done deals mainly with psychosocial factors that indicate how lesbians and bisexuals are oppressed within heteronormative and patriarchal contexts. Research therefore focuses extensively on situations of stigmatization, victimization and alienation.

Matabeni (2001) for example, argues that much work that is written about black lesbians in particular often positions them as victims of violence, hate crimes or relates their existence to those of gay men. This inevitably results in a relative neglect of the various dimensions of lesbian and bisexual women's lives despite increasing research. The main aim of this study therefore is to focus on the lived experiences of lesbian and bisexual women within their individual relationships, their family and within their immediate communities.

As Potgieter (1997), Matabeni (2001) and Hames (2003) point out; few studies focus on agency, empowerment and the subjectivities of lesbians. I therefore use the term 'alternative sexualities' to capture the extent to which certain lesbians and bisexuals in the Western Cape have defiantly and

assertively created 'selves' that defy prescribed sexual identities for women, and the performances that are linked to this.

As one of the first to deal with the way that lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender and intersexed struggles in South Africa created a distinct climate for South African gays and lesbians (in comparison with gays and lesbians in other African countries), Jacklyn Cock (1991), has done extensive research on gender and patriarchal constructions in South Africa. She notes that the politics of gender is about power relations between men and women and that gender relations operate mainly to privilege men and subordinate women. Black working class women have suffered triple oppression with regard to gender, race and class in contrast to the triple privilege of white middle-class men.

Cock (1991) notes that tradition is often invoked to justify gender inequality, a pattern which is deeply rooted in South Africa's history. This study will thus also address the influence of power relations, including race, class and discourses of 'tradition' within same sex relationships. As I shall show, the lesbians and bisexuals do not straightforwardly resist heterosexist power, and in many cases, their relationships are modeled on heterosexual relationships.

A primary aim of this study is to produce knowledge about women's agency within same sex relationships by initiating debate and discussion among participants as to how they negotiate their sexuality. The hope was that this

would create knowledge in which research participants themselves elaborate on issues that reveal their active responses to dominant sexual scripts, even though this agency might not always take the form of dramatic political defiance and an affirmation of gay politics.

This study will in particular illustrate how lesbian and bisexual women assert their sexual identities in relation to their relevant communities as well as in relation to the gay community and within their individual intimate relationships.

Based on the findings of previous research conducted, the view that homosexuality is un-African has been widely discredited. My study will therefore be located within the broader tradition of research that explores the distinctiveness of same-sex identities and cultures in African contexts.



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OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1 outlines the theoretical framework which introduces the theory and concepts for analyzing my respondent's experiences. I deal with analytical and conceptual insights that have been raised by studies of themes such as stereotypes about homosexuality in Africa. The chapter also focuses on the relevance of constructionist and queer theories to my study. As I will show, these explain the constructedness of various intersecting identities, and provide a framework for analyzing my research subjects' locations in terms of region, sexuality, race, and other social locations, including those based on sexual orientations.

Apart from identifying key research trends for Africa, the Literature Review in **Chapter 2** highlights studies significant to my research and focuses on gaps in the methodological and theoretical approaches to lesbianism. In this chapter I will be elaborating on case studies and empirical work that illustrates concepts and theory in chapter 1.

This chapter concerns itself mainly with the theoretical lenses and analytical frameworks through which I will develop my analysis. Here I focus on and discuss different South African case studies and global studies in relation to patriarchy, performances of self and the role of space and how this influences women's personal and public definitions of their identity on the basis of their homoerotic desire.

Chapter 3 deals with methodology and how this is connected to the aim of deepening understanding of the complex experiences of lesbian and bisexual women in South Africa and the thematic analysis. This chapter also contributes to the aims of exploring women's voices and agency. For the purpose of my study I have adopted a mixed method approach which includes one-on-one interviews, focus groups as well as participant observations in order to gather as broad a range of data as possible. The rationale in applying mixed methods is to gather the lived experiences of my respondents in ways they feel most comfortable in sharing as it pertains to the research.

In **Chapter 4** I will illustrate how critical thematic analysis enables the researcher to extract common themes that reflect how women negotiate and claim agency in defiance of heterosexuality and patriarchy. This chapter will consist of two parts in which I analyze the data in terms of methodological and thematic issues. First, I will analyze the personal histories and interviews of participants. Here I will implicitly deal with the methodological and political importance of my study as well as the participants' views. In other words, I will discuss the importance of encouraging participants' voices and responses to enhance understandings of the complexities of lesbians and bisexuals' experiences. I also indicate the relationships between the research focus and a growing trend in many South African studies focusing on gay and lesbian assertions of identity in the face of compulsory heterosexuality. I will also address intersecting power relations in relation to race, class and sexual orientation in the contexts of other themes. These themes draw attention to ways in which lesbians and bisexuals in my study are actively creating personal freedoms in defiance of dominant heteronormative and patriarchal prescriptions.

Chapter 5, the conclusion, teases out the implications of my findings and provides general reflections.

CHAPTER 1

STEREOTYPES ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY IN AFRICA

Informative research, including the work of Murray and Roscoe (1998) as well as recent research on sangomas and their same sex relationships in South Africa, totally explodes the myth that homosexuality is a betrayal of African identity. Recent research focusing on homo-erotic desire among women in Africa also dispels the myth that African women have been distinctively oppressed by patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality. This echoes a central aim of this study's exploration and critique of the myth that women, especially black women are passive when it comes to claiming agency with regard to their sexual identities. My research into same-sex identities and relations in the Western Cape is located within a broader tradition of research that explores the distinctiveness of same-sex desire and identities in African contexts.

Dealing with the apartheid context, Cock (1991) argues that tradition is often invoked to justify gender inequality, a pattern which is deeply rooted in South Africa's history. She cites the common and dramatic example of female subordination rituals as the Hlonipha language of deference which an Nguni married woman was expected to adopt in the house of her in-laws. According to this ritual, the married woman was not allowed to utter any word containing a syllable that occurred in the names of her husband's relatives extending back to great grandparents. If she ignored the rules, she was publicly shamed. The outcome is that women are often viewed as less competent than men while these differences were variously attributed to biological or cultural differences.

Cock's findings about the impact of 'tradition' are repeated in more recent work on gender, sexuality, power and discourses of tradition in various African countries. Morgan & Wieringa's (2005) study on lesbian relationships in Africa confronts the extent to which many Africans have lived in denial of the existence of lesbianism on the continent and highlights a definition of 'culture' that treats same-sex relationships as taboo, alien and as unnatural transgressions. She shows that not only do many African societies treat any form of homoeroticism (same-sex love and desire) with disgust, considering it a grave pathological sin, but that it is also listed as a criminal offence in most countries. Morgan & Wieringa (2005) argues that absurd as it may sound, if the law finds two consenting adults of the same sex making love, it would subject them to imprisonment in countries like Uganda, for life.

The different ways in which African lesbians respond to multiple oppressions on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, class, race and religion is also highlighted in Morgan & Wieringa's (2005) study. Findings of the study provide important leads for exploring the complexity and diversity of lesbian experiences and relationships, and show that these explore some stereotypes while reinforcing others. For example, they note that 'when a female South African pastor, talks about her commitment to her lesbian lover, we discover that it is possible for individuals to live at peace with both Christianity and lesbianism' (Morgan and Wieringa, 2005: 208-209).

At the same time, a Namibian woman's construction of herself as a male lesbian who takes care of her girlfriend 'because as her superior, as her boss, I have to take care of her so she must look good' (Morgan and Wieringa, 2005: 161), reinforces many societal perceptions of lesbian butch-femme role playing. Morgan and Wieringa's work also explores the feelings, attitudes, emotions, roles, beliefs and behaviors of lesbians from various African cultures with regard to related topics such as community, identity, religion, marriage, parenthood and same-sex practices among others. Their work is therefore both empirically detailed and theoretically suggestive for my research: it provides suggestive ways of conceptualizing how lesbians and bisexuals negotiate power and social challenges through forms of agency, complicity and ambiguous self-definition.

I return to this theme in describing theory later in this chapter.

In the South African context, Sanger and Clowes (2006), dealing with lesbian stereotypes in the specific Western Cape context of Mitchell's Plain, found that South African law played a fundamental part in stigmatising and stereotyping non-heterosexual behaviour in order to reinforce the normalcy of heterosexuality. Discriminatory laws were informed by religious and medical discourse, thereby constructing the homosexual as abhorrent and beast-like for defying the prescribe norm of heterosexuality. In 1973 'being different implied a need for psychiatric intervention since homosexuality was still believed to be a mental disorder curable through psychiatric intervention' (Sanger and Clowes, 2006: 18).

According to Sanger and Clowes (2006) 'Lesbians were constructed as invisible, sexually deviant, defiant of conventional gender roles, mentally ill, incapable and unfit parents masculine, religiously immoral, abnormal and unstable'. The combination of oppressions by race, class, sex and sexual orientation contributed to the discrimination experienced by minority groups while forty years of iron-fisted rule by the Nationalist government was characterised by racial segregation and the policing of interracial relationships and sexual minorities.

Sanger and Clowes' (2006) notes that the legal system in democratic South Africa has clearly worked to reverse this explicit demonizing of lesbians and gays. They argue that South African lesbians and bisexuals, because of South Africa's different culture of tolerance shaped by the constitution, are able to have distinct experiences of freedom and oppression. The South African Constitution encourages and allows individuals of same sex orientation considerably more freedom in relation to other African countries.

Sanger and Clowes (2006) go on to show that South Africa's post-Apartheid progressive legislative climate for gays and lesbians, allows distinct experiences of freedom. Today, we see evidence of this in the form of same sex marriages, or the rights of gays and lesbians to have and adopt children – rights which are clearly denied to gays and lesbians in other African countries. Despite the presence of formal rights, however, many myths about homosexuality persist in present-day South Africa, and often fuel extremely brutal acts of homophobia. What is important, however, is that myth-making

about homosexuality in South Africa is in some ways different (even if not less harmful). This has important implications for my study in showing how widespread the idea of homosexuality as being un-African is.

Stereotypes about homosexuality in Africa often echo broader stereotypes and fallacies. Curtis Byer and Louis Shainberg's (1994) book *Dimensions of Human Sexuality*, for example, recorded myths about homosexuality. The most common myth recorded is that one can always tell homosexuals by the way they look or act and that men who act in a feminine manner must be gay. Another common myth is that masculine women with short haircuts and deeper voices must be lesbians. However, just as the vast majority of gays and lesbians do not fit these stereotypes, a portion of heterosexuals match them. Therefore, except for their actual sexual activity or admitting their sexual preferences, there is no definitive way to assess someone's sexual orientation on the basis of gender performance.

According to Byer and Shainberg's (1994) another myth is that homosexuals are all oversexed and that homosexuals are the originators of the HIV/AIDS virus. Yet whether people are heterosexual or homosexual, they exhibit a great range of sexual desire and activity. Byer and Shainberg's (1994) argues that before the advent of AIDS, there was a small segment of homosexual males who were extremely active - exceeding the capacities of almost all straight men. However, they are the exception rather than the rule.

Janet Cey's (2006) paper *The Myths of Homosexuality* notes that the most common myth about lesbianism is that women become lesbians because they have had bad experience with men. The general response of lesbian and bisexual individuals in this case is that if this myth held any truth, there would be a great shortage of straight women to go around.

Path-breaking studies conducted by Morgan & Wieringa (2005) have revealed that same-sex practices in general, and women's same-sex relations in particular, have been difficult to research in Africa due to intolerance and the homophobic sentiments of many African leaders. According to Aarmo (1999), examples of these include Robert Mugabe's statement that same-sex relationships are un-African and an import from the west. She notes that Mugabe has declared moral war on homosexuality in Zimbabwe and insists that homosexuality is a Western phenomenon imported to Africa by the European colonists which causes social disorder. Hames further (2003) argues that attacks on homosexuality in the name of preserving African authenticity are a prime example of the license enjoyed by homophobes at the cost of the dignity of lesbians and gays.

Gevisser (1994) has stated that the notion of homosexuality being regarded as un-African is perpetuated by the lack of visibility of black gays and lesbians as opposed to white gays and lesbians who are more open in their same sex relationships the fact that they are sometimes not termed gay or lesbian while they are in same sex relationships and the outright rejection of same sex relationships among many people in black communities. Many of

those in same sex relationships in these communities feel the impact of pro-tradition arguments, and many face horrific experiences of homophobic attacks. This further perpetuates the invisibility of homosexuality in black communities which fuels the belief that homosexuality is indeed un-African.

Extreme homophobia is of course not unique to black South Africans. Distiller (2003), a white lesbian, recounts how she herself experienced a severe hate crime in 1996 when she was beaten up by her former girlfriend's mother who believed Distiller to be a pervert who promoted homosexuality and made her daughter into a lesbian. In yet another incident Distiller recounts how she was turned away by a nurse at Vincent Pallotti Hospital based on the fact that she is a lesbian on inquiring about fertility treatment.

In line with the above, Vasu Reddy (2005) highlights a few examples of homophobic incidents against individuals based on their sexual identities such as Zoliswa Nkonyana being beaten and stabbed in front of her house by a gang of men in Cape Town for being a lesbian. In another incident a young lesbian nearly bled to death during the Johannesburg Pride after being attacked while being on the Forum for Empowerment of Women float in September 2005. In December 2004 a 22 year-old lesbian was raped in Meadowlands while another teenage lesbian was raped in Mohlakeng.

Distiller (2004) and Reddy (2005) therefore highlight the fact that homophobia is still rife towards lesbians and black lesbians in particular despite a formal context of sexual rights that is enshrined in the Constitution. Possible reasons for the particular vulnerability of many lesbians and gays include limited scope for physical security and choices about work, leisure and social life as well as lack of financial and social resources of black lesbians.

Overall, however, I am in total agreement with Machera (1997) that homophobia is based on the perception that same-sex relations are alien to African culture and an import from the depraved West.

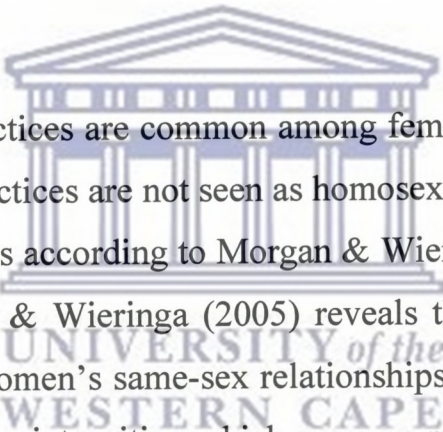
According to Machera (1997) Winnie Mandela has spoken out strongly against homosexuality during her murder trial of suspected homosexual Stompie Sepei saying that homosexuality is un-African and that all homosexuals should be persecuted. Since leaders like Mandela and Mugabe have clearly adopted colonialist discourses in their public discussion of same-sex practices in Africa, they conveniently ignore the strong history of sanctioned same-sex relations between women in certain communities in Africa (Aarmo, 1999). However inaccurate the rationalization of their homophobia has been, anti-gay and anti-lesbian sentiments have had a profound impact on society, and lesbians in Africa have often been subjected to patriarchal prejudices that render them marginalized and voiceless.

Matabeni (2001) notes that according to a report published by the international NGO, Action Aid, lesbian women in South Africa are being raped by men who believe it will cure them of their sexual orientation while women in townships in Johannesburg and Cape Town report a rising tide of brutal homophobic attacks, murders, and the widespread use of corrective rape as a form of punishment. These findings demonstrate the length certain individuals go to in order to enforce their views and perceptions onto people of alternative sexualities.

Much research has not only criticized the homophobia of seeing same-sex relationships as un-African; many writers have also shown how pervasive same-sex relationships are in pre-colonial and contemporary African societies. As revealed in Morgan and Wieringa's (2005) study, many studies of homosexuality in third-world contexts such as Africa show how lesbians and gays do not define themselves in terms of categories that have been developed in relation to sexual identities in Northern contexts and West-centric notions.

In research undertaken to find lesbians in Lesotho, for example, Kendall (1999) found widespread, apparently normative erotic relationships among the Basotho women. She found that public display of affection between people of the same-sex is quite common since the Basotho community has not constructed a social category such as lesbian.

Kendall (1999) notes that in this community woman friends engage in a wide variety of physical practices such as deep kissing and genital contact which includes overt expressions of love. Most Basotho women grow up in environments in which it is impossible for them to learn, purchase or display symbols of gay visibility, where passionate relationships between women are as conventional as (heterosexual) marriage and where women who love women usually perform as conventional wives and mothers. Kendall therefore concludes that love between women is as native to Southern Africa as the soil itself but that homophobia, like Mugabe's Christianity, is a Western import.



Although same-sex practices are common among female sangomas in South Africa, these sexual practices are not seen as homosexual and the women are not classified as lesbians according to Morgan & Wieringa (2005). Research undertaken by Morgan & Wieringa (2005) reveals that in Damara culture there is tolerance for women's same-sex relationships which includes same-sex practices of various intensities which may or may not have included genital contact did and still do occur. These practices are however not labeled as lesbianism or bisexuality. Although the women in my case study all self-consciously define themselves as lesbian or bisexual, I emphasize that their acting on homoerotic desire in ways not necessarily connected to self-proclaimed "gay identity", is important in considering their agency.

Part of this consideration is connected to a trend noted by Cheryl Potgieter (1997). According to Potgieter, there is a tendency for female same-sex relationships to get desexualized (1997). This happens when attention is not

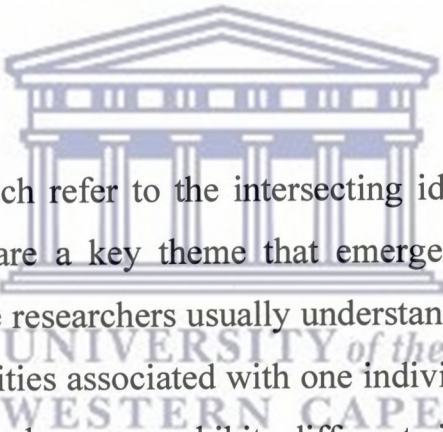
paid to the desire and erotic sexual relationships between women and the focus is on lesbian feminism, which sometimes emphasizes political positions and non-sexual relations between women, or when women's same-sex sexualities are viewed from the perspective of a heterosexual gaze. She notes that research on lesbians' desire and erotic relationships also requires a reassessment of what is often understood to be the erotic content of women's relationships with each other. Potgieter encourages us to understand that preconceptions (which are often Eurocentric or culture-bound) about what constitutes 'lesbianism' can often interfere with one's recognition and exploration of same-sex relationships among women at the local level and within particular South African (and African, generally) communities.



SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF SEXUALITY

For decades, theorists within different disciplines have been asking provocative and productive questions about how sexuality, that seemingly most private of all human experience, is socially constructed. Many of these researchers' views on sexuality, gender identity and consciousness are located within the social constructionist paradigm and queer theoretical frameworks. One of the commonalities between the two approaches is that both frameworks challenge heteronormativity and the dominant order of heterosexuality. Furthermore, much overlap exists between queer theory and the social constructionist paradigm as both approaches criticize and challenge the essentialist obsession with boxing people into clear categories on the basis of anatomy, physical appearance, nature and other seemingly fundamental phenomena believed to determine, gender and sexuality.

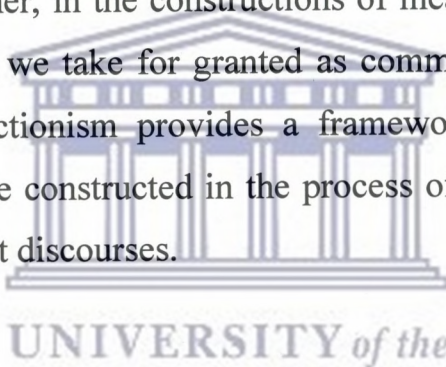
Drawing on the social constructionist paradigm illustrates how productive it can be in unpacking complex identities, and sensitively analyzing non-Western homosexuality. Basically, constructionism refuses the concept of innateness and argues that sexuality is a cultural product, constructed out of the available building blocks in one's environment (Ester Rothblum, 1997). Therefore the primary assumption of the social constructionist paradigm is that sexuality is defined in a backdrop of temporal and cultural factors that contribute to people's sexual orientations. In an effort to best illustrate how these approaches deconstruct identities considered 'normative' I will explain and discuss these approaches as well as certain theorist's views as they pertain to the study.



Multiple identities, which refer to the intersecting identities of race, class, gender and sexuality, are a key theme that emerged during the research process. Although some researchers usually understand multiple identities to involve one set of identities associated with one individual, it is important to consider how individuals may exhibit different identities in different contexts. Data collected around the performance of multiple identities among the lesbians and bisexuals in my study has yielded the fact that many gay people in our society lead double lives in order to protect themselves from discrimination and alienation from their families and society at large. The performance of multiple identities among lesbians and bisexuals was clearly illustrated during the participant observations in specific contexts such as clubs and other public meeting spaces such as Mzoli's in the black township of Gugulethu. Here there was obvious evidence of ways in which race, class, gender and sexuality intersected as lesbians and bisexuals

reflected different and connected aspects of their identities.

According to the constructionist paradigm, sexuality, like gender and culture is something like one's religion since most people are born into a certain faith but this does not mean it is fixed for life and unchanging. John Harvey (1981) argues that all knowledge is a human interpretation, arising from social interaction in the form of conversation, negotiation and other social practices. He goes on to caution that when regarding what "truth" in a belief is, one should consider that it does not merely lie in the interaction with the external reality but rather, in the constructions of meaning and interactions, specifically that which we take for granted as common knowledge. In this context social constructionism provides a framework for exploring how particular categories are constructed in the process of regulating sexualized objects within dominant discourses.



According to Judith Lorber (2000), social constructionists examine the range of sexual behavior, ideology and subjective meaning among and within human groups and view the body, its functions and sensations as potentials (and limits) which are incorporated and mediated by culture. Lorber (2000) further that argue that social constructionist theorists recognize that sexuality is achieved through, and by people and their context. In this sense culture (our norms, beliefs and values among others) and identity feeds into the way women are generally defined and therefore also assert themselves in terms of their sexuality. Lorber therefore connects the construction of gender and sexuality to patriarchal power.

Feminist Adrienne Rich (1986) takes Lorber's (2000) analysis further. She uses social constructionist approaches to challenge patriarchy and heterosexuality by questioning assumptions that women are innately sexually orientated toward men and that the lesbian choice is simply an act-out of bitterness toward men. Rich's intervention into sexuality is relevant since many feminists maintain an essentialist way of thinking about female sexuality. As Rich indicates, the assumption is that heterosexuality is a norm for women, and she argues that feminists often fail to explore how deeply patriarchy is embedded in women's heterosexual relationships with men.

Rich allows us to understand how deeply embedded heterosexual norms, identities, relationships and institutions are in patriarchal society, and how they are always connected to the maintenance of gendered power relations and subject positions. Her conceptualization of 'compulsory heterosexuality' is extremely important in my consideration of the numerous and subtle ways in which society polices sexual identities. It is therefore also crucial to my analysis of how 'lesbian existence' - in the form of lesbians' and bisexuals' negotiating alternative sexualities - responds to entrenched ways of 'being'.

QUEER THEORY AND AGENCIES

Queer theory builds on constructionism since it allows for a critical approach not only to social identity and location but also to social systems and institutions that perpetuate heteronormativity. In this sense, queer theory is connected to Rich's (1986) deconstruction of compulsory heterosexuality. Judith Butler (1990) argues that queer is by definition whatever is at odds

with 'the normal', the 'legitimate' and the dominant, based on the idea that identities are not fixed and no essential characteristic can be said to determine who we really are. Her argument suggests that it is meaningless to talk in general about women or any other group, as identities consist of many elements so that to assume that people can be seen collectively on the basis of one shared characteristic, their anatomical sex is wrong.

Butler (1990) challenges the binaries of the dominant order of heterosexuality by the inclusion of marginalized groups such as intersexed people, lesbians and bisexuals. According to Butler, queer theory takes the most extreme view on the fluidity of gender and sexuality and in essence deconstructs how individuals do and undo gender and sexuality. As a feminist writer Butler proposes that we deliberately challenge all notions of fixed identity, in varied and non-predictable ways. Butler (1990) further states that queer theory is not (necessarily) just a view on sexuality, or gender but also suggests that the confines of any identity can potentially be reinvented by its owner. This approach became most useful and was prominently displayed throughout my research process especially in the contexts of participant observations and focus group sessions.

Butler (1990) argues that queer theory goes up against the entire paradigmatic system of meaning that produces heterosexuality. Operating with a strong notion of the historical and social construction of society's beliefs about human sexual nature, basic premises of queer theory includes denunciation of the views that sexuality is a universal and eternal drive, and the affirmation that sexuality is best viewed from a social constructionist

position. It is for this reason that queer theory questions and destabilizes sexual identities and counter cultural prejudice against sexual minorities such as homosexuals. Queer theory thus allows for a critical approach not only to social identity and location but also specifically to social systems and institutions that perpetuates heteronormativity. The ultimate goal of queer theory is to challenge heteronormativity while it simultaneously challenges the institution of patriarchy to which being queer often poses a radical threat.

On the discussion of performance and performativity I draw on Butler's basic ideas to shape my study of performativity, constructions of gender and sexuality and agency. It is Butler's notion of prescribed and disruptive performance that informs my study and many other studies on subversion. Butler is a complex theorist and has developed and modified her views about performativity, gender, sexuality and subversion throughout her various works. My aim, however, is not to explore her arguments in detail: I am primarily concerned with how her views about performance and performativity can be used to explore and explain lesbians' self-definition and active self-assertion. Butler argues that performativity is what allows the subject to be 'recognized' in terms of prevailing social norms, but also draws our attention to ways in which gendered performance can be unsettled and destabilized.

In her book *Bodies that Matter* which largely deals with performativity, Butler (1993: 187) notes that she wants to avoid any misreading of performativity as 'wilful' and 'arbitrary' by arguing forcefully that domains of intelligibility are bound with effects. She also argues that historicity of discourse and historicity of norms constitute the power of discourse to enact what it names. Hence, the normalization of the material depends largely on reiteration but also exclusion.

Butler's (1993) performativity works through a normative force, namely the practice of reiteration. Exclusions, on the other hand, 'haunt signification as its abject borders or as that which is strictly foreclosed: the unliveable, the non-narrative, the traumatic' (p.188). According to Butler (1993: 188), identity categories are troubled by its impossibility to fully establish an identity contingent on both reiteration and exclusion. While she sees performativity as a potential to "open the signifiers to new meanings and new possibilities for political resignification," one could also view her project as an indispensable tool, insofar as it allows us not only to envision a futurity, but also locate that which challenges and which creates new possibilities.

Butler (1990) argues that feminism had made a mistake by trying to assert that women were a group with common characteristics and interests. She notes that this approach is often performed as an unwitting regulation and reification of gender relations which reinforces a binary view of gender relations in which human beings are divided into two clear-cut groups,

namely women and men (Butler, 1990). She argues that rather than opening up possibilities for a person to form and choose their own individual identity, feminism had closed the options down. She further notes that feminists rejected the idea that biology is destiny, but then developed an account of patriarchal culture which assumed that masculine and feminine genders would inevitably be built, by culture, upon male and female bodies, making the same destiny just as inescapable. According to Butler (1990), that argument allows no room for choice, difference or resistance.

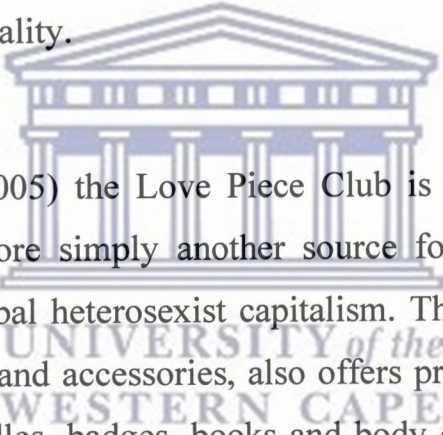
I fully agree with Butler (1990) that rather than being a fixed attribute in a person, gender should be seen as a fluid variable which shifts and changes in different contexts and at different times. In my view the very fact that women and men can say that they feel more or less like a woman or like a man shows that the experience of a gendered, cultural identity is considered an achievement. Butler (1990) also argues that sex (male, female) is seen to cause gender (masculine, feminine) which is seen to cause desire (towards the other gender) which is seen as a kind of continuum. Butler's approach, which is inspired in part by Foucault, is basically to smash the supposed links between these, so that gender and desire are flexible, free-floating and not 'caused' by other factors, such as sex, which are in fact not – according to her – stable. She points out that 'there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender and those identities are performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results. In other words, gender is a performance; it's what you *do* at particular times, rather than a universal *who you are*' (Butler, 1990: 25).

Butler (1990) has dealt extensively with constructions of gender and sexuality, and her views about subversion are wide-ranging and philosophically complex. She views gender identity simply as a set of repeated acts which emphasizes strategies for resisting and subverting identity and argues that gender is politically and therefore socially controlled, for example, rather than woman being something one is, it is something one does.

Butler (1990) for example uses Madonna as one media icon who can be seen to have brought queer theory to the masses with her open manipulation of dress code, make up and body language. By using Madonna as an example, Butler (1990) shows that gender fluidity is outlawing all the rules of cultural gender assignment. It does not accept the prevalence of two rigidly defined genders female and male and believes in freedom to choose any kind of gender with no rules, no defined boundaries and no fulfilling of expectations associated with any particular gender. Throughout, Butler (1990) theorizes the problem of gender explicitly in terms of recognition and desire.

Certain researchers have directly or indirectly used Butler's ideas about the performativity of gender and its connection to sexuality. In demonstrating the value of her central ideas about iterated performance in both constituting and potentially destabilising (queering) the heteronormative stable subject, I have found the discussions and case studies that follow especially suggestive.

Laura Dales' (2005) article on *Feminist Erotica and Agency @ the Love Piece Club in Japan* for example explores agency in ways that show how queer theory explore research subjects as dynamic social actors, even when they may appear to be completely controlled by patriarchy and heterosexism. Her article focuses on the participation in and promotion of open discussion of sex goods, masturbation and queer sexual activity of some women in Japan, a context where it is generally believed that women's heterosexuality is very strictly regulated through behavior, speech relationships. In this apparently constricting context, certain women become actors themselves by, subverting, undermining or opposing the power and repression of dominant forces of sexuality.



According to Dales (2005) the Love Piece Club is not exclusively a sex goods shop and therefore simply another source for the consumption of commodities under global heterosexist capitalism. The shop, in addition to stocking sex toys, aids and accessories, also offers products such as natural (sponge) tampons, candles, badges, books and body care products. Beyond its retail function, the shop is a site for the focus on women's bodies, erotica and sexuality. The website for the shop advises that it is a women's space, and that male visitors to the Tokyo shop are to be accompanied by women. The Love Piece Club also presents information on women's sexuality, including photos, creative expression and critical commentary, challenging mainstream social constructions of women's sexuality, promulgated through mass media and widely visible on billboards, in magazine advertisements, the internet and on television shows. It also actively aims to subvert the depiction of women's sexuality in male pornography or porn produced for

men, such as DVDs and magazines.

Like other mainstream media, The Love Piece Club is a public space, and the theoretical ground covered in Love Piece Club products is accessible to all women who have access to the internet Dales (2005). However, unlike mainstream media, discussions of queer and lesbian sexuality, sexual self-determination and the impact of hegemonic gender ideals can occur in a space explicitly designed to encourage questioning. In this sense, discussions of queer and lesbian sexuality, sexual self-determination and the impact of hegemonic gender ideals, create a potential foundation for women's subversive social engagement – a critical engagement with those forces that shape their identities and life choices. In line with Butler's (1990) ideas of queer theory, The Love Piece Club and the internet, offers women the space to create supportive relationships; to protest against discrimination; to campaign politically and to challenge or subvert dominant expectations of femininity (Onosaka 2003: 96).

Since queer theory has developed a major focus on the affirmation and negotiation of alternative sexualities as well as the destabilizing, disruption and the open subversion of the binaries within the dominant heterosexual and patriarchal discourse, it is highly significant to this study. Queer notions of subversion and gender fluidity were clearly illustrated during my participant observations at the Annual Gay Pride March especially, during which the participating gay community openly destabilized, disrupted and the subverted the binaries within the dominant heterosexual and patriarchal discourse. In this context queer theory encapsulates the very essence of

claiming agency of one's sexuality and/or sexual orientation.

Gender activist Riki Wilchins (2004) has also provided me with insights into queer subjects' agencies by explaining key ideas that have shaped contemporary sex and gender studies. She argues that queer theory is at the heart of radical politics which confronts and challenge power through naming, performance, language and difference. Wilchins (2004) further notes that under social relations in the late 20th century in the North, women generally were heterosexual homemakers, who were by common agreement considered socially and psychologically incomplete until they had a man to marry, bear children and make a home for. She argues that forty years of feminist agitation has transformed much of what evolved over that time to the point where many women now have careers outside of home if they wish, dressed comfortably and even build independent lives.

Wilchins (2004) goes on to describe the ways queer youths today are using the tools of queer theory and gender theory to reshape their world through political passion, personal experience and the patterns of everyday life. In other words, they are extending the subversion associated with late 20th Century gender transformation. Although it's finally acceptable for women to have masculine jobs, wield masculine power and achieve in masculine sports, it is still totally unacceptable for women to indeed be masculine. She notes for example, that should the same type of woman appear in public with all the interpersonal symbols of gender power and privilege – such as crew-cut, wearing a suit and tie and smoking a pipe – many would probably be shocked, disgusted or at least turned off. It is through drawing attention to

the signifiers that Wilchins identifies, such as dress code, speech styles, language, body posture and the numerous subtle markers of gender performance and ascribed sexual identity, that the basic premise of queer theory can be explored in relation to individuals.

Many African studies of lesbian and gay cultures and subjects in relation to agency have explicitly and implicitly been informed by ideas about performativity and subversion as outlined by queer theorists such as Butler. Research undertaken by Mark Gevisser (1994) for example, has found quite a variety of examples of spaces that have been frequented by gay people in certain areas around Woodstock, Cape Town and Salt River. This specific research has shown a history, which also included a few visual examples, of how gay people have redefined their ascribed identities through performance and subversion, even at times when their same-sex orientation was outlawed. An in-depth discussion of Gevisser's findings will be developed in the thematic analysis under the theme of space.

On the issue of subversion in an African context, Tamale (2003) argues that it is not surprising that most homosexuals find it difficult to come out of their closets or be open about their sexual orientation. Due to the repressive conditions of state- and religious-inspired homophobia in Uganda, in an effort to evade public prosecution and prison sentences, most gay individuals blend within the wider society and even live under the cover of heterosexual relationships while maintaining their homosexual relationships underground. The tendency, therefore, is to construct comfort zones where they complacently live a different and segregated lifestyle. Gay and lesbian clubs

in particular do offer comfort zones for homosexuals, until they are rudely awoken by an incidents of hate crimes and at worst, imprisonment.

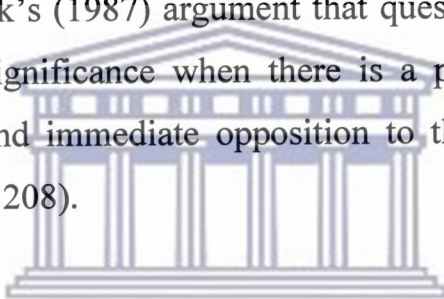
In line with Butler's insights into subversion and agency, Sylvia Tamale (2003), in her article *Out of the Closet: Unveiling Sexuality Discourses in Uganda*, uses Kuchuism to illustrate how lesbians and homosexuals claim the power to name themselves to assert their sexual identities. In Uganda gays and lesbians identify themselves simply with the term kuchu (plural, kuchus). Although Ugandan Society considers them a moral outrage, these individuals have rejected all negative labels and constructed an alternative positive and empowering self-identification which they consider as the prime factor in their personal identity. While 'straight kuchus' take a lot of pride in their orientation, many consider bisexuals as 'not real' and somewhat akin to 'sellouts' who wish to have their cake and eat it (Tamale: 2003).



As an example of subversion through evasion, Tamale (2003) illustrates the recognized forms of self-definition among kuchus that allow individuals within the kuchu subculture to identify one another within the patriarchal heterosexual social system. This identification among gay men often consists of gestures or mannerisms that repudiate conventional masculinity while lesbians tend to use mode of dress to distinguish themselves from heterosexual women. She further notes that almost all the female kuchus she have met in Kampala routinely wears trousers, shirts, baseball caps and other forms of masculine attire. Many interpret this as lesbians' desire to be like men or to adopt the role of pseudo-men. Kuchus themselves find such

interpretations laughable, and believe they are simply asserting their right to dress in styles that they are comfortable with. In this context the self-definition of lesbians and gays therefore involves their subversive performance and statement-making as gender outlaws in society.

Tamale (2003) argues that Kuchuism has taken on a particular and vital importance to homosexuals in Uganda. Since homosexuals in Uganda generally do not feel a sense of belonging in relation to the dominant culture, they have had to reconstruct affirming identities for themselves. I therefore agree with Wendy Clark's (1987) argument that questions of 'identity' and 'self' gain particular significance when there is a part of oneself that is hidden and in direct and immediate opposition to the social and cultural mores of society (1987: 208).



Tamale (2003) notes that there are several gay and lesbian organizations in Uganda, most of which act as support groups with very few engaged in activist work to improve their status. The different groups are however not connected in any way, with some sustaining their memberships exclusively through cyberspace. The avoidance of public visibility by gay and lesbian organizations can be explained by the severity of Ugandan law, in terms of which homosexuality is illegal and carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. The anonymous involvement and communication that many organizations afford also proves safe when individuals, especially those in socially esteemed professions or high office, need to preserve the mainstream sexual identity that is often assumed to be part of their social status. Overall, the exceedingly hostile context in which lesbians and gays

live and work makes it extremely difficult for homosexuals to demand their rights in Uganda with a unified voice.

As I will show in later chapters, dress and self-stylization were key themes during the focus group sessions. It became evident that much importance has been attached to this theme as a means of re-defining identity, claiming agency and expressing independence. On the topic of self-styling, Michel Foucault (1987) describes practices in which individuals create a certain number of operations of their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and ways of being so as to transform themselves. Foucault's (1987) notion of self-styling therefore bears on my discussion of subversive forms of selfhood and corporeality, and an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as manipulable, artful process as illustrated during the Pride March. Morgan & Wieringa's (2005) study of female same-sex practices in various cultures and communities such as, the popular butch lesbian subculture that exists in Johannesburg, for example, has shown how women express their sexual identity and create meaning with regard to identity by means of dress codes as an example of self-styling.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The main aim of this chapter is to survey the wide-ranging literature that informs my interdisciplinary study. I explore important case studies; work on methodology and empirical and theoretical trends in research on gender, sexuality and power. The previous chapter has identified the specific theoretical perspectives I use. This chapter provides a fuller discussion of relevant work related to my field of study. I use thematic categories to map out the wide range of research on gender and sexuality on which my study of localized identities and struggles draws. I also indicate my efforts to build on emerging works that addresses gaps in existing research.

Literature on female same sex relationships can be explored in terms of the relevance of both local and global studies conducted in the field of interest. South African studies have often concentrated on the first-hand experiences of women. Morgan & Wieringa's (2005) study on female same sex practices in Africa including South Africa for example revealed that same sex relationships have existed for centuries in Southern Africa although it has not always been labeled as homosexual or lesbian. Local studies also provide important empirical material about intersecting identities and how context-specific expressions of sexual identity can be explored in relation to other identities.

In the South African context for example, Sanger and Clowes (2006: 18) notes that 'Apartheid laws in the mid 1950s played a significant role in constructing the homosexual as deviant, immoral and mentally ill'. According to Sanger and Clowes (2006: 19) 'minority groups which included blacks, women, gays and lesbians held little or no social power during South Africa's Apartheid past. Along with discrimination against blacks, women and other minority groups, any person who did not accept the hegemony of the white, heterosexual, middle-class, Afrikaans speaking male, was treated with contempt. Furthermore, Christian nationalist apartheid ideology was aimed at keeping the white nation sexually and morally pure through restrictive and legislation around an individual's choice of sexual partner' (Sanger and Clowes, 2006: 19).

Sanger and Clowes (2006: 19) reasons that 'the criminalization of homosexuality in the 1950s and 1960s clearly reflects that it was white males who were to be 'protected' from homosexuality. Male homosexuality became severely stigmatized in South Africa in the late 1950s because of the general intolerance of feminized men, based on the belief that by rejecting their privileged status, homosexuals threatened the superiority of real men'.

In contrast to homosexuals, however, 'sexual acts between South African women were generally ignored and only criminalized in 1988 when the existing prohibition on 'indecent' and 'immoral' acts was extended to include lesbians, (Sanger and Clowes, 2006: 19). Farlam (in De Gruchy and Germond, 1997: 132) however, points out that despite the lack of recognition, 'lesbians were still exposed to discrimination at the hands of

both the legislature and the judiciary’.

According to Cameron (1994), the courts were doubtful whether sexual acts between women should be punishable by law. In this respect Potgieter (1997: 94) highlights the historical marginalization of lesbians and describes the lack of recognition of lesbians as an ‘ideology of disbelief’ by a patriarchal system unable to comprehend that women could possibly not need men, sexually or in any other way. In the past, South African lesbians have not only been ignored, but excluded from criminalization not simply because they were oppressed as women but because they were denied existence as lesbians. Being a black lesbian was even more difficult within the South African context where racial stigmatization played a fundamental role in the sustenance of a nationalist government.

In contrast to local studies, global studies will mainly allow me to show how research undertaken worldwide provides general theoretical and political perspectives for exploring identities and relationships at the national and local levels. This is because international research has drawn extensively on constructionist and queer theories in exploring the social meanings and implications of women’s homoerotic relationships in patriarchal societies which relates to my study and area of focus (Roscoe & Murray, 1998).

Global studies also provide a lens of how same-sex relationships can be experienced, perceived and defined in contextually specific ways. Roscoe & Murray (1998) for example, argue that we generally assume that homosexual

behavior in some form occurs in all human groups. Indeed, ethnographic literature on Africa includes many reports of casual same-sex contact.

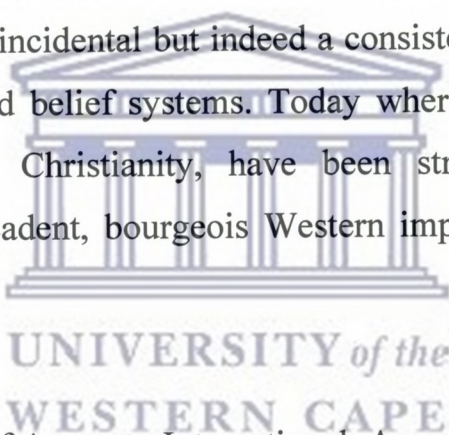
A great variety of recent theories explore homosexuality in terms of the spectrum of human sexuality, with theorists who use social constructionist approaches providing especially important insights. Foucault's (1987) theory that even the deepest-lying sexual categories are social constructs has surely been one of the most powerful developments on the topic of homosexuality. One of the most significant claims to issue from this work is Foucault's claim that the very category 'homosexual' is a social construct which is scarcely more than a hundred years old. It is a fact that homosexuality is not a conceptual category everywhere. As noted by David Greenberg (1988), to many it connotes symmetry between male-male and female-female relationships and when used to characterize individuals, it implies that erotic attraction originates in a relatively stable, more or less exclusive attribute of the individual. Homosexuality usually connotes an exclusive orientation, for example, the heterosexual is not also homosexual and the homosexual is not also homosexual.

Many global studies on sexuality indicate that the term 'sexuality' is by no means a fixed definition and sexuality and ideas of sexuality vary across cultures. According to Machera for example (1997), sexuality is seen as the intricate and multiple ways in which our emotions, desires and relationships are shaped by the society we live in. Sexuality is a complex term with a multifaceted meaning referring to deep emotional feeling as well as to issues

of power and vulnerability in gendered relationships and elicits images of belonging, both physically and emotionally. Being bisexual myself, I relate to both males and females in different ways. For example, while I find myself more physically attracted to males I am attracted to females on a more emotional level. Therefore, while I might have a more physical relationship with males I find myself in a more vulnerable and emotional position with females. This, however, does not mean that I'm unable to have a meaningful, long term relationship with either of the two sexes.

Internationally, researchers have drawn attention to the fact that sexual identity and behavior are constructed in a changing social environment (see Rothblum, 1997, for example). However, Morgan and Wieringa's (2003) studies on the subject argues that same-sex practices have been and still are perceived as traditional practices in many parts of Africa. As cited by Roscoe & Murray (1998), anthropologists in Africa and elsewhere have denied or dismissed the presence of homosexuality even when they observed it. They reckon that when homosexuality is indeed acknowledged, it's meaning and cultural significance are discounted and minimized. By claiming that homosexual relations are solely due to a lack of women (such as in migrant camps in Zimbabwe for example) or on the part of a short lived adolescent phase, the possibility of homoerotic desire – that an individual may actually want and find pleasure in another same sex – is effectively denied.

According to Roscoe & Murray (1998) what began with denial has subsequently ended in a near taboo on the subject of African homosexualities based on European, not African morality. The colonialists did not introduce homosexuality to Africa but rather intolerance of it as well as systems of surveillance and regulation for suppressing it. However, these systems were not successful as long as the reaction of the colonized was simply to hide or deny such practices. Only when native people began to forget that same-sex patterns were ever a part of their culture did homosexuality become truly stigmatized. Recent research undertaken by Roscoe & Murray (1998) has shown that African homosexual relationships are neither random nor incidental but indeed a consistent and logical feature of African societies and belief systems. Today where Western influences, notably Marxism and Christianity, have been strong, the belief that homosexuality is a decadent, bourgeois Western import has become quite common.



Based on the findings of Amnesty International, Amos Lassen (2003) argues that it is an acceptable premise that most religions globally are against homosexuality. In his book *The Queer God*, Lassen notes that in Tanzania for example, gays and lesbians are seen as immoral and satanic and anyone found to be in a homosexual act is liable to the severe punishment of life imprisonment (Morgan & Wieringa, 2005). Based on my own experience and observations as a member of a minority group, I support Rose's argument that most lesbians, both as individuals and as members of a couple, are confronted with the pervasive experience of heterosexism and homophobia.

On the issue of homosexuality, Amnesty International points out that in many places of the world; same sex sexuality is not a right but a crime:

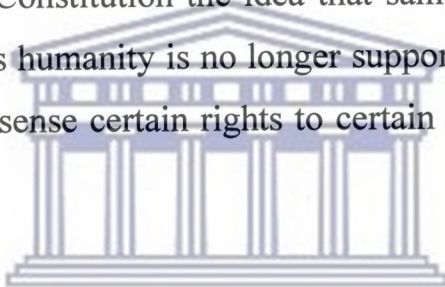
‘Homosexuality is considered a sin or an illness, a social or ideological deviation, or a betrayal of one’s own culture. Although most governments deny that they commit human rights violations against homosexuals or qualify said crimes as unusual aberrations, they often openly and fervently defend the repression gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered individuals are subject to in the name of culture, religion, morality or public health and facilitate such repression with concrete legal norms (Lassen 2003: 31, 34).’

Many theorists have in fact shown that the fixation with categorizing human beings’ sexuality is not ‘natural’, but has distinctive legacy in Western thought. Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* (1986) argues that the notions of deviance and normality have been central to the codifying of identities such as homosexual, gay and lesbian.

Struggles for sexual rights in South Africa have however challenged both Afrocentric and Western-centric expression of homophobia. In his book *Defiant Desire*, Gevisser (1994) for example argues that South African expressions of homosexuality, and the language and identities associated with this have often taken their cue from a Western legacy of gay identity formation and activism. South Africa however provides unique opportunities to explore the localized and distinctive ways in which particular individuals in particular communities express and define their ‘identity’ in relation to

their sexuality.

In South Africa, steps to rectify discrimination have been taken with the adoption of the Constitution which guarantees non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. South Africa has one of the most progressive constitutions in the world (Potgieter, 1997). Due to constitutional rights, previous sodomy laws have been scrapped; gays and lesbians can now lawfully adopt children; their spouses can be added to their medical aids and they can even get legally married. Sanger and Clowes (2006) note that 'with the adoption of a new Constitution the idea that same-sex desire somehow devalues an individual's humanity is no longer supported in the overarching legal discourse. In this sense certain rights to certain individuals are slowly being dismantled'.



Section 9 (3) of South Africa's Constitution expressly prohibits unfair discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation (<http://www.constitutionalcourt.org.za>). It reads: "The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, color, **sexual orientation**, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth" (emphasis my own).

A number of amendments and new legislation in South Africa's Constitution has contributed to the freedom of sexual orientation and sexual expression in South African society. After a long history of the marginalization and

persecution of gays and lesbians in South Africa, the country became the fifth country in the world and the first in Africa, to allow legal marriages to same sex couples (<http://www.constitutionalcourt.org.za>). The Constitution and legislature are important in providing a framework of rights and the context in which contemporary same-sex relationships are played out.

However, although the rights of gays and lesbians are enshrined in the South African Constitution which guarantees them equal rights, Taghmeda Achmat (2008) highlights the plights of the gay community in countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Egypt. She also argues that globally, lesbianism is still contested in many countries and that many lesbian and gay men still have to fight for the right to life as well as the right to legalize marriage, adoption and family rights. This in itself illustrates how deeply the notion of heterosexuality is rooted and perpetuated in society mainly through the institutions of socialization and patriarchy.

In order to best illustrate the relevance of previous studies and extensive literature in the field I will identify various themes raised in the literature as they relate to the study.

METHODOLOGICAL STUDIES

I have indicated that a central concern emerging in my research on black lesbians in South Africa concerns methodological challenges. Informed by Matabeni (2001), I have aimed for approaches that encourage self-reflexivity, transparency about how power dynamics come into play between

researchers and their subjects, and the complexities surrounding the researchers' location in relation to her subjects. As I will demonstrate in a later chapter, I have sought to emphasize the perspectives and testimonies of my research participants. I have therefore found the work of Marjorie Mblinyi (1992) on power and feminist research extremely valuable.

While Matabeni (2001) emphasizes particular challenges involving research on black lesbians, Mblinyi (1992) provides a broader discussion of power, knowledge production and research processes involving especially marginalized women in southern Africa. For her, this marginalized group consists of peasant and working class black Southern African women. In my case, the marginalized group consists of lesbian and bisexual women various areas within the Western Cape. Mblinyi (1992) confronts the obvious power of producing knowledge about others by situating herself as a white, Western-educated woman working on southern African women.

For me the challenge is similar to Matabeni's. Since I am a colored bisexual who can claim some form of insider perspective towards the study, I am also in a position of structural power (similar to Matabeni's) by virtue of my role and status as a researcher and producer of knowledge. In this context I have grounded myself as a colored bisexual insider who was in the process of engaging with a community with which I shared a sense of belonging while simultaneously maintaining a professional role as researcher during the data collection process.

My major challenge was that of conducting interviews with individuals who were still closeted and who did not feel as comfortable in talking about their sexuality especially in a group setting. I therefore conducted one-on-one interviews with those individuals, as a means to have their voices heard and include their contributions to the study as well.

The rest of my interviews were concluded in a group setting which proved to be lively with much debate and spontaneous expressions of opinions which challenged many deep seated beliefs of certain interviewees. In this context I attempt to produce knowledge in ways which ensures that my own preconceived research agendas do not drown out the voices and perspectives of my subjects. At the same time, I am conscious of my need to organize, analyze and interpret the experiences of my subjects and participants.

Informed by Mblinyi (1992), the focus of my research on agency is crucially connected to my adoption of a methodology that focuses on dialogue between researcher and research subject. Mblinyi (1992) argues that human society and individuals are constantly changing, and that this arises from the actions and ideas of individuals and groups leading to different kinds of research processes. She notes for example that interviews, whether structured or unstructured, formal or informal are like a running a workshop in which the researcher can evoke discussion, follow the line of discussion, follow ideas not anticipated in the research and even catch non-verbal gestures and the hesitation which signal alternative interpretation.

Mblinyi (1992) also considers open-ended questions less alienating and more democratic than structured items. According to her the researcher retains control over the discourse built into the question and its interpretation, recording and analysis and participants may actually have much less control over the final interpretation and outcome of their speech. The value of the approach described by Mblinyi (1992) is therefore particularly important to my case study of lesbian and bisexual agencies and identities.

THE CONTEXTS OF SEXUALITY

One of the oldest and most enduring myths Europeans have created about Africa is the myth that homosexuality is absent or incidental in African societies. I agree with Clark Burton's (1995) argument that most of what is known as 'traditional' African cultures were written by individuals who were part of a colonial system that seriously disrupted those cultures. Part of that disruption entailed distorting understandings of sexual practices and identities in traditional Africa.

As Busangokwakhe Dlamini (2003) shows, since it is widely believed that homosexuality is not part of traditional societies in Africa, such claims have genuine social consequences because they stigmatize those engaging in homosexual behavior and grappling with gay identities. Although such beliefs (which have counterparts throughout the world) may tell us something about perceived ethnic cultures, identities and boundaries, they cannot be relied on as evidence for the actual origins or transmission of

cultural traits relating to sexual identities, especially those that are stigmatized, as in this case, lesbianism and bisexuality.

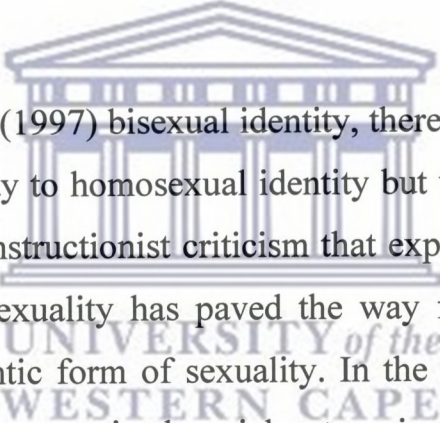
SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF HETEROSEXUALITY

According to Bhaskaran (2002) heterosexuality is assumed: therefore socialization across the gender lines is discouraged. Parents are protective of their girl children, and boys are represented as predators after one thing. Girls are expected to remain untouched, unsoiled, and virginal till marriage. Female sexuality is constructed as passive, receptive to masculine sexuality, denying women sexual agency. Heterosexuality is the normative, compulsory sexuality.

The belief that heterosexuality is the only natural form of sexual expression is rooted in a cultural framework that defines heterosexuality as compulsory and homosexuality as deviant or pathological. Heterosexuality is grounded in bodily sexuality but it cannot be understood independently of the variable beliefs, values, ideologies, discourses, identities and social relationships through which people become socially heterosexual and practice heterosexuality. Furthermore, heterosexuality is lived in distinctive lifestyles (especially those tied to marriage and household arrangements) masculinity/femininity, normality/abnormality.

Rich (1986) for example defines heterosexuality itself as a beachhead of male dominance where heterosexuality is presumed as a sexual preference of most women. Although heterosexuality is experienced as the norm,

lesbianism and bisexuality are a lived critique of the norm. Firestein (1996) argues that broadly conceived bisexuality for example, means or pertains to one's experience of erotic, emotional and sexual attraction to persons of more than one gender. She reasons that studies on bisexuality which include serial or simultaneous same-sex and cross-sex sexual relationships, have found that despite ample evidence of prevalent bisexual behavior, few researchers in the 1970s and 1980s gave bisexuality a passing nod. Therefore, bisexuality was either considered nonexistent or conceptualized as an intermediate between heterosexuality and homosexuality according to Firestein (1996).



According to Rothblum (1997) bisexual identity, therefore, was adopted as a steppingstone on the way to homosexual identity but was not considered an end in itself. Recent constructionist criticism that explores the dichotomous and scalar models of sexuality has paved the way for the recognition of bisexuality as an authentic form of sexuality. In the past decade therefore, bisexuals have become recognized social categories along with gays and lesbians (Lorber, 2000).

Jeffrey Weeks (1987) argues that our sexualities defines us as human beings: it gives us our identities, it gives us the ability to know how we want to define ourselves as male or female, as heterosexual and homosexual, 'normal' or 'abnormal', 'natural' or 'unnatural.' Forms of self-naming that defy heterosexuality relate not only to sexual orientation, but also to gender performance.

According to Achmat (2008), the common definition of a lesbian is a woman who desires other women sexually, is a limited understanding of the category, since there is no single type of lesbian. There are lesbians who define themselves as 'butch', 'lipstick' or 'diesel dykes'; there are lesbians who define themselves religiously, culturally or racially and lesbians who are in heterosexual marriages because of societal and religious pressures due to their sexuality. Queer theory is relevant in providing tools for exploring how different individuals negotiate, affirm and perform their sexual identities.

Rich (1986) argues that although many societies show unexpected tolerance towards non-heterosexual relationships, it is important to note that the very same societies or communities demonstrate deep prejudices around homosexuality in general. This leads to the assumption that people who are gender role non-conforming (masculine women, feminine men) are perceived as deviant. Although these beliefs may be recognized as stereotypes, the literature review provides examples of how this underlying belief system may remain unrecognized and lead to bias. The fact that we sometimes consciously and unconsciously practice ignorance and intolerance shows how societies embrace the beliefs, norms and perceptions subtly enforced through patriarchy.

Rich's (1986) study of compulsory heterosexuality highlights how taboos against lesbianism are linked to patriarchy. Since women are generally socialized to be passive and emotional beings, heterosexual relationships subtly enforce patriarchy by defining men's sexuality in terms of their

aggressive and dominant conquest of women. Another assumption noted by Rich (1986) is that women are innately sexually orientated toward men and that the lesbian choice is simply an act-out of bitterness toward men. It is thus assumed that women who have been wrongly treated by men, be it through rape, domestic violence or inequality in the workplace are most likely to turn to other women and or become lesbians. This belief reinforces the assumed 'normalcy' of heterosexuality, and in turn, according to Rich, of patriarchy.

Tamale's (2003) article *Out of the Closet in Feminist Africa* 3 highlights how taboos against lesbianism are linked to patriarchy in a specific African context. Some of these myths and taboos include that homosexuals are naturally violent; most gay men are pedophiles and that same-sex boarding schools breed homosexuals to name a few. According to (Tamale, 2003), one of the most efficient ways that patriarchy uses sexuality as a tool to create and sustain gender hierarchy in African societies is by enshrouding it in secrecy and taboos. Tamale (2003) further argues that another option is to use the law to prohibit all sex outlaws in the social ghettos of society.

Prominent among the sex outlaws that have historically resisted and subverted dominant cultures are homosexuals, bisexuals and transgender individuals which relates to my study. According to Tamale (2003), punitive laws against prostitution, abortion, adultery, erotica and prostitutes serve a similar purpose as is the case in Tanzania for example. By maintaining a tight grip on certain activities, and silencing the voices of those individuals and groups that engage in them, the patriarchal state makes it extremely

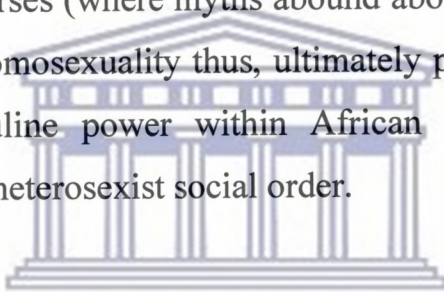
difficult for these individuals and groups to organize and fight for their human rights. Socio-cultural norms and religious beliefs (such as virginity testing, female genital mutilation, female chastity, occult sexuality, taboos around polyandry amongst others) thus constitute the screws that keep the clamp of sexual repression firmly in place.

According to Tamale (2003), political, cultural and religious fundamentalisms have played a crucial role in suppressing and stifling sexual pluralism in Uganda. Her study also found that any variation in sexual activity and sexual partners from heteronormativity is considered pathological, deviant, unnatural and condemned in the strongest possible terms. Gendered politics views sexual activities that go against the grain of mainstream sexual politics as crucial since these views subverts conventional gendered relations and hierarchies. Tamale (2003) concludes that sexuality therefore becomes a critical site for maintaining patriarchy and reproducing African women's oppression.

Her study also found that the gendered dimensions of sexuality become very clear when the implicit erasure of lesbian identity in Ugandan society is considered, especially since Ugandan law seems to be more preoccupied with male-on-male sex when it criminalizes intercourse against the order of nature. However, the dominant phallogentric culture maintains the stereotype of women as the passive recipients of penetrative male pleasure and that as found in Kendall's (1990) study on same sex relationships in Lesotho, non-penetrative sex does not count as 'real' sex. In the case of Uganda, women's sexuality is often reduced to their conventional mothering

role with emphasis put on their reproductive capacities (Tamale, 2001). Therefore, what poses an ultimate threat to patriarchy is the idea of intimate same sex relationships where a dominating male is absent and where women's sexuality can be defined without reference to reproduction.

Tamale (2003: 4) argues that the mainstream aversion to same-sex relations consequently reflects a greater fear since homosexuality threatens to undermine male power bases in the Ugandan 'private' sphere (at the level of interpersonal relationships and conventional definitions of the 'family'), as well as in public discourses (where myths abound about what it means to be a man or a woman). Homosexuality thus, ultimately presents a challenge to the deep-seated masculine power within African sexual relations, and disrupts the core of the heterosexist social order.



POLICING OF WOMEN'S SEXUALITY

Control of human sexuality is perceived as the root of most social practices related to women's oppression such as gender based violence, coercive marriage, female genital cutting, commoditization of women's bodies and vulnerability to HIV/AIDS (Miki van Zyl & Melissa Steyn, 2005). Not giving women a choice over unwanted pregnancies, for example, leads to unsafe terminations of pregnancies which is a particular form of violence which is precipitated due to resistance of giving women control over reproduction.

It is a well-known fact therefore, that many women, whether members of oppressed or oppressing groups in terms of race, class or sexual orientation, are socialized into the belief that they are subordinate to men. Furthermore, women (and men) are socialized to believe in and maintain the patriarchal system while women have to repress their views on sexuality and identify with and conform to the patriarchal structures in order to survive. Patricia McFadden (2003) argues that the sexual act not only serves as a means through which men can reproduce themselves and the patriarchal system but it is also a central means of appropriating women's bodies and women's fertility. For centuries, women's reproductive abilities have been appropriated by men for purposes of their self realization as men. Thus women in our societies have internalized the patriarchal ideology which defines their sexuality as the possession of men (Rich, 1986).

In many African societies marriage is viewed as a rite of passage and sex outside of marriage is frowned on. The heterosexual marriage union is the only sanctioned space for you to explore your sexuality. This form of sexuality is seen as productive because it is tied to reproduction (Gayle Rubin, 1984). Sexuality in this instance is tied to particular gender roles and responsibilities as dictated by culture. The woman's body by virtue of the uterus is expected to bear children; she is expected to maintain the home and look after the children. The husband is expected to leave the home, find work and bring home a pay check. Even though these supposedly 'natural' roles are social constructs, these gender limits have the result of inhibiting the free sexual expression of men and especially women in the community. The expression of your personal sexuality is loaded because it is tied into

social transgression or acceptance, i.e. your sexuality can determine whether you are a good girl or a bad girl.

According to McFadden (2003), African women's sexuality in particular, is to a large extent policed through claims around cultural norms and traditions. In many of these traditions women's bodies are classified as dirty and immoral if their bodies and sexuality are not contained within the functions of reproduction or prescribed female roles as wives and mothers. In South Africa, no less than in other societies, appropriate behavior for males and females is determined by specific contexts and situations. Almost all families in South Africa, rural and urban, regardless of race or ethnic group, have traditions that prepare girls for their role as women in society. Individuals, like me have learned how they ought to behave throughout their lives. This gendering also applies to patterns of sexual activities with heterosexual practice being the norm across cultures.



I therefore agree with Robertson's (2004) argument that although culture is thought to shape sexual expression and customs, the bedrock of sexuality is assumed – and often quite explicitly stated – to be universal and biologically determined. Culture is viewed as encouraging or discouraging the expression of generic sexual acts, attitudes and relationships. Oral-genital contact, for example, might be part of normal heterosexual expression in one group but taboo in another.

According to Rich (1986) women have learned to deny the limitations of masculine lovers for both psychological and practical reasons based on heterosexist assumptions. This assumption of female heterosexuality is an enormous assumption to have glided so silently into the foundations of our thought. The extension of this assumption is the frequently heard assertion that in a world of genuine equality, where men were non-oppressive and nurturing, everyone would be bisexual. Such a notion also assumes that women who have chosen women have done so simply because men are oppressive and emotionally unavailable: which still fails to account for women who continue to pursue relationships with oppressive and/or emotionally unsatisfying men.

Rich (1986) further notes that compulsory heterosexuality leaves numberless women trapped in the 'normal' although everywhere women have resisted it. Thus the invisibility of homosexuality as an institution allows women's absence of choice over their own sexuality to go by unrecognized. Thereby women are subsequently denied the collective power to experience their own needs or determine the meaning and place of sexuality in their lives. Furthermore, heterosexuality cannot be understood without identifying both female power/empowerment and the social processes which work against it especially since heterosexuality itself is maintained through social control. In this way, Rich identifies difference in the same way that other theorists do.

McFadden (2003) and Rich (1986) are in agreement that keeping women within a male sexual purview enforces heterosexuality for women and assures the male right to physical, economical, and emotional access to women. At the same time, the assumption that 'most women are innately heterosexual' stands as a theoretical and political stumbling block for many women. Thus the heterosexist definition of the sexual act fits neatly into the dominant patriarchal definition of women as subordinate to men in every way, including and especially the sexual sense.

Global studies done on patriarchy and sexuality argue that women are generally taught to view themselves primarily in terms of familial relationships established through heterosexual relationship (McFadden, 2003). Fatna A. Sabbah (1984) notes that in the Middle East, for example, women are regarded as an active sexual power therefore it is important to restrict women's sexual power over men. Sabbah (1984) argues that the result is isolating women and men in different worlds since a woman's sexuality have to be concealed. Her looks and behavior must not reveal her sexual force since it will remind the man of his weakness.

In western culture, sexual inequality is based on the belief in the biological inferiority of woman. Sabbah (1984) however point out that in Islam, it is the contrary: the whole system is based on the assumption that a woman is a powerful and dangerous being. He further argues that this ultimately explains why the Koran maintains man's superiority and domination over woman since it is men's responsibility and duty to keep women under their protection and control.

According to Aarmo (1999) 'fitting in' in this context is considered to be more important than the personal interests of the individual. Based on my personal experience and general observations, I have indeed noticed that women are socialized to be submissive and subordinate to men and denied the collective power to experience their own needs or determine the meaning and place of sexuality in their lives. Thus, women are and will not really be 'free' sexually or otherwise as long as they remain socially and economically unequal to men.

Various South African studies focus on how fixed definitions of 'culture' are used as yardstick to marginalize and persecute gays and lesbians, perpetuate patriarchy, homophobic tendencies and heteronormative ways. South African researchers such as Sanger and Clowes (2006); Aarmo (1999); Morgan and Wieringa (2003) and Beth Firestein (1996) to name a few who have focused on gay, lesbianism, and bisexuality have shown how lesbians are represented as deviant and located outside the norm through discourses that normalizes heterosexuality in the name of culture and authentic identity.

Same-sex desire, for example, is in many instances depicted as sin, as dangerously deviant, as un-African and as a Western import among others. It is important to consider how these notions permeate the legal, political, religious, medical and popular discourses of most African countries, including South Africa. Even though legislation has changed to create an official acceptance of same-sex relationships and the rights of gays, bisexuals and lesbians, popularized beliefs in various spheres perpetuate homophobic myths.

In the South African context what is known as curative rape is often used as a means to control lesbians' sexual independence and reveals how rapists define sexuality as a weapon. Black townships are rife with violence against women generally, but there is a special ire toward lesbians, in an effort to show lesbians their place as women in society (www.pamshouseblend.com). With lesbian murders on the rise, these murders appear to be hate crimes, committed by people who are intolerant of women and lesbians. The high level of violence against women in South Africa is caused by a complex set of intertwined factors such as poverty, unemployment and cultural attitudes that promote machismo which will take generations to resolve.

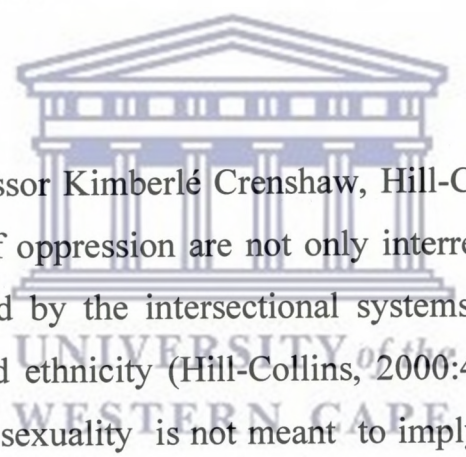


**INTERSECTING POWER RELATIONS OF RACE, CLASS
AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION**

Intersectionality, according to Susanne Knudsen (2006), is an analytical method which seeks to examine the ways in which various socially and culturally constructed categories interact on multiple levels to manifest themselves as inequality in society. She further argues that intersectionality holds that the classical models of oppression within society, such as those based on race/ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, class, or disability do not act independently of one another. Instead, these forms of oppression interrelate creating a system of oppression that reflects the 'intersection' of multiple forms of discrimination (Knudsen, 2006: 62).

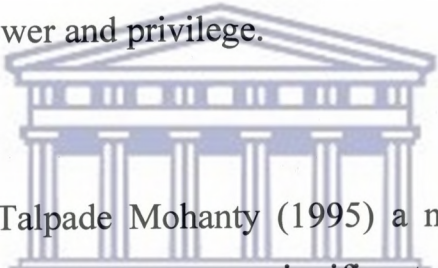
According to Patricia Hill-Collins (1998) much social science research defines race, class, gender and nationality as descriptive variables attached to individuals who are then reinserted into existing theoretical models on the

family. She points out that a long history of scientific racism insisting on the primacy of biological and/or cultural explanations for all aspects of Black behavior, for example, has meant that structural features such as social class received much less emphasis than approaches confirming deeply entrenched notions of Black biological and/or cultural deviancy. Hill-Collins (1998) notes that as a result of these factors, cultural and psychological values have long been emphasized as central to understanding Black family organization instead of economic and political phenomena, such as industrial and labor market trends, employment patterns, migration histories, residential patterns, and governmental policies.



Much like her predecessor Kimberlé Crenshaw, Hill-Collins (1998) argued that cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated, but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society, such as race, gender, class, and ethnicity (Hill-Collins, 2000:42). Intersections of race, gender, class and sexuality is not meant to imply that these are the only forms of social relations that enter into the shaping of sexual identity. According to feminists of color for example, experiences of class, gender, sexuality, etc., cannot be adequately understood unless the influences of racialization are carefully considered.

Hill-Collins (1990) argues that when we shift our theoretical lens to the intersections between and among relations of gender, race, class and sexuality, we extend the boundaries of political economy by challenging the 'categorical hegemony' attempted by many Marxists with class and many feminists with gender. Instead, intersectional forms of analysis, which considers how different systems of stratification and their associated discourses and ideologies intersect; provide a more complex sense of the multidimensional nature of power, privilege and inequality in contemporary societies. Hill-Collins (1990) therefore suggests that we think in terms of a matrix of domination of an interlocking, though fluid and contradictory, system of oppression, power and privilege.



According to Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1995) a multidimensionality of power, oppression and agency poses some significant challenges. This is due to the fact that there is already a sense of caution expressed within feminist literature about the unreflexive and mechanical manner in which many feminists are compelled to address the holy trinity of gender, race and class, thus substituting one reifying discourse (gender alone or gender and class) with another equally unsatisfactory one (Mohanty, 1995: 13). This danger suggests the need to be attentive to the relational and contradictory aspects of the intersections of systems of power and structures of domination. Thus, systems of racial, class, gender and sexual domination do not have identical effects on socially constructed categories of women and men (third world women and white men for example) and sexuality.

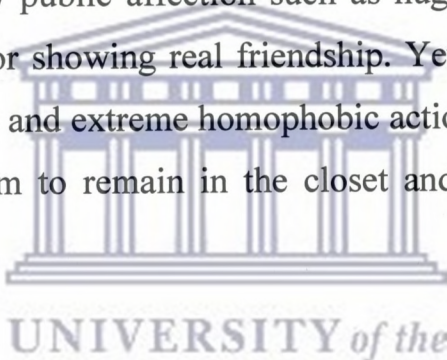
SAME-SEX PRACTICES AMONG WOMEN IN AFRICA

According to extensive research revealed in studies on women's same sex relationships, Morgan and Wieringa's (2003) book, *Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men and Ancestral Wives*, identified long existent same-sex practices which include different types of female friendships that occurred between powerful women such as rain queens and traditional healers (sangomas). These include traditional institutionalized forms such as female bond friendships, women marriages, transgender and same-sex identified healers, girl's erotic play in boarding schools including 'mummy-baby' relationships. According to Morgan and Wieringa (2003) these different types' of same-sex relationships between women are not limited to the western lesbian identity by which individuals uniquely identify themselves according to west-centric notions.

Research conducted on the African continent has yielded many examples of ways in which African women of various ethnic groups were found to have relationships with other women. Morgan and Wieringa (2003) notes that studies conducted by Tietmeyer (1985) has for example, identified 40 long existent ethnic groups concentrated in the southern Sudan, Kenya, Nigeria, Benin and Southern Africa in which one or other form of women marriages was concluded. Although these are not classified as homosexual, they challenge the myth that same-sex practices are absent or incidental in African societies. Roscoe & Murray (2001) therefore argues that female same-sex patterns are poorly documented and frequently misunderstood and that while marriages between women have been reported in several African societies, it is poorly understood and the question of sexuality within these

relationships hotly debated.

In Kenya homosexuality has been termed barbaric, an alien to Kenyan culture, a notion that has been instilled in Kenyans through various leaders such as former President Daniel Arap Moi, and through the Protestant and Catholic Church as well as from the government (Morgan, 2005). Homophobia in Kenya makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible for people to come out publicly as homosexuals. Males who publicly show affection to other males cannot do so without provoking reaction. However, when two women show public affection such as hugging and kissing it is accepted as the norm for showing real friendship. Yet, if they say they are lesbians they face abuse and extreme homophobic action against them which makes it easier for them to remain in the closet and enjoy their freedom while they are there.



Interestingly a well-known tradition of same sex marriages exists between women from certain groups. For example, when an elderly woman from the Kikuyu, Kiso, Kamba or Kalenjin tribes decides she needs a female wife it is encouraged. This tradition might not be solely for the sake of inheritance but also as a way of encouraging procreation. According to Morgan (2005) this practice has been in existence for a long time and is still practiced and accepted today. However, the issue of same sexuality within these marriages is considered taboo and this tolerance is not extended to LGBTI people.

Serena Dankwa's (2003) study of same-sex intimacies in Ghana for example highlights/focus on how West African societies have privileged different social categories such as seniority, motherhood or marital status in comparison to Europe and North America where sexual practices and particularly same-sex desires are regarded as constitutive of identity. However, in Southern Ghana, female same-sex relationships have been forged beyond Euro-American models of lesbian lifestyles and identity politics exists with interplay of women's material and emotional survival strategies in postcolonial Ghana.

According to Dankwa (2003) the term *supi* for example, refers to a close female friend and usually refers to the passionate relationships forged between secondary school girls at Ghanaian boarding houses. These relationships are generally based on a patron-client model where the senior *supi* supports and protects her junior, while the junior fetches water, washes, cooks, and does other favours for her senior. Examples of such affectionate bonds involve the exchange of gifts, love letters and erotic intimacies and come to public attention only in cases of jealousy and dramatic break-ups.

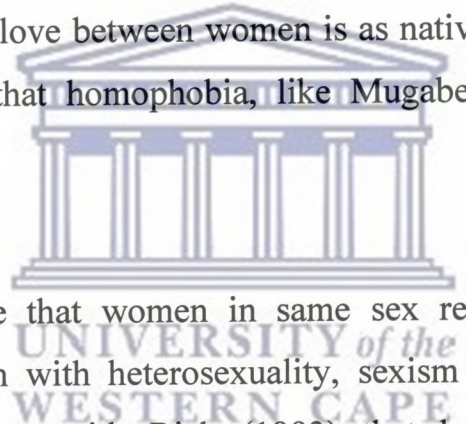
However, best friends' intimate secretaries are assumed to terminate with the end of school but if not, they continue in discretion, alongside women's lives as wives and mothers. Adult women make *supi* contacts in and outside of homosocial spaces, in the market and at social gatherings such as name giving ceremonies and funerals. Dankwa (2003) notes that just as in Ghanaian heterosexual relationships, gifts and financial support play a crucial role in courting and sustaining these relationships. These passionate

relationships reflects on negotiations of women who do not conform to assumed norms of female sexuality and whose lived realities defy prescriptive definitions of gender arrangements.

Potgieter's (1997) study of lesbians' experiences from a South African perspective found that the term lesbianism, as well as the sexualized lesbian identity, was first used towards the end of the 19th century to stigmatize certain behavior to control women and particularly their sexuality. Therefore behavior that had always taken place was now branded with negative connotations. This in turn implies that female same-sex sexuality has always been practiced, but has only fairly recently been named as an "orientation" in order to label women who do not conform to the dominant, heterosexual norms as noted by Potgieter.

Achmat (2003) points out that although some aspects of sexuality are not socially constructed, lesbianism or sexual orientations are different for each person. While one lesbian might feel that she did not have a choice in her sexual orientation, another lesbian might feel that she chose to be a lesbian. In research undertaken to find lesbians in Lesotho, for example, Kendall (1999) found widespread, apparently normative erotic relationships among the Basotho women. She found that public display of affection between people of the same-sex is quite common since the Basotho community has not constructed a social category such as 'lesbian'.

Kendall (1999) notes that in this community woman friends engage in a wide variety of physical practices such as deep kissing and genital contact which includes overt expressions of love. Most Basotho women grow up in environments in which it is impossible for them to learn, purchase or display symbols of gay visibility, where passionate relationships between women are as conventional as (heterosexual) marriage and where women who love women usually perform as conventional wives and mothers. Although same-sex practices are common among female sangomas in South Africa, these sexual practices are not seen as homosexual and the women are not classified as lesbians either according to Morgan & Wieringa (2005). Kendall concludes that love between women is as native to Southern Africa as the soil itself but that homophobia, like Mugabe's Christianity, is a Western import.



Matabeni (2001) argue that women in same sex relationships exists in societies that are laden with heterosexuality, sexism and in many cases, homophobia. She agrees with Rich (1993) that heterosexuality is the presumed sexual preference but argues that some women rejects this 'compulsory heterosexuality' and choose to engage in same sex relationships or alternative relationships. She mentions, for example, that in countries such as Uganda, Kenya, Swaziland and South Africa same sex relationships of both traditional (for example women-women marriages and mummy-baby relationships) and modern (for example Tommy boy and lesbian identities in all these countries) character has been documented among young and older women.

Matabeni (2001) also argue that women in same sex erotic relationships in the African context adopt and identify themselves as lesbians or variations of lesbians such as ‘dyke’, ‘manvroue’, ‘tommy boys’ and ‘butch and femme’ to name but a few. Matabeni (2001) however argues that whether women in same sex relationships choose to identify as lesbian or not, such women, especially if they poor, face numerous challenges. I am in agreement with Matabeni’s (2001) statement that various identity categories such as race, sex, gender, class and sexuality are interrelated and simultaneously experienced. She also argues that women in same sex relationships are constantly reminded of the social structures, social powers and economic limitations they live in which in many ways explains why and how women in these relationships negotiate their sexuality.



RIGHTS, SUBVERSION AND AGENCY AROUND SAME-SEX

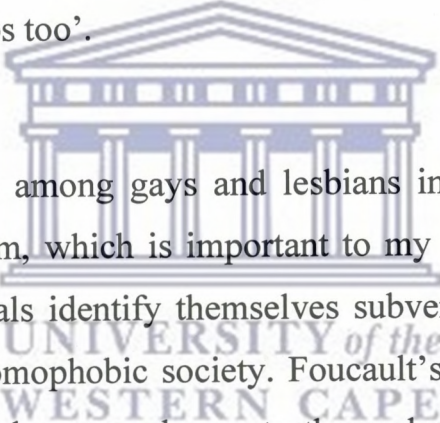
While many studies have explored the construction and hegemony of heterosexuality (and the marginalization of gays and lesbians in relation to this), theoretical work and empirical studies have also explored subversion and defiance in relation to lesbian and gay struggles, the reclamation of identity and the persistence and resilience of individuals’ choice of same-sex relationships. The previous chapter dealt with the theoretical models that are relevant to exploring the agencies of lesbians and bisexuals. In this section, I deal with some of the studies that assist my focus on agencies.

In South Africa struggles to redress power inequalities and discrimination based on sexual orientation have successfully used the human rights framework to contest the othering and ostracism produced by discriminatory normative practices as well as to seek protection for vulnerable groups. In the South African context for example, The Supreme Court of Appeal in 2004 declared the common-law definition of marriage unconstitutional. This decision followed an appeal by Marie Fourie and her partner, Cecilia Bonthuys, which resulted in mixed public reaction (Vasu Reddy & Zethu Cakatha, 2007). Even though there were public outcry by many homophobic organizations and individuals, further legal victories and policy reform have benefited the construction of lesbian and gay identities in South Africa. Furthermore, such victories have progressively promoted claims to citizenship and nationhood for the gay community in South Africa and simultaneously cemented South Africa as one of the most progressive Constitutions in the world to include Gay Human Rights.

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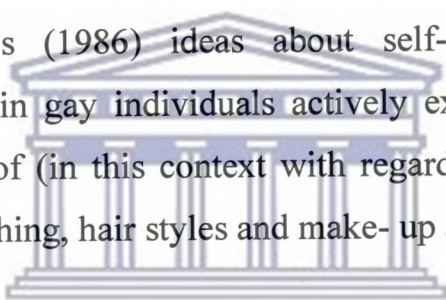
According to (Reddy & Cakatha, 2007) marriage is in essence one possibility of a full citizenship (which includes the right to equality and privacy), a view which is underpinned by the conception of the gay rights movement as a public demand for respect for homosexuals (which includes the right to dignity). As a consequence the primary benefit of marriage is the extension of citizenship rights that facilitate the assimilation of gay and lesbian individuals into the mainstream of society. However, such a view does not imply that all lesbians and gays endorse marriage since for many the need for marriage is disputed, as it signals the assimilation of a heterosexual model.

Homophobic arguments mobilized against same-sex marriage are informed by fears of reproductive relations, gender roles, and the role of children and adoption, and are voiced usually in terms of a moral/religious perspective (Reddy & Cakatha, 2007). However, in line with the constitution, many gay and lesbian individuals have made use of the right to marriage and the rest of the benefits that comes along with it including medical benefits for both parties and the right to adopt amongst others. Same sex marriage therefore opens a 'potentially subversive space for a rearticulation of gendered identities in intimate relationships which simultaneously enables us to rework concepts of equality and diversity for women and men in heterosexual relationships too'.



The struggles for rights among gays and lesbians indicate one form of subversion. Another form, which is important to my study, concerns the ways in which individuals identify themselves subversively, defiantly or oppositionally within homophobic society. Foucault's (1986) ideas about self-stylization focus on how people create themselves in a certain way. He therefore raises the forms of subversion that are directly relevant to my study. Although the history of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Intersexed (LGBTI) struggles clearly reveals the way that South Africans with alternative sexualities have resisted homophobia, it is also important to explore resistance in less formal and more personalized ways.

Based on the notion of self-stylization, Foucault (1986) argues that the virtual self is not something potentially implicit in all human beings that should be realized or discovered but that it is something that is created; much like an artist creates a sculpture or a painting. Foucault's (1986) ideas about self-stylization thus focus on the character of the individual; and not on the subject. He further argues that while a subject is something given in advance, character is the set of dispositions and motivations to act into which we are acculturated and which we may then choose to cultivate or reject. Following this notion it is clear that if the self has depths, it is only because it has been created by the subject itself. It is therefore in this context that Foucault's (1986) ideas about self-stylization is best illustrated in how certain gay individuals actively express their various depths of self by way of (in this context with regard to their individual sexual identities) of clothing, hair styles and make-up amongst others.

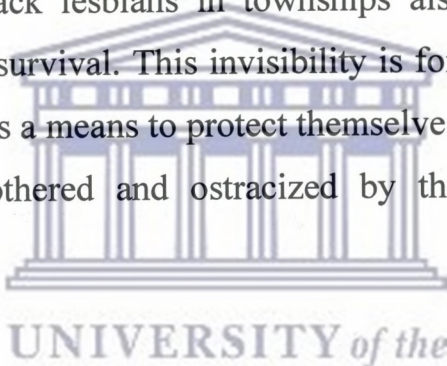


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Tamale (2003) describes the challenges that face many lesbians and bisexuals' freedom to express their identities through publicly visible signs such as drag. On an international level, homophobia in Uganda for example, imposes great difficulty on homosexuals to come out of their closeted lives or to be open about their sexual orientation due to extreme repressive conditions of state and religious inspired restrictions. She notes that in order to stay clear of possible prosecution, most homosexuals blend within the wider society and even live under the cover of heterosexual relationships while maintaining their homosexual relationships underground. According to Tamale (2003) the general tendency is to construct comfort zones where they complacently live a different and

segregated lifestyle such as gay and lesbian clubs for example, which offer comfort zones for homosexuals.

Morgan & Wieringa's (2005) study on lesbians in and around South Africa found that when two women are seen hugging and kissing in public it's accepted as the norm for showing real friendship. However, if they say they are lesbians; abuse is poured upon them, making it easier for them to remain in the closet and enjoy their freedom while they are there. Morgan & Wieringa (2005) also notes that hate crimes and extreme forms of homophobia against black lesbians in townships also renders lesbianism invisible as a means of survival. This invisibility is forced on individuals in same sex relationships as a means to protect themselves from discrimination, alienation and being othered and ostracized by their communities and families.



In focusing on defiance, heteronormativity and the marginalization of gays and lesbians, Reddy (2005) emphasizes how space (in particular the strategic deployment of space) is connected to the liberation of the sexual subject and the broad emancipation of gays and lesbians. Therefore the role of space is crucial to this study since it is important for many gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals to claim agency in safe spaces. Lefebvre (2001) argues that space is more than just a passive locus of social relations but that people give meaning and vibrancy to space and space gives meaning to people.

IDENTITIES IN WOMEN'S SAME SEX RELATIONSHIPS IN AFRICA

Research conducted in South Africa by Morgan and Wieringa (2003) has revealed a butch-femme culture that is very strong in the Johannesburg lesbian subculture. In these relationships both females occupies a certain space in the relationship that is also accompanied by certain roles and responsibilities. Some femme lesbians, for example, would occupy the space of housewife while some butch lesbians would act as breadwinners and providers in the household. The same goes for butch lesbians who would do the cruising and picking up of girls in bars and other social spaces frequented by lesbian and bisexual women.

Wieringa (2005) however argues that lesbians relates to the butch/femme culture in different ways and found that while some lesbians accepts the butch-femme roles they are expected to play, others deviates from it. As a member of the lesbian/bisexual community, I have on numerous occasions observed how certain women adopt the butch (male) role and others the femme (female) role within relationships. I have also observed that others deviate from adopting these roles and present themselves as plain women-loving-women without making distinctions in gender roles.

However, much discussion on butch/femme roles within gay relationships is grounded in the unspoken belief that gay relationships are, or should be modeled on heterosexual stereotypes. In attempts to define butch and femme, one aspect is frequently emphasized: dress code. Outward

appearances play an important role in gay popular culture and deciphering the visual codes as a skill only learned through submersion in the subculture. These signs can be as blatant as a drag queen's finery or as subtle as a handkerchief. In heterosexual society women sends out a variety of messages by wearing a dress with a plunging neckline, while in gay society she speaks volumes just by wearing a dress. Using outward appearances as an indicator, a woman can be classified femme by wearing a dress, makeup and jewelry; or butch by having short hair, wearing trousers and scorning makeup.

In Namibian gay society, for example, dress codes are strictly gendered and the maleness of Damara lesbian men is strongly related to their sexual behavior which also has strong social connotations linked to dress codes and a social division of labor. They are also very conscious of certain responsibilities especially in the department of finances. Lesbian men apply careful negotiation of dress codes in relation to showing respect to the church and the wishes of parents. However, girlfriends expects that their 'men' be dressed as proper men by wearing pants, men's shirts and men's underwear. Although many women falls in love fully knowing that their partners are women, they are pleased that their partners play the male role while family members and others also recognize the maleness in these lesbian men.

Following the traditional male/female role playing, the butch is supposedly the more active partner sexually while the femme partner is more passive. The active/passive relationship is not confined to lovemaking, but extends to

the courtship ritual (for example who asks whom out, who pays for dinner, etc.) where the butch assumes most of the 'male' functions. However, once a relationship is established and particularly where the couple sets up house together, there is quite often a 'role reversal' with the butch assuming many of the tasks which are assumed to be women's work' – such as cooking and cleaning.

According to Morgan and Wieringa (2003) many lesbians assume these roles because it gives a framework to their relationships. Through their perception of their relationship as a butch/femme situation, they accept certain unwritten codes of behavior. In many instances it does not matter how you dress or who does the cooking. What matters is who is in control of the relationship. There may however be instances where silences exist within these relationships where one of the partners may take on the passive, more submissive role. These silences may include leaving the decision making or even the initiation of lovemaking to the more assertive partner. It must however be noted that not all silences have negative connotations since many same sex relationships are in fact based on the heterosexual model of gender roles.

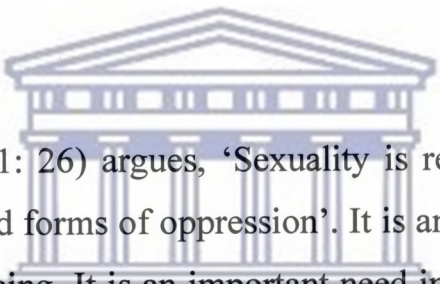
In a patriarchal society like ours, for example, where men hold – and are seen to hold – power in the public and private realms, it follows that the partner who makes the decisions and holds the power in the relationship will be the 'man', or the butch. For the butch, the independence which power brings is a heady drug. However, none of these models fully explain why gay women play butch and femme roles – but play them they do, whether in

public or private which is what this study aims to investigate. Gay women who have a relationship which is a healthy partnership between two equals are as heterosexuals who have a relationship which is a healthy partnership between two equals.

Findings from the literature review shows that women's negotiation of their sexuality is widely influenced through the institutions of socialization and patriarchy in particular. Since society shapes and limits our experiences of sexuality, women are socialized from an early age to believe in and maintain the patriarchal system and have to repress their views on sexuality and identify with and conform to the patriarchal structures in order to survive.

As previously mentioned, women, whether members of oppressed groups or not, are generally socialized into the belief that women are subordinate to men. While sexuality is also an area in which women in patriarchal societies find themselves highly oppressed especially in the link between women's economical, social and sexual subordination, many women of alternative sexualities find themselves in heterosexual relationships in order to survive. On the other hand, society punishes those women who negotiate alternative sexualities by means of ostracizing them or by trying to find a 'cure for their conditions' such as curative rape.

Failure to comply with society's standards might therefore lead to the individual's behavior to be labeled deviant and at worst, the othering and subsequent alienation of that particular individual from his immediate community. It is therefore clear to see that how women are generally socialized and acculturated into our society and immediate community influences how they negotiate their individual sexualities. It is however important to consider patriarchal and heterosexist cultures which regulate 'correct' feminine behavior for women in the domestic and public spheres which evidently leads to many gay and bisexual women leading "double lives".



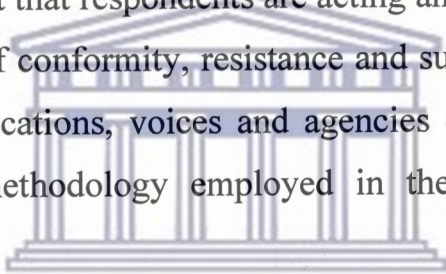
As Barbara Reyes (1991: 26) argues, 'Sexuality is related to our personal lives and our internalized forms of oppression'. It is an important element in people's life and well-being. It is an important need in human beings; it is a source of power and strength. When people are allowed to express their sexuality in their own terms and determined by their specific needs, it becomes a source of strength and empowerment.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCHING LESBIANISM AND BISEXUALITY:

A CAPE TOWN CASE STUDY

The ultimate aim of this chapter is to present a perspective of lesbians and bisexuals as assertive sexual beings who defiantly act on their desires and choices which unsettles the binaries with regard to being out, coming out, living publicly as lesbians and visibly defining themselves as queer. Throughout the study I have found that my respondents are defiant, subversive and constantly refuse to ascribe to prescribed norms. This chapter will also capture the fact that respondents are acting ambiguously in terms of a combination of acts of conformity, resistance and subversion. The chapter will also discuss the locations, voices and agencies of the subjects in my study and how the methodology employed in the study accesses this assertiveness.



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For the purpose of the study I recruited eight lesbians and bisexuals from different social backgrounds between the ages of 30-40 to participate in this study. After setting up an initial contact meeting between myself and the interested individuals, I presented them with a voluntary consent form which they all had to sign giving their full consent to participate in the study.

A timeslot and venue which suited my own as well as the participants' schedules was set up for the focus group discussion. The venue was chosen with relevance to accessibility, security and sense of privacy to allow for optimal interaction and discussion around the sensitive research topic. The

focus group sessions thus yielded vital data as lesbians shared their life stories in an intimately private and safe space without the fear or anxiety of being misunderstood or judged on heterosexual prejudices. An interview schedule was drafted through which discussions were initiated, all interviews were conducted in English and the data recorded (with the permission of the participants) by making use of an audio-recording throughout the interview process.

In gathering data for the participatory section of my study, I have frequented specific locations, spaces and events frequented by gays and lesbians as it relates to the study. The rationale behind making use of these different methods of gathering data was in order for me to explore the life histories of lesbian and bisexual women in different contexts as a means of gaining a broader scope of the lived lives of lesbians within various contexts and societies in the Western Cape.



The hope was that this would encourage participants to elaborate on and or introduce issues they consider relevant to the research. By exploring the views of participants on sexuality, their performances of self and how they create subcultures, valuable themes and key terms were identified which produced knowledge on the various ways women of different social upbringing, social status, culture and identities negotiates their individual sexualities. This in turn counteracts the top-down research that neglects lesbians' self-perceptions, sexual agencies etc as expressed by Matabeni (2001) especially since disregard of lesbian lives and experiences contributes to the invisibility and silence of black lesbians.

Engaging in participant observations relevant to the study enabled me to identify important key themes and record and juxtapose my own experiences within various spaces and contexts as well as the range of useful spaces. It also enabled me to draw an analysis of certain spaces frequented by gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals. These observations have taken place over a time span in various locations and contexts in and around Cape Town with the aim of identifying patterns and acts of sexual display and agency. Participatory research also formed an integral and vital role throughout the research process, especially as it paves the way to discuss the role of space in Chapter 4.



SAMPLE DESIGN, CRITERIA AND TECHNIQUES

The target sample for this study consisted of eight women of lesbian and bisexual sexual orientation between the ages of 30-40 of diverse cultures. By interviewing individuals of different racial groups and or sexual orientations, class and education generated in depth information on how people of different statuses claim agency in relation to their sexuality.

My rationale in using this sample is to produce knowledge of how women of diverse cultures and sexual orientations construct and affirm their sexuality. I have focused on recruiting respondents that fall in the 30-40 age bracket due to the fact that I found women in this particular age group relatively mature in dealing with issues related to their sexual identity and living publicly as lesbians and bisexuals. Women in this particular age group are of particular importance to my study in light of the fact that these are women

with experience of living with changes around social and legislative responses to gay rights.

Women in this age bracket have had fairly extensive life experience and in most cases feel settled in their sexual identities and their personal choices. They are however still assertive enough to assert their sexuality and claim agency with regard to their sexual identity. In most instances they also felt the benefits of greater tolerance and therefore have the freedom to celebrate their different identities and sexual freedoms in a way that their younger counterparts might not. I am convinced that I personally would not have been as bold in coming out and living publicly as bisexual had I been less mature and younger than my current age of 39.

I am therefore of the opinion that the reason for people being more cautious and closeted about their sexual identities might be due to the homophobic regime that remained dominant before our country became a democratic nation after the 1994 elections. The fact that our Constitution has become more progressive with regard to gay issues also contributes to these women and many other gay individuals being open in a way that was previously unheard of. In the context of this study these factors contribute to invaluable data that informs this study.

Snazzy for example, resides in a previously white dominated area of Ruyterwacht where she resides with her current same sex partner. She is employed in a Turkish restaurant in Waterfront which has mainly foreign nationals as patrons. She is therefore in constant contact with mainly white or foreign nationals which according to her also brings a sense of awareness of how she conducts herself as an open lesbian. Her landlords prove to be homophobic and conservative which also adds to a sense of vulnerability to both her and her partner in how they conduct themselves at their current accommodation. She and her partner therefore indulge in house parties for lesbian individuals in other areas on the Cape Flats where they feel more comfortable in being themselves. They are however in the process of looking for alternative gay friendly accommodation. Since both Snazzy and her partner are financially secure, they have the means to frequent spaces where they feel more accepted and comfortable in negotiating their sexualities. In this instance economic status plays a crucial role in how this couple can negotiate their alternative sexuality freely and live openly as lesbians.

Corina lives in Manenberg on the Cape Flats where being openly gay and lesbian are more accepted. There are however individuals who has issues with bisexual men and women who has the preconceived ideas that these individuals are confused and or promiscuous. Although many bisexual individuals prefer to keep their bisexual identity private, there are those who openly challenge heterosexual men and women and defend their own sexual orientations. Although Corina resides in a less opulent suburb than Corina, for example, the fact that her community is more accepting of gays and

lesbians plays a role in how she can negotiate her sexuality as a bisexual woman.

Vovo and Babalwa reside in the black township of Gugulethu where cultural influences are very dominant and of utmost importance. Although they maintain an open lesbian lifestyle, they are always conscious of the cultural norms and beliefs of the people in their community and family and maintain a lifestyle of respect towards their elders and their respective families. In this way they are able to live more openly as lesbians while also living in a more accepting community and family environment. Although many black families may not be accepting of the sexuality of their lesbian or gay family members, they prove to be more tolerant of them as long as a sense of respect is shown towards elders and family members and no lesbian or gay activities are performed out in the open like kissing and holding hands among same sex partners. Culture in this context plays a dominant role in how these two lesbian individuals negotiate their sexualities.

I have therefore also taken the role of demographics such as race, class, social status and location into account since this practically influences how different individuals behave and negotiate their sexuality in relation to the particular society or community they live in. Interviewing individuals of different racial groups and/or sexual orientations, class and education has helped me to reveal a wide range of background and to generate information on how people of different statuses claim agency in relation to coming out, being out and either subverting their lifestyles or live publicly as lesbians or bisexuals.

In this context I found race, class, social status and location are important predictors as to how lesbians and bisexuals negotiate and assert their sexuality. These different statuses are of great importance since it is evident, for example, that white educated middle class lesbians and bisexuals have less challenges about coming out and living openly as gay people than working class, uneducated black lesbians and bisexuals. It might for example be less challenging for a white educated, middle class woman with adequate financial resources in a same sex relationship to access resources available to gays. In contrast the opposite might hold true for uneducated, black working class bisexuals and lesbians living in black townships, where culture, the threat of violence, victimization and alienation from family and society are an everyday reality to live with.



ETHICAL ISSUES

Due to the sensitive nature of my study and the need for strong ethics in relation to it, I have taken a number of ethical factors into consideration to protect the human rights and dignity of the subjects. I have informed participants that the study is being undertaken within the Women's and Gender Studies Department on women's negotiation and agency in relation to alternative sexualities. The objective (solely academic) nature of the research was explained to participants as well as the importance of their participation.

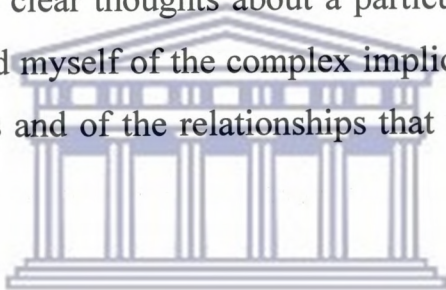
In line with guidelines advocated by Johan Mouton (2001) on issues around disclosure, two key issues namely confidentiality and anonymity were strongly emphasized as the primary safeguard against unwanted exposure. I assured my subjects that all personal data will be secured and concealed by use of pseudonyms in order not to compromise the ethics of confidentiality.

The voluntary nature of the interviews was emphasized and the subjects were informed that the study will only commence after the interested parties has given their written consent (See Addendum A) without any physical or psychological coercion. In respect for human freedom according to Gregory Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2000), subjects were assured that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. Finally, in order to ensure the psychological and emotional well-being of the subjects, I have set up a referral and support system in advance for possible vulnerability in discussions due to the sensitive nature of the study. As a further precaution, subjects were debriefed after interviews have taken place in an effort to maintain containment of subjects.

Throughout the study I took cognizance of Matabeni's (2001) guidelines of the possible challenges I might encounter and be aware of during my study. Matabeni (2001) for example warns that even though my identity as a bisexual woman is an asset in terms of gaining access, I should be cautious of the possible implications it might have on my academic career. This is due to the fact that my study could be dismissed on the basis of my writing in a way that is biased towards a group with whom I identify and my work tainted by personal concerns. She also notes that although my subjects and I

might share a number of similarities, I should also be aware of the ambiguities of ethnicity, gender identity and power in the field.

Another possible challenge is that studying populations close to one's identity can give one access to people and open possibilities for intimate relationships of different kinds. Therefore my insider status can create an emotional dynamic. I therefore had to be aware that emotional blocks might develop in hearing subjects' experiences, blocks that might be caused by me and my subjects' shared social oppression as lesbians/bisexuals and which could possibly limit my clear thoughts about a particular topic. Therefore I constantly had to remind myself of the complex implications of the intimate nature of my interviews and of the relationships that were formed between myself and the subjects.

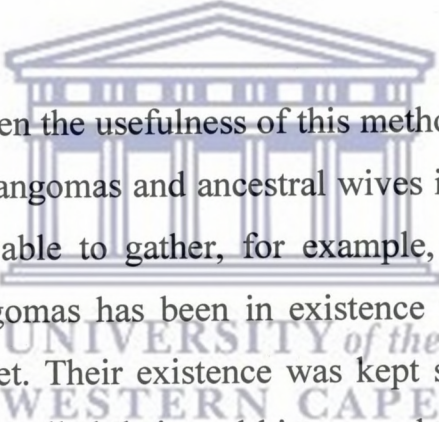


DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH PROCESS

In order to gather vital, relevant data for the study I have made use of mixed methods consisting of one-on-one interviews, focus group discussions and participatory observations which eventually led to open-ended exploration. The rationale of making use of a combination of methods is that it steers away from the general thesis/argument driven type of research. With this method, data gathered is tightly held together with the researcher's thesis, as opposed to conclusion based on unexpected issues raised by subjects. My method is open-ended and aimed at allowing subjects' contributions to shape my thesis.

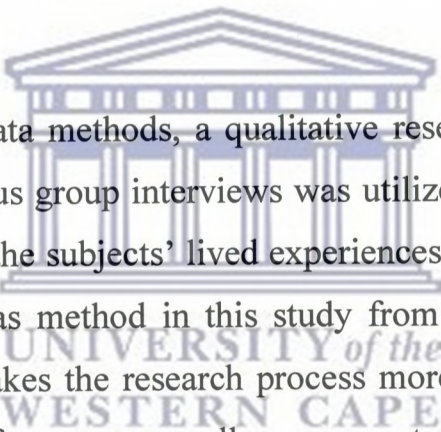
I conducted three one-on-one interviews with one particular subject who preferred to be interviewed individually since she found groups intimidating. I found this method quite useful since this particular subject felt safe in the space of a one-on-one interview and could therefore more easily share her life history and her deep and innermost thoughts. I was therefore able to gather in depth data I might not have been able to obtain had my subject been part of a focus group. The fact that she spontaneously and openly shared her life history within this specific research method emphasizes the value and importance of building up relationships of dialogue with my subjects in order to gain invaluable data related to the study.



Morgan (2005) has proven the usefulness of this method in gathering data in her study on same sex sangomas and ancestral wives in South Africa. Some of the details she was able to gather, for example, include the fact that although same sex sangomas has been in existence for a long time, their existence was kept secret. Their existence was kept secret by heterosexual male sangomas who controlled their oral history and the information that is passed down from generation to generation.

Morgan (2005) notes that although people knew about it, no one was supposed to talk about it. Therefore, when a group of young sangomas in their twenties started coming out in the last ten years after democracy in Soweto, they received a hard time from their trainers and other older heterosexual sangomas.

According to Morgan (2005) same sex sangomas are powerful people at the centre of African culture and therefore occupy a special position in society as they are respected and feared. Sangomas in same sex relationships don't have the problem of harassment by the community although lesbian rape is seen as necessary to teach lesbians a lesson. Same sex sangomas however, are rarely raped as people are afraid of the sangomas because of the power that they believe sangomas have. Since this is quite topic sensitive topic to discuss in an group setting, the one-on-one interview method generated valuable information which might not have possible should I have made use of an focus group interview.



As part of the mixed data methods, a qualitative research methodology of two semi-structured focus group interviews was utilized which provided in-depth explorations into the subjects' lived experiences. The rationale behind using the focus group as method in this study from a feminist or gender perspective is that it makes the research process more democratic. Morgan (2005) illustrates that focus groups allow access to research participants whom may find one- on-one, face-to-face interaction scary or intimidating.

Studies using focus groups have shown that group participants find the focus group experience more gratifying and stimulating than individual interviews. According to Martin Terre Blanche & Kevin Durrheim (1999) in-depth focus group interviews methods are an appropriate method to apply in this study since it involves the interaction of group participants *with each other* as well as with the researcher. This in turn generates richer responses (which became evident in this study) from participants during the interview process

as well as the opportunity for the discussion of key issues and themes related to the study. Ann Lewis (1992) uses interactive data to illustrate that group interviews help to reveal consensus views; it may also be used to verify research ideas of data gained through other methods and may enhance reliability.

Further advantages of the focus group method are that it produces in-depth qualitative material. This method also enabled me to observe the interactive behavior of the participants which in turn became quite useful to the study which is how and why they worked well in exploring lesbian and bisexual experiences. This in turn allowed for continuous debate which also revealed other relevant topics of discussion which I included in the data. Issues such as marginalization and stigma attached to bisexuality for example, became heated topics of debate. Other topics included the role of space, power relations within same sex relationships as well as prescribed gender roles in relation to variations of lesbians such as 'dyke', 'manvroue', 'tommy boys' and 'butch and femme' to name but a few. In essence, making use of focus groups added value to my study due to the fact that it created an effective platform for valuable discussions on various topics not anticipated by either myself or the subjects in my study.

The focus group method also proved a valuable tool of data collection; since it was for example not anticipated that bisexual sexual orientation in itself might be questioned. However, the fact that the subjects found themselves in a group setting where they can openly discuss their sexual identities made it possible for them to interact with each other and debate around their

individual and collective thoughts and perceptions of each others sexual identities and life histories. The discussion of bisexuality in particular elicited much debate in which the subjects challenged each others perceptions and opinions around bisexuality. It was also a platform where bisexuals could clarify and demystify various ignorant perceptions around their sexual identities. At the same time this specific discussion proved to be a learning curve for those who had misconceptions around bisexuality and bisexual people in particular.

Eliciting vital, relevant information and responses from my respondents was especially important due to the fact that, unlike heterosexual women, lesbian and bisexual women do not usually have as many spaces and opportunities to affirm their individual experiences and articulate such experiences. Furthermore, women's general socialization of being subordinate to men leads to many women to internalize their socialization and inhibit their true feelings and emotions in order not to unsettle the binaries. Therefore, based on my subjects' individual experiences and their socialization of subordination, these women seemed to relate to each other on a much deeper emotional and physical level than heterosexual women.

This became quite apparent during the research process while I observed the behavior of certain subjects, for example those who seemed to want to 'bare it all' in relation to those who seemed more reserved in their responses. As a means to address the way in which lesbians and bisexuals are generally silenced, I made use of narrative life histories in the focus group sessions and one-on-one interviews. To encourage some of the respondents to open

up and feel comfortable in sharing their stories, for example, I initiated all my interviews with a comprehensive life history of myself as bisexual individual, putting emphasis on my coming out life story. By sharing my life history of being in a 14 year heterosexual marriage then coming out as a out and proud bisexual woman first to my then husband, my children and then within my religious community I simultaneously established rapport and a sense of belonging between myself and the subjects.

The fact that the subjects could identify with certain issues in my life history enabled us to establish an almost instantaneous rapport which was helpful to the research process. This in itself was vital to the study since sharing some of my life experiences assisted subjects to feel comfortable in sharing some of their individual life histories. This really assisted both me and the subjects to establish an almost instant rapport which helped us to form a bond of trust as a platform to openly share their stories and experiences which in turn fostered a sense of community among myself, as the researcher and the subjects. In this context, subjects became more spontaneous and free in sharing their life histories which elicited invaluable, significant data to the research question.

Data collected through life histories included how the subjects became aware and made sense of their individual sexual identities, how and when they came out of the closet, why some of them are still closeted with regard to their sexual identities and how some of them dealt with homophobia within their families and communities to name a few. Life histories thus formed an integral and very important part of my study since the data

collected was true, lived experiences which informed my study. The sharing of various life histories simultaneously facilitated a healing, supportive platform where subjects could vent some of their frustrations and concerns about their individual lifestyles and daily issues as well as a sense of belonging.

Participatory observations allowed me to observe the behavior of respondents. This method is mostly employed by anthropologists such as Margaret Meade (1965) who study and record the behavior, cultural practices and life histories of various societies and communities. This method also helps in the attempt to develop an in-depth understanding of their underlying ideologies and beliefs. I therefore conducted participatory observations in various locations frequented by the gay community in and around Cape Town as a means of data collection.

Being a member of the gay community also gave me the advantage of positive feedback whenever I requested the permission to conduct my research in different locations, spaces and contexts. This in turn afforded me the opportunity to observe and record these individuals' behaviors which were both vital and relevant to the research topic. Utilizing this approach was particularly important and relevant to the themes that emerged to inform the study namely self-styling and performativity, power relations, performing gender and prescribed gender relations as well as the role of space. Making use of the participant observations model thus proved invaluable since I could observe members of the gay community being out, how women lived publicly as lesbians and how they visibly define

themselves as queer.

Kendall (1999) also employed this popular method during her study on Basoetoe women in Lesotho. Kendall's (1999) study found widespread, apparently normative erotic relationships among the Basotho women. She concluded her study arguing that the public display of affection between people of the same-sex in Lesotho is quite common since the Basotho community has not constructed a social category such as 'lesbian'. This in essence supports the notion that long existent same-sex practices such as female bond friendships, women marriages, same sex erotic relationships, girl's erotic play in boarding schools (including 'mummy-baby' relationships) are not seen as homosexual and that women participating in these practices are not classified as lesbians either.

Based on the quality and range of information gathered in Kendall's (1999) study and my own research for example, illustrates the value of utilizing participatory observations as a means of data collection. In essence, making use of mixed data collection methods afforded participants to experience a general sense of general freedom, a sense of feeling comfortable with different intersecting identities and a confirmation of a sense of community among others.

This exploratory study relied on a semi structured interview schedule with open-ended questions (see Addendum B) as a tool for data collection which allows for greater flexibility in pursuing new information as it emerges.

Mblinyi (1992) illustrates that open ended questions are indeed useful in exploratory studies where knowledge about the topic is limited, or when trying to follow up on other, more structured or probing questions. Questions around several themes served as guidelines for the interview. As it is explorative in nature, I anticipated that the research will yield new insights into the dynamics around the different contexts in which certain women assert their individual sexuality.

I have analyzed my data within a critical thematic analysis framework since it is a coherent way of organizing or reading some interview material in relation to specific research questions. The amount of information gathered was so overwhelming that I had to scale down and select the most important points that emerged. This in itself proved challenging since I aimed not to develop a top-down approach, for example using evidence to confirm my theoretical ideas only.



Data collected was transcribed and thematically analyzed by dividing data under themes to do justice to both the elements of the research question and to the preoccupations of the interviewees. Thereafter the data will be processed and interpreted to answer important research questions and address theoretical issues. The emerging themes played a vital role in clarifying and analyzing the data as it relates to the study. This study differs with other studies on lesbian and bisexual identities in that this study focus on a broader perspective of their individual life histories other than other studies which mainly focus on these identities as victims and pawns in female oppression.

Emerging themes included self-styling and performativity, agency and resistance, power relations and the role of space. These themes formed a thread as discussions continued within the focus group sessions in particular. The most common reason offered as to why some of the subjects had the need to adopt and/or perform gender and prescribed gender roles stemmed from the heterosexist nature of their communities and individual households. It was imperative for Samuna, for example, to adopt a straight personality in order to remain part of her family to prevent being alienated and ostracized. Babalwa noted that in order for her to remain in a relationship with her partner she had to abide by the power dynamic that manifested in their relationship. It seemed that although she voiced her dissatisfaction with regard to the power dynamics she experienced on a daily basis, she eventually internalized this notion as normative and eventually adapted to it.

On the theme self-styling and performativity participants explained that in order for each of them to maintain their individual identities of butch/femme in their partnerships, it was important to dress and act a certain way to openly define themselves as queer and living publicly as lesbians. The participatory observations at the annual Gay Pride March in particular illustrated how members of the gay community openly defined themselves as queer by way of dress codes and performativity, for example. The role of space proved to be vital due to the fact that many of these individuals had to assert themselves in spaces where they feel safe from possible homophobic notions or alienation from family or their individual communities. Various locations in and around Cape Town, especially within the Pink District in the City Bowl area, provides safe spaces where gays and lesbians can come out,

be out and openly define their queerness.

A full discussion of the relevant themes will follow in Chapter 4.

ANALYSIS OF IDENTITIES

My one-on-one interviews were held with Snazzy, a 31 year old lesbian restaurant manager at the Waterfront, Cape Town. She was the only respondent with whom I had one-on-one sessions on her request. Snazzy's willingness to participate in the study also influenced me not to exclude her although she refused to participate in the focus group sessions. In summarizing Snazzy's recollections of her childhood and how she negotiates her intimate relationships, it became quite apparent that she has been negotiating multiple identities such as that of butch lesbian, breadwinner, caretaker, protector, provider and lover amongst others.

The interviews with Snazzy in some ways reflected different facets of many same-sex women's experiences in present day South Africa; on one level they are proud, confident and assertive; on another level, lesbians may also have to navigate highly homophobic contexts, in which partnerships with, for example, closeted women may lead them to compromise on their own freedoms.

The interviews with Snazzy also provided me with the opportunity to establish an intimate rapport with my respondent through a process in which I was also expected to share some of my own experiences, anxieties and concerns. I personally found that the more I opened up and shared my life story as a bisexual woman with Snazzy; she seemed to do introspection and reflections of her own experiences, all of which she shared accordingly. Although she was quite a willing respondent when it came to sharing her life history, I was of the opinion that had I not shared some of my own experiences too, she might not have shared as much and as deeply had I not been as open about my own experiences. I should add that this indeed paved the way for free, open and fruitful discussions which delivered rich, in-depth feedback in each interview session.

The rest of my respondents, which were seven in total, participated in focus group interviews due to the fact that most of them preferred to participate in a group setting. The focus group interviews were an important method since this particular group of women had already established a sense of community and belonging which made it easier for them to communicate with each other in a group setting. The focus group interviews also created opportunities for self-reflection and debate of relevant topics that was initially not anticipated. Some of the ideas that surfaced in focus groups included misconceptions and stigma attached to bisexuality, the importance of gender roles and power dynamics in same sex relationships. These topics have been hotly debated especially since most of the subjects refrain from discussing it with their individual partners for various reasons such as to prevent conflict and/or at worst, possible break ups. The focus group

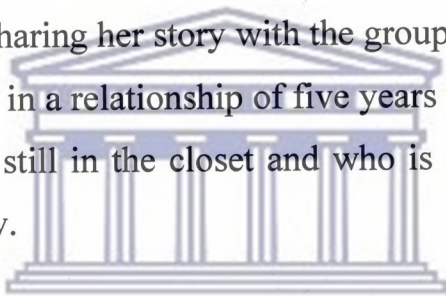
interviews therefore simultaneously created opportunities for self-reflection and a space in which to make them heard on issues of concern in their individual relationships and/or personal lives.

The first focus group interview took place at the home of Mariah. Since most of the respondents were friends of hers and met there on weekends, we agreed to meet at her home. Three colored women (two bisexuals and one lesbian) took part in this focus group. Mariah is a 36 year old single bisexual security officer from Parow who alternates her sexual interactions between both sexes. Being a self-proclaimed bisexual and coming from a small rural town in De Aar led to much debate about her among participants topic of debate. This is due to the fact that the rest of the subjects could not believe that lesbianism and bisexuality exists in rural areas since most of them related bisexuality and lesbianism to people in urban areas and not in small, rural towns.



Corina is a 39 year old single bisexual bank clerk from Manenberg who has only recently come out of the closet among some of her friends. She does however not live as an open lesbian as yet since her parents has no idea of her true sexual identity. She did however comment that she think that her siblings might have a slight idea but that they may be waiting on her to confirm their suspicions. She stated that she's not ready to come out to her family as yet.

Shady is a 38 year old single lesbian machinist from Bishop Lavis, whose contribution reflected the complexities of bisexual and lesbian woman in, coming out, being out and living publicly as lesbians. Her life history also reflects the challenges lesbians face in assuming prescribed gender roles. These challenges for example includes the assumption that there should be a 'butch' (male) and a 'femme' (female) figure in lesbian relationships. Her contribution totally demystified this common perception. The second focus group consisting of five women (two black and three colored including Shady) and was held at my home. Shireen is a 30 year old colored lesbian nurse from Bishop Lavis and a very close friend of Shady's. Her enthusiasm and openness to about sharing her story with the group initiated much debate within the group. She is in a relationship of five years with a married lesbian woman, Tanya, who is still in the closet and who is currently married to a man to please her family.



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Samuna, a closeted 32 year old colored lesbian who owns a driving school, comes from Elsies River. She expressed her fear of her family, clients and especially her religious community finding out about her true sexual identity. Although she shared little, whatever she put on the table was discussed in great depths by the rest of the group. Vovo is a 33 year old single black butch lesbian from Gugulethu who dates multiple women and wears men's clothes only. She takes a strong stance that butch women should behave like their male counterparts and insists on asserting her butch gender role at all times even though it may cause conflict and/or unhappiness in her relationships. She also puts much emphasis on dress codes.

Babalwa is a 35 year old black lesbian from Gugulethu who's in a steady relationship of three years. Her personality personifies the heterosexist notion of women as submissive to their partners and even though she is not as happy as she would like to be in her relationship, she would rather suffer in silence than making herself heard to her partner. On reflection on Babalwa's contributions, I am of the opinion that her relationship is based on the heterosexist model of female submission to the head of the household, in this instance, her butch partner.

The theme of power relations became extremely transparent during discussions. Shireen for example mentioned that she repeatedly makes huge sacrifices in order to keep her partner happy, many times to her own detriment. However, she mentions that these sacrifices are worthwhile due to the fact that her partner treats her with a deeper sense of love and compassion than any man has ever treated her. While some of the participants voiced their admiration for Shireen following her statement, others, and in this case mostly the butch lesbians, found her statement pitiful and too subservient. By judging from how most butch lesbians in general project themselves as assertive and masculine, and their individual performances of selves, their opinions and response to Shireen's contribution came as no surprise.

On the issue of power relations and performing gender, Babalwa notes that she has totally given up on the issue of equality in their relationship especially when it comes to decision making. Their finances for example, as well as when and where they should spend their spare time are decided by

her partner without any input from Babalwa who are never included. In this sense she notes that she doesn't see any difference between their relationship and that of a heterosexual relationship as the one partner are the more in control of the relationship while the other is expected to maintain a passive, submissive role. This in essence goes beyond just making decisions within the relationships up to telling your partner what to wear such as in the case of Shireen whose partner decides on and controls her dress code.

Vovo was quite eloquent and forthcoming about she negotiate power relations and performativity by being more interested in her own needs than that of her partners. She also admitted to treating her individual partners according to how they provide in her wants and needs. This was met with a certain amount of shock and disgust by some of the other participants. Self-styling was an important theme that especially became evident within the focus group sessions and participant observations since almost all participants had their own individual way of asserting and projecting their sexual identity by means of clothes, hairstyles, make up, body language, pitch of voice etc. this theme also focused on how gay people can succeed in reconstructing identities in assertive ways.

One of the findings of the study was that I noticed that all participants if not all of them, exhibited a sense of relief in having shared their stories. I ascribed this to the fact that many of them felt misunderstood, alienated and ostracized by both their families and communities and in some cases even within their intimate relationships, in different ways. The interview sessions seemed to serve as a platform to release some of the frustrations they are

going through with their families and partners out in the open. At the same time the group also served as a support to one another since some of them could identify themselves with most of the issues that were brought to the fore. It also helped me to foster a better understanding of myself in relation to and with others since I always felt alone and misunderstood while I was going through much of the same experiences like that of the subjects. In all, the interviews served a much broader purpose than just that of gathering data.

The idea of gathering data was eventually transformed into gaining a better understanding, for example, of identity as multiple and unstable and of gender as a performance. Thus, where it can be tempting for researchers to draw dogmatic conclusions about their data, I felt I was able to speculate about different motivations while also gaining a broader understanding of how and why certain subjects act as they do. I therefore feel that my research will complement a growing tradition of research undertaken by other South Africans on black lesbians, such as Matabeni's (2001) work on black lesbians in Johannesburg.

Indirectly noting the importance of this, Matabeni (2001) emphasize the absence of African lesbian researchers which in turn increases the risk of the invisibility and silence violence of black lesbians who do not naturally open up to non-Black researchers about their innermost thoughts and intimate life histories. This research has thus succeeded in gaining a deeper understanding about the respondents' self-perceptions and self-identifications while simultaneously also making the voices of all subjects

heard and not silenced as is so often the case in other research studies. I am therefore indebted to Matabeni and the value of her work, since I can use her insights, especially around methodology, insider/outsider status and possible challenges I might face in my study as a guideline for future research.

In reflecting on the focus group interviews I found that different dynamics were revealed amongst the subjects. There was no need to combat any silences as everyone actively participated in heated debate precipitated by Shireen's lively and robust sharing of her life stories. Having such active group discussions and being an insider combated the general way in which lesbian histories are often silenced and helped to create an atmosphere for open and spontaneous interaction within the group discussions. Shireen's contributions seemed to lead most of the group discussions so I was challenged to see to it that there were no absent, silent voices. In these instances, especially in the case of Samuna, I made a point of drawing the silent voices into the group discussions in order to have their voices heard and to take cognizance and document their responses as well.

The focus group method of data collection thus had its advantage to serve as a platform to initiate debate and open discussion which might not have been the case in another method of data collection such as one-on-one interviews. The focus group approach allows a specified group of people to foster a sense of community and freedom to discuss the topic at hand in a safe and secure environment which in most cases, elicits information relevant to the research question. I have been able to explore some of the central insights of queer theorists in relation to the testimonies and everyday experiences of

lesbian and bisexual women in various contexts and settings. My insider status in the study as a bisexual woman who is currently in a same-sex relationship gave me the opportunity to gather firsthand data and experiences I might not otherwise have been able to do if I were an outsider. My ability to delve deeper into the lives of the respondents, to be trusted and obtain sensitive information which revealed new and exciting data to the study certainly proved to be an asset to the study.

Matabeni (2001), while conducting a study on black lesbian groups in Johannesburg notes a few tricky issues raised by being an insider. She argues that factors such as race, class, education, sexual orientation and gender may at different times outweigh the cultural identity we associate with insider status. She further notes that although the researcher might share a number of similarities with the respondents one has to be aware of the ambiguities of ethnicity, gender identity and power in the 'field'. According to Matabeni (2001) studying populations close to one's identity can give one access to people and open possibilities for intimate relationships of different kinds.

During the entire research process I also have been fortunate both to identify and deal with contradictions in lesbian experiences. In analyzing the data, for example, I could observe different patterns in relation to the intersection of lesbianism and class, lesbianism and occupation as well as lesbianism and race. I have for example, discerned that if you're a white, middle class lesbian with a good occupation, this affords you the means of being more open or secretive about one's sexuality and frequent safe spaces where one

could meet and mingle with other lesbians. In the case of a black, working class lesbian in contrast, it becomes more difficult to assert one's sexuality and frequent safe spaces which is mostly situated in the greater city bowl area and which might in many instances are way too expensive to access or frequent per se.

Matabeni (2001) also states that although she did not pursue or anticipate any romantic liaisons with her participants, it became difficult for her to evade 'suitors' with whom she had to stay in contact as they were interviewees. She therefore had to be cautious about possible sexual attraction to participants and about the sexual suggestions directed at her during interviews or ethnography. According to Matabeni (2001) there could be emotional blocks to hearing interviewees' experiences; blocks that in this case might be caused by a shared social oppression as lesbians and bisexuals, and which could limit one's clear thoughts about a particular topic. At one stage, for example, I became somewhat emotional while telling my coming out story and my experiences of being ostracized by family, friends and even my church. Yet this was not seen as a weakness but instead prompted the rest of the group to share even more intimate life experiences with the rest of the group.

I was therefore very fortunate to explore and record various expressions of lesbianism, different identities and various ways of assuring independence and freedom around sexual choices and self-identification. It was quite enlightening to see how lesbian and bisexual women attach different meanings to certain interactions, practices or symbols, including socializing,

meeting, selecting particular dress items to assert and affirm their sexualities and sexual identities. Many of these practices and symbols might seem ordinary and unremarkable. Yet when we pay attention to the way they are redefined or transformed by individuals who try to 'speak back' to heteronormative society, we realize how much lesbian and bisexual constantly battle to be themselves and be accepted for who they are within their families and immediate communities.

It was quite apparent how some lesbians attach much importance to practices such as dress codes, hair styles, body language and interacting with their partners in specific ways to identify themselves and assert their sexual identities. The role of space is also important in fostering a sense of belonging and containment with regard to safety among many of these women. It was quite remarkable for instance, how butch lesbian women would act much more assertive in their relationships and society in relation to men. I'm sure that if I were not an insider in this group, I might not have had the privilege to experience and understand the various enriching lesbian lifestyles and identities I have witnessed throughout the research process.

CHAPTER 4

In analyzing the data, common threads were identified as important in exploring how women negotiate alternative sexualities such as lesbianism and bisexuality. I found it useful to take cognizance of and to document the nuances of each participant as an individual and as a member of a group. These nuances include body language like hand gestures and facial expression, pitch of voice, the un/willingness of each to share their life stories, the dynamics between participants as well as the general atmosphere in which the data collection transpired. The focus of this section is to analyze the information collected with the help of the mixed method of data collection namely focus group discussions, one-on-one interviews and participatory observations through which I was able to identify key themes relative to the study namely:

- Power relations and performing gender
- self-styling
- agency and resistance; and
- role of space

In what follows I use excerpts from findings of the mixed method of data collection also include a general analysis of my observations within these various settings. Furthermore I will also juxtapose my experiences with those of the participants.

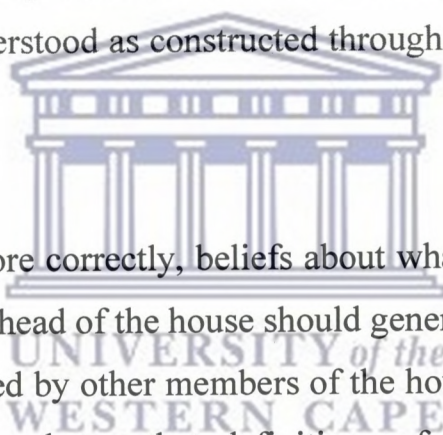
POWER RELATIONS & PERFORMING GENDER

In his article on power and patriarchy O'Murchu (1997) argues that relationships are assumed to function from the top down; people are supposed to 'know their place and keep it'. According to O'Murchu (1997) this is a guideline which is frequently applied to those at the bottom of the pile but rarely to those at the top with much emphasis placed on difference and separation, isolation and exclusion. Since some of the respondents or their partners place themselves in a superior position to that of the other partner by being in control of decision-making and finances among others, they indirectly enforce power by the laying down of certain rules which they expects their partners to abide by. In this section I consider how certain lesbians assert themselves with regard to being out and living publicly as lesbians. This chapter also aims to focus on the importance of power relations within same sex relations in terms of gender roles which will draw mainly on Foucault (1986), Butler (1990) and other relevant theorists.

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According to Rich (1987), a first means of judging women's bodies is through seeing them as inferior with reference to norms and ideals based on men's physical capacities. Secondly biological functions are collapsed into social characteristics. While men have traditionally been thought to be capable of transcending the level of the biological through the use of their rational faculties, women have tended to be defined entirely it terms of their physical capacities for reproduction and motherhood.

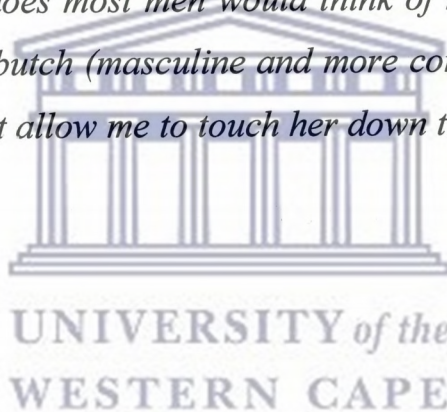
Foucault (1986) therefore argues that the construct of a supposedly 'natural' sex functions to disguise the productive operation of power in relation to sexuality. Therefore, the notion of sex brought about a fundamental reversal which made it possible to invert the representation of the relationships of power to sexuality, causing the latter to appear, not in its essential and positive relation to power, but as being rooted in a specific and irreducible urgency which power tries as best it can to dominate' (Foucault 1979: 155). Foucault's claim here is that the relationship between power and sexuality is misrepresented when sexuality is viewed as an unruly natural force that power simply opposes, represses or constrains. Rather, the phenomenon of sexuality should be understood as constructed through the exercise of power relations.



However, culture, or more correctly, beliefs about what constitutes 'culture' also influences how the head of the house should generally project and assert themselves and be treated by other members of the household. Writers such as Kopano Ratele have shown that definitions of the static and highly patriarchal nature of African culture in South Africa are largely attributable to colonial and apartheid administrative practices. These ideas have been taken on by many Africans themselves. Many believe, for example, that in Xhosa culture, the man is the indisputable head of the house due to the fact that he is classified more superior to women in respect of gender and cultural traditions. During the focus group sessions I have in fact observed that the Xhosa butch lesbians, such as Babalwa's partner JT and Vovo, within same sex relationships tend to model heterosexual relationships with regard to extremely rigid gender roles. This preoccupation with maintaining strict

demarcation between authoritarian masculinity and subservient femininity is evident in the following excerpt, which reveals the connections between sexual and financial control:

JT likes to be in control of any decision making. She decides how and where we spend our free time, when we should hook up (meet) and how we spend our money. Up until sometime ago the same applied when we were in bed coz she would always be on top and I was initially never allowed to touch her down there. What I mean is that in our culture woman are not allowed to initiate sex and if she does most men would think of her as a slut. Because she sees herself as the butch (masculine and more controlling) figure in the relationship, she did not allow me to touch her down there (the genital area) for a long time.

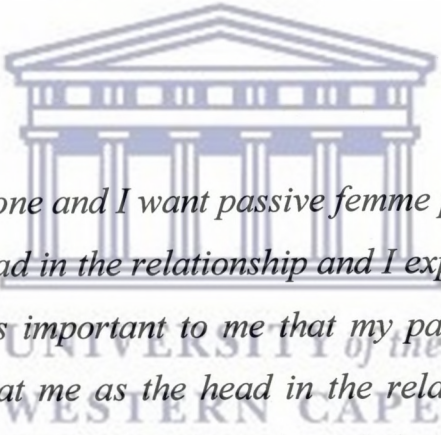


Babalwa

Babalwa's case study is therefore an excellent example of how participants sometimes perform gender and utilize examples of power play that exaggerate patriarchal heterosexual relationships.

In the following excerpt Vovo projects herself as a (butch) woman who loves (femme) women. It is interesting to note that although she maintains a butch, masculine persona, exerts a male role in all her relationships and wears exclusively men's clothing, she does not at all identify herself as a tomboy or a male. Throughout the focus group sessions it has however

become evident that she deems herself superior to heterosexual men by acting in an excessively masculine way, especially in constantly seeking to attract multiple partners and demonstrate her ability to attract both heterosexual and lesbian women as “conquests”. She furthermore revels in the fact that most people mistake her for a man because of her male appearance, behavior, dress code and her neat, short hair cut. She also verbalized that what she wears and the quality thereof is crucial to how she identifies and projects herself as a butch lesbian. Interestingly, projecting an assertive butch attitude also affords her much respect and admiration within the dominantly heterosexual community especially with men when it comes to her choice of partner.



I'm definitely the butch one and I want passive femme partners. I always like to take charge as the head in the relationship and I expect my partners to be femme and passive. It's important to me that my partners know that they need to respect and treat me as the head in the relationship and that I'm there to take care of their emotional needs and desires. That's why I like power dressing in good quality men's clothing. I like clothes that make me look like a man and I like my woman to compliment me by looking all femme and gorgeous. That way I can enjoy other woman admiring her and see men green with jealousy that I as a lesbian can score (have) such a good looking woman by my side.

Vovo

Vovo's contribution evidently reflects how certain lesbian individual's claims agency, by parodying and partly borrowing from the norm of masculinity by way of behavior and clothing amongst others. Vovo and Babalwa clearly illustrate strategies of gender bending and claiming agency by choosing to conform by adopting the identities of being typically masculine. These are examples of how lesbian and gay individuals typically subvert, take on and adhere to the norm of masculinity even though they appear conscious of it being a pose or guise of gender identity.

The subversive meaning of the performed masculinity associated with the participants above is well-described by Foucault. Drawing on Foucault's (1986) account of the historical construction of sexuality and the part played by the category of sex in this construction, feminists have been able to rethink gender, not as the cultural meanings that are attached to a pre-given sex, but, in Butler's (1993) formulation, 'as the cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is produced and established as prior to culture' (Butler 1990: 7). Following Foucault, Butler argues that the notion of a natural sex that is prior to culture and socialization is implicated in the production and maintenance of gendered power relations because it naturalizes the regulatory idea of a supposedly natural heterosexuality and, thus, reinforces the reproductive constraints on sexuality.

The butch participants in my study challenge the idea of the inevitable connection between sexed bodies and gender identity and behavior. Moreover, their self-consciousness about not men, but being emphatically

masculine reinforces their self-conscious adoption of gender as cultural performance.

However, while some of my participants chose to emulate conventional masculine and feminine identities, others display much more ambivalence about these identities. The following excerpts relate to Abdul-Lughod's (1986) argument that where there is power, there is resistance:

I prefer to play the femme (feminine) role in my relationships and only go for with butch numbers (masculine woman). I'm not in a committed relationship at present but when I am I don't mind doing the cooking but when it comes to other housework I like my partner to pitch in (help). As soon as I find out I've got a lazy partner its tickets with her! I'm nobody's servant so if you want me you better deliver (lend a helping hand) or hit the road)! I mean if I wanted a man I would have taken one in the first place!

Shady

Shireen's response is similar to Shady's, and she notes that the power relationship she finds herself in is very stressful at times due to the extreme jealousy and dominating nature of her partner as is evident in the following excerpt:

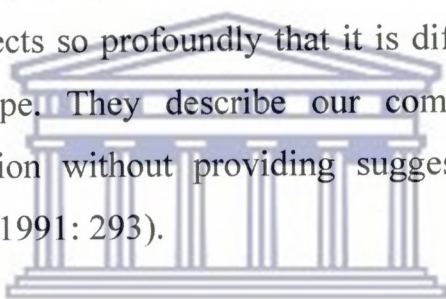
My relationship is very stressful at times. Tasha is extremely jealous. I like to dress femme and look attractive but she has a problem with it. I'm only supposed to look sexy when I'm with her and I'm not allowed to spend too much time chatting to other people in the company when she's around. I mean, you imagine this: I have to act as if me and her are only friends but at the same time she still wants to have power over me and monitor who I have nice conversations with. Once when we got home she gave me a slap across the face coz (because) a guy I was chatting with at a braai we went to was looking at my tits (breasts) while he was talking to me. She told me my top was much too revealing and forbade me ever to wear that type of clothing. She even went further and cut up all of my sexy clothes. What she doesn't know is that I bought new sexy clothes that I store at my cousin's home! (Roaring laughter from the rest of the group). Whenever we go out and she's not going with, I dress up at home then go to my cousin's place and dress sexy there before we leave!

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Shireen

Shady and Shireen's contributions evidently focus on how some of my respondents sometimes perform gender in a way that seems to echo heterosexual relationships between men and women, yet claim agency by means of parodying and partly borrowing from the norm, yet also subtly resist it in various ways.

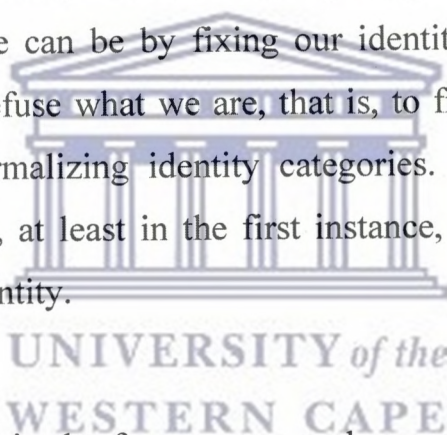
Where participants in lesbian relationships who adhere strictly to prescribed gender norms experience these as desirable and liberating, others sometimes see these as restrictive, echoing the oppressiveness of patriarchal heterosexism. Thus, the responses of Shady and Shireen can be explored in terms of the partial resistance described by Foucault. On the issue of power relations in particular, Foucault (1986) envisages modern disciplinary power as ubiquitous and inescapable. Based on this premise Foucauldian power reduces individuals to docile and subjected bodies and thus seems to deny the possibility of freedom and resistance. According to Sawicki (1991) Bartky and Bordo have portrayed forms of patriarchal power that insinuate themselves within subjects so profoundly that it is difficult to imagine how they (we) might escape. They describe our complicity in patriarchal practices of victimization without providing suggestions about how we might resist it (Sawicki 1991: 293).



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Foucault (1986) however rejects the idea that resistance can be grounded in a subject or self who pre-exists its construction by power even though he does not deny the possibility of resistance to power. In his later work Foucault explains that his theory of power implies both the possibility and existence of forms of resistance. According to Foucault 'there are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised' (Foucault 1986: 142).

However, Foucauldian resistance neither predates the power it opposes nor issues from a site external to power. Rather it relies upon and grows out of the situation against which it struggles. Foucault's (1986) understanding of resistance as internal to power in fact refuses the utopian dream of achieving total emancipation from power. In the place of total liberation Foucault envisages more specific, local struggles against forms of subjection aimed at loosening the constraints on possibilities for action. He suggests that a key struggle in the present is against the tendency of normalizing-disciplinary power to tie individuals to their identities in constraining ways. It is, Foucault (1986) contends, because disciplinary practices limit the possibilities of what we can be by fixing our identities that the object of resistance must be to refuse what we are, that is, to fracture the limitations imposed on us by normalizing identity categories. Foucault's notion of resistance thus consists, at least in the first instance, in a refusal of fixed, stable or naturalized identity.



Based on data gathered in the focus group and one-on-one sessions I have come to the conclusion that it is generally women who seem to be the gate keepers of their own oppression and power relations between women by means of setting down rules and regulations within the relationship where the passive party is ruled from the top down. These excerpts prove that power relations exist even within same-sex relationships which are directly linked to patriarchy where women, whether as members of oppressed groups or not, are socialized into the belief that women are subordinate to men. Men are furthermore socialized to believe in and maintain the patriarchal system while women have to repress their views on sexuality and identify with and

conform to the patriarchal structures in order to survive. Therefore, based on the data and literature review, the same seems to hold true within some same-sex relationships.

The following comments by respondents relates to Dales' (2005) critique of the destructive impact of patriarchy on women in particular where she mentions how possession (of one woman over another in this context) relates to the masculine (in this case butch), dominant power that wants to claim control over everything and dictate how we exercise our gifts, particularly our creative ones. O'Murchu (1997) argues that everything is analyzed (by the head) and understood to exist and operate autonomously within a culture of power that seeks to domesticate and control (other women in this case).

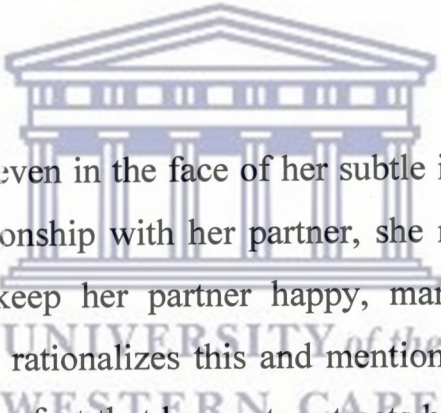
Since women's bodies and their sexuality are generally within the functions of reproduction and prescribed roles of as wives, mothers and daughters, it is expected of them to be subservient and to put others' (that of children, males and in this context, the dominant partner's) needs before their own. It is thus interesting to see how the patriarchal way in which we have been socialized interlinks with power relations within same-sex relationships in the same way as it does within heterosexual relationships which are illustrated by the following excerpts:

I must confess that I'm more interested in my own needs than that of my partners. I tend to treat my partner accordingly if he or she satisfies and take care of my needs be it physical, emotional or financial. I make sure that my needs are met first before I focus on that of my partners.

Corina

I'm a controlling bitch and not shy to say so! I like my partners to provide for me. I like to be spoiled and taken out now and then. I am independent but it's nice to have someone else to spend time and money on you. They can't expect me to cook, give them the goods (sex) and provide for entertainment too!

Shady

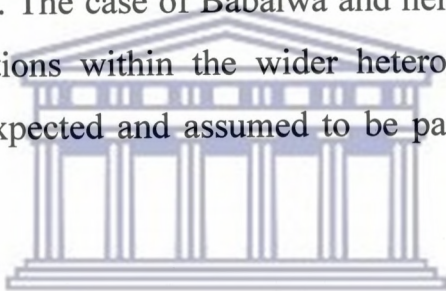


Shireen mentioned that even in the face of her subtle instances of resistance in her dominating relationship with her partner, she repeatedly made huge sacrifices in order to keep her partner happy, many times to her own detriment. She however rationalizes this and mentions that these sacrifices are worthwhile due to the fact that her partner treats her with a deeper sense of love and compassion than any man has ever treated her. However, while some of the participants voiced their admiration for Shireen following her statement, others, and in this case mostly the butch lesbians, found her statement pitiful and too subservient.

Therefore, by judging from how most butch lesbians in general project themselves as assertive and masculine, and their individual performances of selves, their opinions and response to Shireen's contribution came as no surprise. Based on data collected in the study during the focus group session

and previous literature, it is evident that certain same sex relationships are based on the heteronormative model of socialization. Shireen's experiences therefore clearly illustrate the fact that even women in same sex relationships are at times subjected to the patriarchal notion that women should be passive and submissive towards their butch partners/lovers even when they feel profound discomfort about this subordination.

Data collected during the study reflects how negotiating of power relations ties up with power relations in the wider society by reinforcing and challenging the binaries. The case of Babalwa and her partner, for example, reflects on power relations within the wider heterosexual society where women are generally expected and assumed to be passive, submissive and conforming.



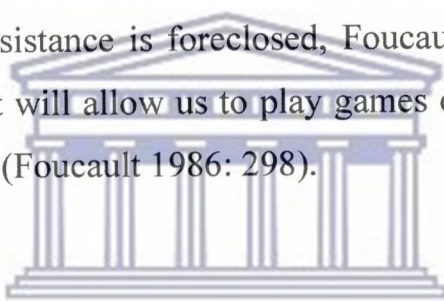
Power relations thus seem to manifest for example in the context of same sex relationships, where one of the parties assume a more assertive role than the other. This is however not the case in all same sex relationships, since there are instances where even the supposedly submissive partner resists power and asserts themselves as in the case of Shady who resists partners who do not for example help with household chores. Therefore, resistance is always complex and framed by existing practices which ties up with Butler's (1990) and Foucault's (1986) constructionist discussion that we never simply discover identities from nowhere.

The one-on-one sessions with Snazzy showed how she negotiates prescribed gender relations within her intimate relationships. She recounted how she always seems to find herself in intimate relationships where she takes care of her partners both financially and emotionally. A summary of her childhood and life history yielded how she took on the role of provider and protector, a role which her father had failed to perform during her childhood. She thus unconsciously tends to make up for her mother's lack of financial provision and protection from her husband (Snazzy's father) by making sure that she loves, protects and provides for her partners as is expected of her butch lesbian identity. Except for being a woman who has intimate relationships with other women, she also negotiates various roles such as that of butch lesbian, breadwinner, caretaker, protector, provider and lover.

I don't know what it is but I tend to find myself at work way more than at home. I enjoy my work and managing a restaurant is quite a lot of work. All my partners I've been with has accused me of being a workaholic but I feel that me working so hard is to the benefit of both me and my partners. I mean the time I used to be a simple waitress I earned more tips than my salary and could carve out a comfortable lifestyle for me and my partner at the time. It also happened that my partners tended to be more dependent on me financially. I'd say that I see my role as that of the provider which might have still been the case if I were a man.

Snazzy

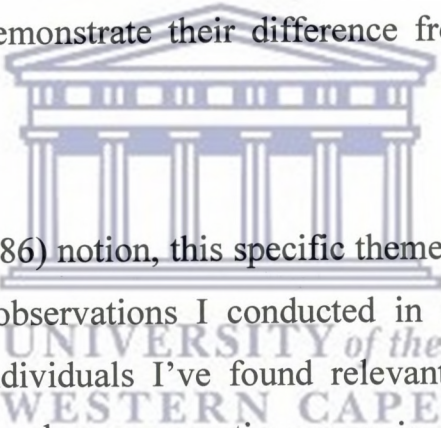
In conclusion Foucault suggests that individuals are not limited to reacting against power, but may alter power relationships in ways that expand their possibilities for action. Based on data collected many of the respondents forged a gender identity process through which they aimed to achieve an awareness of their individual sexual and gender identities and assert themselves within their individual communities and relationships. Thus, Foucault's work on ethics can be linked to his concern to counter domination, that is, forms of power that limit the possibilities for the autonomous development of the self's capacities. By distinguishing power relations that are mutable, flexible and reversible, from situations of domination in which resistance is foreclosed, Foucault seeks to encourage practices of liberty 'that will allow us to play games of power with as little domination as possible' (Foucault 1986: 298).



SELF-STYLING

Self-styling was an extremely important theme that became evident since almost all participants had their own individual way of asserting and projecting their sexual identity by means of clothes, hairstyles, make up, body language, pitch of voice etc. During the participant observations I could identify ways in which some of these individuals projected themselves by subverting, self styling as well as using space in supporting ways. The main focus of Foucault's (1986) ideas of self-stylization explores how gay people in general can succeed in reconstructing identities in assertive ways.

Following Butler, Lorber (2000) argues that gender is performances complete with costume changes and episodic dramatic narratives in which individuals can deliberately produce conformity on varying degrees of social subversion. Queers often openly subvert binary gender and sexual categories through their deliberate mixtures of clothing, makeup, jewelry, hairstyles and behavior. It is in this context that Foucault's (1986) ideas about self-stylization is best illustrated in how certain gay individuals actively express their individuality and sexual identities by way of clothing, hair styles and make up amongst others. Self-styling and performativity therefore relates to the ways in which gays and lesbians come out, visibly define themselves as "queer" and publicly demonstrate their difference from heterosexual men and women.



Based on Foucault's (1986) notion, this specific theme was very evident and during the participant observations I conducted in spaces frequented by lesbian and bisexual individuals I've found relevant to the study. These observations have taken place over a time span in various locations and contexts with the aim of identifying patterns and acts of sexual display and agency. These spaces also include heteronormative spaces such as the University of the Western Cape where heterosexual displays of affection are a dominant and acceptable trend and where any affection shown between same sex individuals is frowned upon and criticized. Contributions collected during the focus group sessions which proved significant to the study will also be included in the analysis which will simultaneously reflect on how lesbians come out and live publicly as lesbians.

I have conducted participant observations in Stargayzers Gay Club situated in the Parow industrial area as well as Beulah's and Bronx Gay Bars. Beulah's and Bronx Gay Bar are situated quite close to each other in De Waterkant area in Green Point. These are spaces are also frequented by most of my subjects. The first setting is Stargayzers Gay Club which is a predominantly gay club where gay people seem free to be themselves and assert their sexual identity.

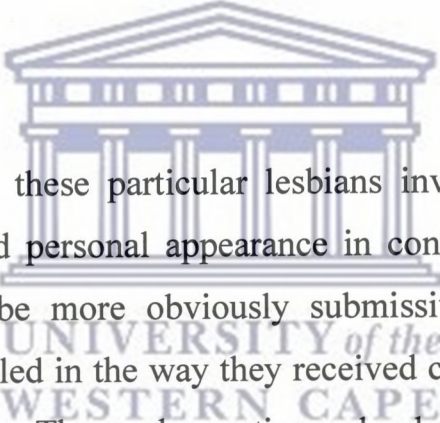
Self-styling seemed to be an important aspect in how many of the patrons chose to express their sense of 'difference' and a self-selected gender identity, and illustrates how various subjects bravely and resolutely work to construct their bodies in independent ways. Butch lesbians for example, were dressed in masculine clothing such as tight fitting muscle tops and men's trousers. Most of them wore their hair very short, bald or in a Mohawk hairstyle that is synonymous with their male heterosexual counterparts. It was also obvious that most of these butch lesbians adorned their bodies and facial features with piercing and tattoos which also indicated and projected their butch personae. In some instances it was easy to discern between 'futch' (soft butch) lesbians and dykes (extremely butch) lesbians by way of the way they dressed, their body language, body piercing, tattoo's and the way they projected and asserted themselves among others.

By using outward appearance as an indicator 'dykes' tended to behave and dress in an extremely masculine way by way of male clothing and modeling heterosexual male behaviors such as taking the lead in making their partners comfortable and seeing to it that they are relaxed and always have something

to eat/drink in the various contexts. There were also dykes that would pull out the chairs for their partners, open the car doors for them and even accompanied them to the ladies room. To me it became more evident that these dykes modeled male behavior and dress code to the extreme that one could very easily mistake some of them for males. However some “futch” lesbians seemed to adopt moderately masculine identities as opposed to “dykes” in the context of dress code, personal appearance and behaviors. It was evident that although they also adopted a butch personae, they did not appear or act as masculine as their ‘dyke’ counterparts in their behaviors and/or dress codes. These women acted and dressed in ways that still projected them as feminine while they simultaneously imitated and modeled male heterosexual behaviors in a subtle way.

Femme lesbians were evidently dressed in high heels and body fitting clothing which accentuated their cleavage and/or body image. In most instances they wore their hair long or short with feminine hair cuts such as bobs and Kimberley cuts. Make up, jewelry and a small clutch bag rounded off the entire dress code for most of these bisexual and lesbian women. It was interesting though to see how they identify their difference from conventions of heterosexual femininity. Whereas heterosexual, bisexual and femme (feminine) women tended to project themselves in the general feminine way, it was clear that lipstick (extremely feminine) lesbians consciously projected themselves in a more exaggerated feminine way to identify their difference from conventions of heterosexual femininity more clearly.

What made these lipstick lesbians excessively feminine is the fact that most of them wore very heavy make-up, extremely short skirts or body fitting clothing, projected exaggerated mannerisms such as the way they walk, talk and behave as well as wearing extremely high heeled shoes, boots and stilettos. They also tended to go to great lengths to assure that their make up is always fresh and perfectly applied by either continuously looking at themselves in their compact mirrors and make up kits or excusing themselves to the ladies rooms to freshen up. Thus, although the butch subjects I have observed make their gender identity obvious in most instances, there is evidence that the femme subjects also presents themselves differently.



It seemed obvious that these particular lesbians invested more time and effort in their looks and personal appearance in contrast to other women. They also seemed to be more obviously submissive and ostentatiously demure and clearly reveled in the way they received constant attention from their butch counterparts. These observations clearly illustrated how self-styling and performativity were applied by these individuals to assert a distinctive kind of femininity and how butch and femme lesbians construct themselves in different ways while modeling heterosexual relationships at the same time.

It became evident that even though heterosexual gender behavior is a reference point for the respondents in my study, they (my respondents) exercised some degree of choice, for example gaining some psychological and emotional gratification from certain forms of conformist self-styling

such as adopting butch/femme roles in their relationships and openly assert their sexual identity. I have for example noted that many of my butch respondents, if not all of them, asserted their sexual identities in a uniquely masculine way by way of dress codes, personal appearance and body language which demonstrates agency.

The following excerpt shows how Vovo, one of the butch lesbians claim agency and gains some psychological and emotional gratification from conformist self-styling by way of dress code:

I only wear cargo pants, jeans and men's t-shirts to assert my butch identity and I wear it wherever I go. I like power dressing in good quality men's clothing and I only shop at Truworths Men Stores. I like clothes that make me look like a man and I enjoy seeing other men admiring my clothing and dress sense! I generally wear this kind of clothing among friends, family and peers and like my woman to compliment me by looking all femme and gorgeous. That way I can enjoy other woman admiring her and see men green with jealousy that I as a lesbian can score (have) such a good looking woman by my side.

Vovo

Shady prefers dressing like a feminine woman although she shaves her head like most heterosexual men generally does. In this sense she conforms her self-styling to adopting a masculine hair cut while simultaneously asserting her femininity by way of dress code:

I also wear the same type of clothes around friends, family and my peers. I like to shave my head, wear tights, short skirts and nice tops. Although people see my dress sense as though I'm butch, I'm actually feminine at heart.

Shady

It was very obvious to see how the butch lesbians dominated in Beulah's bar in particular. As a visitor to this establishment I found it quite interesting how this bar seemed to offer a sense of belonging especially to butch lesbians where the general behavior of lesbians was typically masculine and/or hyper-masculine and at times also ambiguous. A strong sense of camaraderie could be detected among butch lesbians in the way they asserted themselves and interacted amongst each other and with their partners. The sense of community that prevailed in this specific scene was extremely evident and most patrons seemed to be comfortable with the atmosphere whether through being family or friends or just as regular patrons. It was also evident to observe lesbian and gay peoples' sense of comfort about being 'different' among one another within this particular space as a whole which seemed to offer a safe space to be oneself without fear of alienation or reprimand.

My second participant observation was conducted at Beulah's which seemed to consist of predominantly butch and femme lesbians and gay male patrons while Bronx Gay Bar consisted mainly of white gay males and femme lesbians. At Beulah's I got the impression that lesbians, especially the butch ones dominated the entire scene. On observing femme lesbians I found most

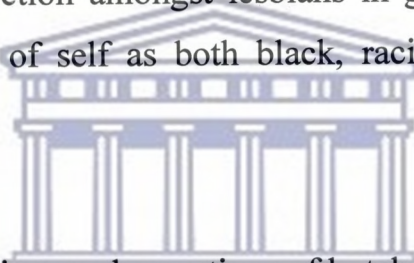
of them maintained a generally femme appearance which was other than those lipstick lesbians I identified in Bronx Gay Bar who seemed to be more upper class and extremely feminine in appearance.

I have also observed a distinct difference between lesbians at Bronx Gay bar and those at Beulah's. Lesbians at Bronx for example, projected a distinct self-consciousness in this male-dominated space with regard to body language and dress code amongst others. These lesbians also seemed to stress their assertiveness and need to proclaim distinct identity as lesbians, and not simply as gay individuals. It seemed as though they put themselves out there as the female equivalent of gay men who frequented this male dominated space. On the other hand, being in a male dominated space also afford these lesbians to claim agency with regard to openly being themselves in a (male) gay friendly environment where they did not have to shy away from the gaze of (homophobic) heterosexuals or a dominantly lesbian environment.

The next context of focus was Mzoli's Meat in Gugulethu where I have found that the space mainly frequented by many township butch and femme lesbians as well as 'tomboys'. Mzoli's also serves as a space where lesbians in general and tomboys in particular assert gender identities freely and openly. This was in most, if not all cases asserted through dress: tight muscle tops; men's pants and shoes and hair styles involving the hair being either cut short or totally bald as well as the use of men's colognes. This trend included the wearing of popular male sophisticated and expensive dress and brand names brand such as Dolce Cabana and Yves St. Laurent, for

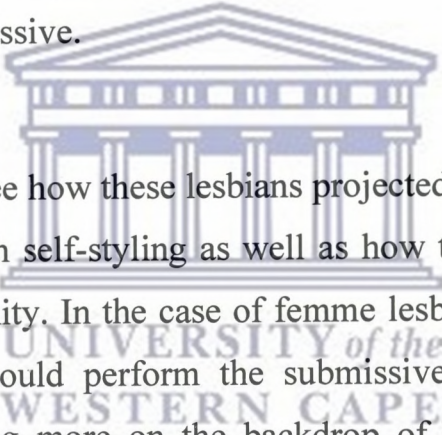
example, through which the butch lesbians especially asserted their gender roles within their individual relationships and in the gay community as well.

Mzoli's is a social spot where popular culture is manifested in an extravagant way through dress code, expensive cars and accessories such as the latest cell phones and bling (jewelry). It was therefore ironic to see that gay individuals in this setting seemed less concerned with expensive clothes because of less social pressure to assert their authority and status in a racist and classist society lesbians than I have observed elsewhere. I in fact observed a strong connection amongst lesbians in general for the need to proclaim a proud sense of self as both black, racial subordinate, and as lesbian.



I have noticed a contrast in my observations of butch lesbians at Mzoli's and those I have observed in other contexts. Based on my observation it became evident that butch lesbians at Mzoli's adopted a strong sense of being authentically "African" through exaggerated patriarchal behavior and sexual dominance over their partners. Cock (1991) notes that in Xhosa culture for example, the man is undoubtedly the head of the house and the female is expected to be submissive and subject herself to her husband or the head of the house. Cock (1991) however argues that tradition is often invoked to justify gender inequality amongst the sexes, a pattern which is deeply rooted in South Africa's history. She further argues that the ideals of masculinity and femininity have been sharply polarized in all these traditions and therefore, women are viewed as nurturing, caring, emotional and receptive according to this polarized ideology of gender roles.

Since men are linked to self-assertion, competition, aggression, rationality and power-seeking the dominance of men over women promotes these masculine virtues at the expense of the feminine. During the study I have noticed that two of my black butch lesbian respondents namely JT and Vovo modeled their respective relationships based on their cultural traditions as the hyper-masculine man (in this case the butch role model) being the head of the house. This also became evident when observing black butch lesbians' behaviors towards other black butch lesbians and their partners as well at Mzoli's. It was clear to see that although these butch lesbians fostered a sense of belonging among each other, their partners could clearly be observed as being submissive.



It was also obvious to see how these lesbians projected a sense of comfort in the roles associated with self-styling as well as how they chose to perform femininity and masculinity. In the case of femme lesbians for example, one could see how they would perform the submissive and passive role in socializing by remaining more on the backdrop of the scene while their butch counterparts would project a more active and assertive role by cruising; interacting with other lesbians butch and taking care (for example serving them alcohol or food or walking them to the ladies rooms) of their individual partners.

The Annual Gay Pride Festival is another social space where gay people from all classes, races and social backgrounds claim agency and assert their sexualities. I found this space invaluable in identifying how people of different sexual orientations asserted and negotiated their individual

sexualities since there was so much to observe, interpret and learn from. One specific bisexual individual male named Charlene made a big impression in the way she openly defined herself as queer by way of self styling in the form of dress code.

At first sight, one would perceive this particular individual as female but on closer inspection or on listening to the person's voice one would be tempted to assume that she was in fact male. This individual was dressed in an outfit which depicted masculinity such as male pants, a male shirt as well as a male shoe on the one side and a skirt, women's female blouse and pump (ladies shoe) on the other side. Half of her head was shaved and the other half styled in a feminine way. After inquiring asking her about the meaning of her particular outfit, she mentioned that the message she tried to get across was that both men and women can be of bisexual sexual orientation and that there is no sure way that anyone could know for sure the sexual orientation of another person by just looking at them. No one could have thought of a better way to bring this message across than Charlene.

Charlene's contribution to the gay march proved an excellent example of subversion of unitary and clear cut gender and sexual identity. In dressing her body in both male and female clothing while simultaneously adopting male and female personae, she depicted that gender is not fixed but fluid and that different meaning can be applied to dress code, body image and personal appearance. Therefore, Butler's (1990) notion that queer theory is not (necessarily) just a view on sexuality, or gender but also suggests that the confines of any identity can potentially be reinvented by its owner, like

Charlene, in this case, holds true.

Another observation I found revealing was of two extremely attractive lipstick lesbians driving a motor cycle. They projected an ultra feminine persona but drove a huge metallic vehicle, with this totally subverting the heterosexual image of men at the helm of motorcycles with women in the back seat. Many people were in awe of them driving such a huge, masculine motorcycle in full feminine garb. Drag Kings and Queens, many of whom are well-known icons in the gay community, came out in full force with the most elaborate costumes, make up and jewelry of which many have been in the gay arena for decades and are well known in the greater gay community.

Miss Gay Pride was also in attendance, as were her first and second princesses. These women (transgenderd men) adorned in their finery and high heels proudly carried their bodies through the streets of Cape Town enjoying the attention from the masses of people who came out in their hundreds to have a look at the party goers. There were also a group of lesbians dressed in firemen's uniforms who joined the festival asserting a masculine image while at the same time a group of gay men wearing tight fitting leather outfits also took part in the celebrations. What could be observed throughout the festival were the manner in which each individual and groups as a collective used self-styling and performativity, as well as space amongst others to assert their sexuality and define themselves as queer in the context of heterosexual normalcy.

The data collected through participant observations effectively illustrates how people of different sexual identities and sexual orientations select an image for themselves which in turn enhances their aspects of self-presentation. This indeed illustrates Butler's (1990) notion of the artificiality of gender, and the fact that while society seeks to prescribe gender and impose it on the body, individuals often mock or subvert dominant prescriptions. These examples reveal how agency comes in many ways, shapes and forms through which gay individuals make themselves heard and known in their immediate contexts and communities.

AGENCY AND RESISTANCE

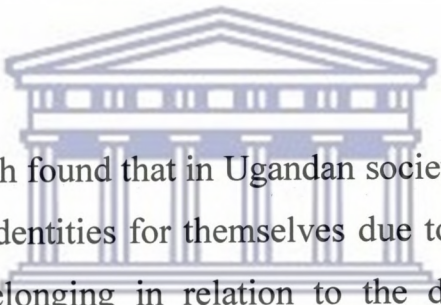
As previously noted, women's situation cannot be explained only as subordination. They have power to act too. Dales' (2005) study of women's agency and resistance in contemporary Japan, for example, defines agency as the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act. She argues that agency can be seen as including but not limited to resistance to actions that actors themselves describe as aiming to defer, subvert, undermine or oppose the power and repression of dominant forces (2005: 87). I agree with Dales' (2005) argument that discussions of queer and lesbian sexuality, sexual self-determination and the impact of hegemonic gender ideals create a potential foundation for women's subversive social engagement – a critical engagement with those forces that shape their identities and life choices.

Central to Dales' (2005) study is the point that The Love Piece Club is not exclusively a sex goods shop but a space explicitly designed to encourage questioning (2005). A key theme of Dale's (2005) study is knowledge and enjoyment of one's own body as a means to claim agency of ones' sexuality. She mentions that women's sexuality is constructed as delicate and significantly different from that of men. Yet Japanese women are not simply women who want sex – they are women who defy male expectations of female sexual subjectivity, and whose sexual behavior is underpinned by a critical reflexiveness (Dales, 2005: 87).

Dales (2005) therefore calls for new and creative engagements with women's sexual subjectivities which both acknowledge and challenge the social context of discourse on sex and sexuality. She further argues that engagement with ideas of queer and active sexuality, through the perusal and consumption of erotica and sex goods, can disengage young women from the gendered norms that shape social being. Women are thus encouraged to embrace and explore (sexual) aspects of their self that are otherwise diminished, taboo or rendered invisible in the general public performance of everyday life. The Love Piece is therefore an excellent example.

Furthermore, the virtual component of The Love Piece Club magnifies the potential level of engagement of women with sex and sexuality which proves an excellent example of women's agency and resistance in challenging the mainstream social constructions of women's sexuality.

Mehrdad Darvishpour (2003) women in Iran are getting their voices heard and takes agency of their sexuality through women's movements in which they have found their way to challenge the establishment and simultaneously change the situation of women. Women's resistance in this extremely patriarchal society for example include the refusal of women to wear the Islamic veil, despite probable punishments. This clearly illustrates that agency takes on many forms and that contemporary women the world over are more prone to be assertive and have their voices heard. However, the examples above show just some aspects of women's active resistance in Islamic Iranian society.



Tamale's (2003) research found that in Ugandan society, many homosexuals reconstructs affirming identities for themselves due to the fact that they do not feel a sense of belonging in relation to the dominant heterosexual culture. She explains that in an effort to obtain a sense of belonging, the practice of Kuchuism has taken on a particular and vital importance to homosexuals in Uganda.

Lesbians tend to use mode of dress to distinguish themselves from heterosexual women, with almost all the female kuchus in Kampala routinely wearing trousers, shirts, baseball caps and other forms of masculine attire. Kuchus believe they are simply asserting their right to dress styles that are comfortable and indicative that they own their sexuality. Based on my own experience I agree that self-definition of lesbians and gays involves their subversive performance and statement-making as gender

outlaws in society as expressed in the following excerpts:

In (Bishop) Lavis we have a lively culture of gay house parties. Everybody's welcome as and party together by clubbing (contributing) money or things to eat and drink. The vibe (atmosphere) is cool (nice) and we all just have a cool time and let our hair down (enjoy ourselves). Other than that I feel quite comfy (comfortable) wherever I chill (relax) because I don't hang out with just anyone. I choose my company well and everyone knows I don't take no (any) shit (nonsense) from no-one!



Shady

As I said before I feel freer in certain spaces when I'm not with my partner. I personally do feel secure and safe to affirm and negotiate my sexuality in any social group or space where she is not known to protect her. We have been together now for a year and three months but in order to protect her and not have her family alienate her; I even agreed to let her marry a man just to please her family who wanted to see her married with children. I was the one who arranged the whole wedding just so she could feel safe and also because I didn't want her to turn back and blame me for not making the right decision. I even drove with her in the marriage car and became her husband's best friend! (Gesticulating with her hands) Unbelievable hey! That's how far I would go for the women I love.

Shireen

Burton (1995) however argues that to address agency in its multiplicity requires that the definition encompass pragmatic acts of unintentional resistance. She further notes that for the study of women, it also widens the scope beyond that which is explicitly feminist, and perhaps even includes acts performed with an expressly un-feminist intent. While sex workers, for example, and 'so-called sluts' themselves may interpret their sexual activities differently, some feminists support the definition of these as un-feminist activities which, in Barton's words, 'reinforce women's subordinate status by rendering their value dependent on men' (Burton 1995: 86).

According to (Burton, 1995), agency cannot be collapsed into simple decision-making, since the choice to provide and use the service and site of The Love Piece Club, for example, reflects decision-making at multiple levels, and not all of these necessarily speak of empowerment, consciousness or politically-informed motivation. A focus on active sexuality as inherently and unequivocally indicative of empowerment can obscure the multivalence of sexual acts, which as Barton cautions, 'may be liberating on an individual level while simultaneously being indicative (and reproductive) of institutionalized constraints' (2002:586).

THE ROLE OF SPACE

For those lesbians and bisexuals who are not totally open and out about their sexual orientation, the role of space proves to be extremely important as it has a direct influence on the individual's behavior and self-esteem of the respondents as illustrated by contributions in the focus group sessions and

one-one-one interviews.

Samuna related how she only feels safe and secure to affirm her sexuality in the presence of two of her closest friends but totally refrains from showing affection to her partner in the company or presence of others. However for others who are open about their sexual orientation the opposite is true as commented by Snazzy in her one-on-one interview:

I act the same in most spaces and social groups. I must confess though that although I'm gay I don't like to frequent gay clubs. I prefer straight clubs instead coz (because) I kinda (kind of) feel that we as a marginalized group are marginalizing ourselves more by hanging out (going to, frequenting) certain spaces only. I mean what's the use of being gay and marginalized when you marginalize and distance yourself from the wider society?

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Still for others whose partners are not out of the closet, space proves to be challenging as the one partner has to continuously be alert about the way in which she asserts herself in order to protect the others' true sexual orientation. In this context Shireen commented that she felt much freer in certain spaces when she is not with her partner. She personally feels secure and safe to affirm and negotiate her sexuality in any social group or space where she is not known to protect her partner. This shows how vital space is for many lesbian and bisexual women to assert their sexuality without the reproach and/or fear of being alienated or ostracized with regard to their sexuality.

As noted in previous chapters, the belief that homosexuality is alien to African cultures constrains many South African lesbians in powerful ways. In my research I often found that black lesbian women assert and affirm their sexuality within obviously gay-friendly contexts, such as bars, and not within their families and communities for fear of possible alienation and/or homophobic behavior and towards them. These views clearly surfaced during the focus group sessions and in interviews, which were themselves regarded as safe spaces.

Babalwa noted that being a black person and a lesbian has made her very conscious of how she behaves in certain spaces and social groups. She further mentions that her culture does not condone black women showing affection in public in general or where there are elders present and in her case, especially to other women in an intimate way. She indicated that she is often intimidated mainly by older women and men.

She claimed that she was often conscious of their being especially vigilant about the importance of the youth maintaining “their culture” and not being contaminated by what they defined as western ways, which included homosexuality and feminism. She does however stress that there are certain spaces in which she feels more relaxed such as in certain lesbian friendly houses and shacks owned by other lesbians in our township where lesbians get together, enjoy themselves and party with each other. In these spaces, she felt free to show affection towards her partner, dress in ways she liked and explicitly define her difference from heterosexuals while at the same

time signal her sense of community with other lesbians:

I'm as free as I can be no matter where I am. I do however show respect towards the elders in my community like my culture expects of me. So I won't go kissing my wife in front of elders as many of them are old and set in their traditional ways and I respect that.

Babalwa

Babalwa stressed the importance of how central supportive and gay-friendly spaces are for her in expressing her identity as lesbian. Therefore it is obvious why many members of the gay community are more assertive and feel safer and freer to be themselves than in certain spaces and/ or communities. Achmat (2008) therefore notes that many black lesbians in homophobic spaces such as in certain black townships like Khayelitsha for example, do not feel as free to be themselves within their own communities and would rather venture into safer communities and spaces for fear of reproach or possible homophobic advances and/or attacks on their identity, their person or worse, their lives.

Some of the other respondents made it clear that the pressures of being true to 'African culture' and having the approval of others in their community are extremely important. In other words, they did not feel they had the option to dissociate themselves from their communities (and a valued sense of identity

as 'black' and 'African'.) These respondents clearly testified to the challenges that many lesbians confront in negotiating multiple and often conflicting identities. Vovo for example, noted how she has a huge respect for the elders in her community although she feels like a freak sometimes when she and her partner venture out of their immediate community and go to Cape Town, for instance, where they walk hand in hand and publicly show affection to one another. She went on to state that even in these relatively free spaces she felt conscious of being scrutinized. Being seen as openly lesbian, even in relatively liberal spaces in Cape Town, she felt that she was somehow still perceived as deviant: a black woman who was not heterosexual, and who was therefore not an "authentic" black woman in terms of her culture as that of a compliant heterosexual woman.

With regard to some of my respondents' struggle with different identities and attitudes towards them, Shireen has mentioned that she faces a daily struggle of having to subvert her lesbian identity for the sake of her partner who is still closeted. She notes that in an attempt to protect her partner from possible recrimination and alienation from her conservative family, she (Shireen) poses as a female friend to her partner when they are in the presence of her partner's family and/or her straight friends. She argues that constantly having to deny her sexual identity and behave in ways that are more acceptable to her partner's family and friends puts a strain on their relationship and she sometimes feel as if she's living a lie and needs to juggle different identities in order to sustain their relationship. She further notes that her love and commitment to their relationship keeps her from acting in ways that might 'out' her partner's true sexual identity and possibly

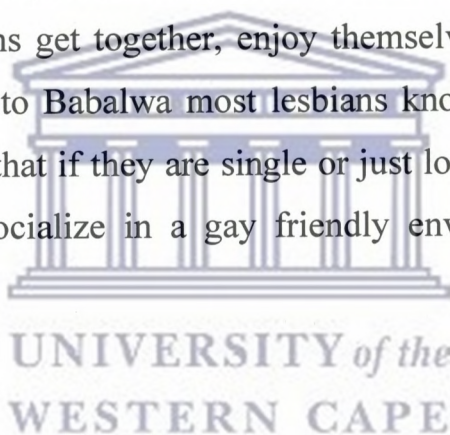
end their relationship. Shireen therefore faces a double struggle of having to conceal her open lesbian identity while struggling to protect her closeted partner at the same time.

Although Corina has recently come out of the closet among some of her friends, she still faces daily challenges to live as an open lesbian since she's not ready to come out to her family as yet. Like many other closeted lesbians she fears being ostracized by her family and prefers to be herself only among those who know about her true sexual identity. Her main struggle therefore is facing her family and having to deal with the possibility of them not being accepting of her sexual identity.

Samuna is also a closeted lesbian who faces a different struggle in contrast to the other closeted lesbians like Corina, for example. Owning a driving school with a highly respected clientele, and being a member of a religious community of which her family also forms part puts her in a very precarious position as a lesbian. She expressed that her struggle is her fear of her family, clients and especially her religious community finding out about her sexual identity and the possibly negative attitudes and effects she might face on both a personal level and how it may affect her livelihood. For her it is therefore imperative to hide and suppress her sexual identity and conform to heterosexual norms since she feels she has more to lose by coming out as a lesbian. This is due to the fact that she fears homophobic attitudes on a personal level as well as on three different levels in society with regard to family, religion and work.

Because of the dominant heterosexism of social and cultural spaces in Cape Town, many lesbians attach a great deal of importance to designated spaces of gay leisure and entertainment to find partners. Supportive spaces are therefore often utilized as picking up spots for single lesbians on the lookout for someone to date or company or someone who is on the lookout for a potential flirt, lover or long term relationship.

Babalwa noted that there are certain spaces where she personally feels more relaxed like at gay friendly houses and shacks owned by other lesbians in her township where lesbians get together, enjoy themselves and socialize with each other. According to Babalwa most lesbians know about these houses and meeting places so that if they are single or just looking to hook up with another woman and socialize in a gay friendly environment, they know exactly where to go.



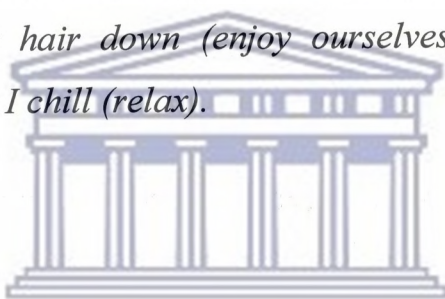
In certain areas on the Cape Flats such as Manenberg and Bishop Lavis, for example, gay parties have indeed become the norm and are well-known by gays and lesbians and even tolerated by many heterosexuals as illustrated by the following excerpts:

I like going to Mzoli's in my township. There you can eat, drink and just let your hair down (just be yourself). Many gay people from in and around Cape Town come to Mzoli's and I like the fact that Mr Mzoli himself is very anti-homophobia. He has on many occasions publicly declared that gays and lesbians are as welcome at his place than any other person and that he

doesn't tolerate or condone homophobia or any forms of hate crimes towards gay people at his place or in the townships at large. Because of this we as black lesbians feel very safe to go there because we are very much targeted by black guys who feel that we steal their women from them."

Vovo

In (Bishop) Lavis we have a lively culture of gay house parties. Everybody's welcome. We party together by clubbing (contributing) money or things to eat and drink. The vibe (atmosphere) is cool (nice) and we all just have a cool time and let our hair down (enjoy ourselves). I feel quite comfy (comfortable) wherever I chill (relax).



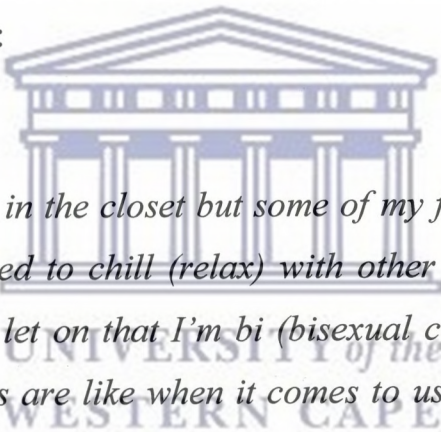
Shady

Based on the above excerpts it is clear that many homophobic heterosexuals tolerate lesbians as long as they confine their self-expression to certain spaces.

For bisexuals it is especially imperative to find safe spaces where they can feel free to assert and affirm their sexuality in the face of misconstrued perceptions by the wider society on the notion of bisexuality. In most cases finding safe spaces is not easy for most bisexuals due to the distrust from certain lesbians and even the wider heterosexual community towards bisexuals. This is due to the general perception that bisexual people are

promiscuous and confused and do not know where they belong and where they want. McIntosh (1993) notes that there is still uneasiness between lesbians and bisexuals over the politics of identity due to the political stance of those lesbians and gays who argue that homosexuality is not a matter of choice which is undermined by bisexual behavior and politics. Thus the double identity of belonging and not belonging to a category of stigmatized people has created hostility toward bisexual women among some lesbians.

Corina's response to the question of safe space perfectly illustrates the above in the following excerpt:



I'm still kinda (kind of) in the closet but some of my friends know about me (bisexual identity). I used to chill (relax) with other lesbians in Mitchell's Plain but I didn't even let on that I'm bi (bisexual coz (because) you guys know mos what lesbians are like when it comes to us bi's (bisexuals). I am kinda (kind of) challenged to just be myself in a straight (heterosexual) world. I.....[I] mean, although I do my thing(do what I want) in certain spaces I still feel a sense of unease because somehow I always find straight people looking at me as if I'm an alien when they see me showing affection for another female. I mean if they (straight people) do their thing in public for all to see it's accepted as normal but when gay people do the same thing, we are frowned upon.

Based on Corina's contribution it is evident that for certain individuals (safe) spaces are crucial in the claiming of identity especially for those who live in homophobic spaces and those who are still closeted. Therefore space is clearly a strong precursor and investment in finding freedom in order to project and assert the individual's defined sense of self.

On the issue of environments that support bisexuals, Mariah notes that she prefers going to pubs and gay clubs where she feels safe and secure as long as she remains careful not to seduce the 'wrong' sex at the 'wrong' place. She clarified the notion of what she perceives as 'wrong' as being careful not to seduce a gay male or a heterosexual female in certain spaces for fear of possible reproach and/or conflict. She further mentions the fact that she prefers to frequent pubs where she doesn't mind seducing both sexes due to the fact that she feels safer to assert and be herself in a pub or gay club than to frequent other predominantly heterosexual spaces.

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Based on my own experience, I can identify with the bisexual respondents and so many other bisexual individuals since I still endure the constant badgering of lesbian friends that regularly inquire when I'll be stepping over to 'their side'; due to the fact that many of them uphold the perception society has of bisexuals being confused. According to Weinberg, Williams and Pryor (1994) bisexuality consists of a mingling of sexual feelings, behaviors and romantic inclinations that does not easily gel with society's categories of typical sexuality. They argue that being out as bisexual carries a unique type of social status, one that could most aptly be termed "double marginality".

According to Weinberg et al. (1994), bisexuals always risk being stigmatized from two directions: by heterosexuals for their homosexual inclinations and by homosexuals for their heterosexual inclinations. It is thus understandable why many bisexuals feel that they are not accepted or do not 'fit' in within the gay or straight world.

In contrast to the contexts described above, the University of the Western Cape campus is a heteronormative space, and therefore is the site of very different gender performances from those previously described. On this campus it is quite normal to see heterosexual couples openly engaging in expressing affection towards each other. These sexual displays take place all over campus and were not in the least frowned upon by anyone.

Couples can often openly be seen kissing and cuddling in suggestive ways and at times even lay on top of each other on the lawns outside the Education Department or the swimming pool in particular. At no point could gay couples be seen engaging in the same activities since being openly gay on campus often makes students targets of harassment or persecution, and being caught in open displays of affection with one's same sex partners makes one even more vulnerable. This inevitably depicts the ways in which heteronormative displays of affection are accepted as the norm while homosexual displays of affection are perceived as abnormal and unacceptable.

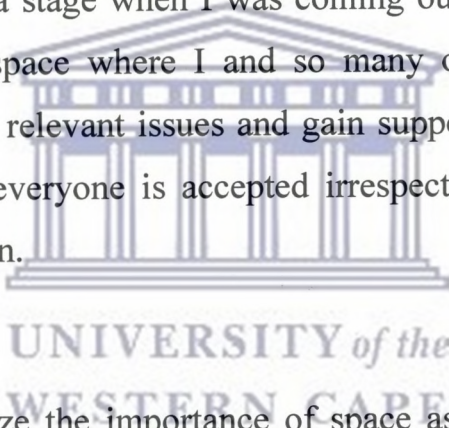
Hames (2007), on highlighting the need for gay-supportive spaces, refers to Yvette Abrahams' (2005) study on homophobia at the University of the Western Cape which specifically focused on the lives and experiences of lesbian and bisexual women on campus. While conducting the commissioned survey, Abrahams (2005) identified discomfort and tension between the progressive policy about sexual rights and freedoms and hostile institutional culture attitude.

Further findings of the study also revealed hostility, misogyny and patriarchal attitudes of the Student Representative Council and the fundamental Christian organizations on the campus that strongly discouraged female students from volunteering at the Gender Equity Unit and forming the Women's Support Group based on the grounds that it would turn these women into lesbians (Abrahams, 2005; 10). Therefore, the forced normalization of heterosexuality and the prevalence of homophobia on campus explained why lesbian and bisexual women have long been silent about their sexual identity. Furthermore, peer pressure to conform to heterosexuality and the fear of identifying as bisexual or lesbian prevented these women to embrace their sexual identity until they left the academy.

The Gender Equity Unit is one, if not the only gay supportive space on the campus most frequented by gay and lesbian individuals. Yet, a common stereotype about gay-friendly environments such as the example provided of the Gender Equity Unit is that it is often perceived to simply serve as spaces for lesbians to find short or long-term partners. It is however important to note that people both on and of campus positively utilize the Gender Equity

Unit to organize and mobilize functions and events such as student colloquiums and seminars on relevant gay issues such as homophobia and hate crimes. This particular gay friendly space in which the gay student organization Loudenuff is based, also encourage and offer interested individuals the opportunity to socialize and engage in networking during Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgenderd and Intersexed related workshops, programmes and events such as the annual anti-homophobia week.

I have personally found this space, the workshops and events very supportive and safe at a stage when I was coming out trying to understand my sexuality. It is a space where I and so many other gay and lesbian individuals can discuss relevant issues and gain support from each other in an atmosphere where everyone is accepted irrespective of sexual identity and/or sexual orientation.



Reddy (2005) emphasize the importance of space as vital for meeting up with others within the lesbian and bisexual community as well as heterosexual society to foster a sense of belonging and companionship. He explains how space and the strategic deployment of space in particular, can serve to reinforce sexual pleasure as a process, consequence, or effect that is connected to the liberation of the sexual subject. In explaining the role of space, Reddy (2005) reflects and engage in his own experiences and understanding of the broad emancipation of gay and lesbians in relation to how the Durban Lesbian and Gay Community Centre actively promotes service provision for gays and lesbians. He argues that such provision is

integral to a new imagining of lesbians and gays as a response to our abject status and construction as un-African.

According to Reddy (2005, 81), sexual pleasure for gays and lesbians in our country is intimately connected to our developing freedom as sexual subjects and that “sexual power” cannot stand on its own. Sexual power and pleasure are thus not end products, but effects that are linked to the simultaneous development of a rights-based approach to identity politics. According to Reddy (2005), the collective involvement of the Durban Lesbian and Gay Community Centre as a centre in gay and lesbian service provision and mobilization leads to the gradual empowerment for gays and lesbians. An effect of this empowerment, therefore, is our challenge to heteronormativity, and our celebration of sexuality and sexual cultures that associate sexual pleasure with affirmation of their identities, as opposed to subordination.



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It is however important to note that social exclusion and discrimination faced by gays and lesbians in apartheid society have often promoted specific patterns of spatial clustering, in which histories of sexuality and spatiality are intertwined in heteronormative representations of the world Reddy (2005). Such representations have reflected a systematic policing of gender and sexuality in terms of spaces that gay men and women could or could not occupy, resulting in their generalized exclusion and prohibition. Therefore space may become safe in terms of the threat of homophobic violence for gays and lesbians who rarely feel safe, and who often have limitations imposed upon their movements, even after homosexuality is decriminalized.

Reddy (2005, 82) therefore argues that ‘the construction of physical spaces for gay and lesbian people in the post-1994 economy is about the assertion of our identities, about a form of ‘protection’ and a form of ‘compensation’ against compulsory heterosexuality. The translation into practice of gay and lesbian equality in the form of systematic claims to citizenship has an important political resonance in the area of space’. It is in this sense that Reddy (2005, 82) suggest ‘gay and lesbian spaces have indeed become queer, because they articulate a new cultural context for politics, criticism, consumption, and the production of identities’. For us, identity is negotiated through a recognition of that which is supposedly other, including that which is other in terms of space.

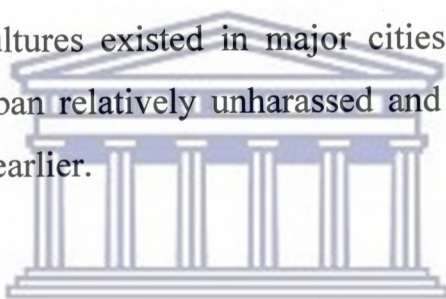


By foregrounding the Durban Centre, Reddy (2005) illustrates how the material contours of space and place influence and accommodate sexual practice, and by extension, identities, as a particular political construction. As a concept, space may also highlight cultural practices, such as the use of public toilets and parks as pick-up grounds and clubs, bars and other negotiated spaces, such as cruising grounds. These homoerotic and sexualized spaces in which gay and lesbian subcultures are directed towards sexual release, amusement and sexual pleasure, are equally imbued with meanings in a political and politicized sense.

Space is therefore by all accounts not a neutral zone but one constructed by forms of power and governed by oppositions between private and public space, family and social space, leisure and work space. It is in this sense also

that commercial activities such as bars and clubs, specialized shops and other amenities within the urban gay sphere have become queer spaces, safe havens from violence and spaces to be oneself, which Reddy identifies as areas that are sites of resistance (2005).

In judging from the above excerpts and research conducted by Gevisser (1994) it becomes evident that there are certain communities which accept same-sex relationships and indeed makes space for these individuals to freely be themselves and interact with each other. Gevisser (1994) argues that homosexual subcultures existed in major cities such as Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban relatively unharassed and have done so at least since the war a decade earlier.



Gevisser (1994) further notes that cruising areas for gay men developed during the war because of their proximity to soldiers and soldiers. Such areas included the Sea Point Promenade and Gardens area in Cape Town and the Esplanade alongside the docks in Durban. However, lesbians, despite entirely being ignored by both the law and the media at the time, experienced far greater pressure to remain closeted and had far fewer public gathering spaces. Although many black lesbians have resolutely created their own spaces, often in the form of small house parties, the paucity of supportive spaces may be especially true for black lesbians in Cape Town.

This study has proven that the Gevisser's fairly optimistic reading of the growth of gay spaces in Cape Town does not apply to lesbians according to responses in the one-on-one interviews, focus group sessions and participant observations. With the help of South Africa's progressive constitution, the broader Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Intersexed community has increasingly been acquiring safe meeting and leisure spaces where they can now freely assert their sexuality and claim agency. Yet the number of lesbians who continue to feel constrained and marginalized testifies to the limits of legal rights for many gays and lesbians, and illustrates the powerful impact of ongoing heterosexism in communities and the broader society.



CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION & REFLECTIONS

Undertaking this study has had taken me through the various stages of excitement and sheer frustration at different times throughout the study. At best, this study has been a learning curve for me and provided me with priceless experiences with my participants and the research material as well. I have also enjoyed the excitement charged atmosphere in which participants openly shared their experiences as bisexual and lesbian beings. What was also heartening is the fact that there was never a moment of unease between the bisexual and lesbian respondents during the interview sessions. This was ironic in view of the perception; supported by evidence of conflict, that tension between the two sexual identities has always existed and has inevitably become the norm. In contrast, everyone was all rather keen to ask questions and offer their opinions about things they never understood about the other's sexual identity/sexual orientation which clarified their misinformed perceptions and at the same time also precipitated unintended topics of discussion.

My initial coming out story also generated debate after I shared my personal experiences in negotiation and agency of my sexual identity. By adopting an insider approach I establish an almost instant rapport by sharing my experiences which set the tone for a highly confidential yet interactive and fun filled session each time we met up for a group discussion or individual interview session. In this context, the study also served as a learning curve for all participants and I included. I must admit that while not losing focus of the task and purpose at hand, I enjoyed many moments of reminiscing and in

gaining a better understanding of myself as a bisexual being and of how others project and negotiate their individual sexualities. Best of all, I even had a chance to confront my own prejudices and misperceptions I might have had about others and their sexual orientations and or sexual identities.

In drawing comparisons, I have not found any vast differences between the one-on-one interviews or the focus groups other than the fact that Snazzy might have been less open in her responses within a focus group session. I also found that the focus group sessions continued and often created the sense of community that many gay and lesbian people turn to for affirmation, safety, and creating a sense of support through shared physical space. As such, the support groups tended to become both a research and a political platform. In hindsight the study for me, rather than primarily focusing on information, was a search for answers, support and understanding which had political implications, from all my respondents.

The role of space was of utmost importance and central to the study in order to get the best possible data both in interviews and observations. I must admit to having had a truly educative and empowering experience in listening to the narratives of others which again proves and substantiates the power of life histories as a means to gather first hand data relevant to my study.

A difficulty I experienced was that of time, since some of my respondents and I was shift workers and expressed their desire to participate in the different group sessions based on friendships within the groups. They also expressed their fear that they might lose out on the discussions if they are not included in the different sessions with their friends. Another difficulty which has also manifested throughout analyzing the data was that of my own personal obligations such as work and family responsibilities which at times demanded my time and energy.

Having two teenagers who has both at the time had to deal with personal issues also proved another difficulty which at times drew me away from completing my paper in the time frame I have initially set out in order to graduate and further my studies. This in essence also influenced the amount of time spent on supervision between me and my supervisor in order to effectively engage in discussions on how to improve on the paper. However, no amount of difficulty can ever compare to the invaluable data I have both been privileged to collect and record with the help of each participant throughout the study.

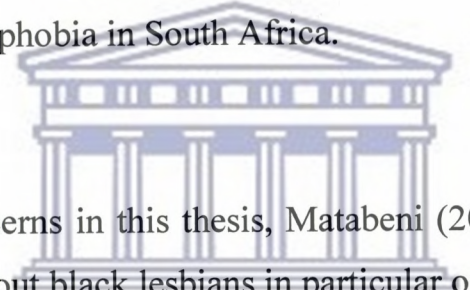
I entered the research process with a feeling of anxiety not knowing how my respondents might accept my sexual identity as a bisexual woman. This anxiety stemmed from society's general perceptions that bisexuals are confused. The relationship between myself and my respondents also challenged my own thinking about myself, my identity and my own sexuality and ideas about how I relate to others.

Yet I found that my fears prior to the research process were unfounded and I experienced very little difficulty in relating to my research subjects as both a bisexual woman and as a researcher and in maintaining my own true identity beyond that of just being a researcher. As a bisexual woman who shares many experiences with the subjects this study, I also found that I could easily find research subjects, and that I could build u relationships of trust with them.

Although I shared some similarities with some of my respondents I had to be aware of ambiguities with regard to race and culture. Issues of language and translation were easily negotiated and the cultural gap between me and my respondents was minimal. One challenge I had to face more than once was to be aware of and to prevent the silence of some respondents and one voice dominated discussions. This was especially important since, it was the first time that some participants openly and intensely discussed their lives and shared intimate details of their full life history and sexual lives.

I believe that what makes this research different from dominant forms of research undertaken on gay and lesbian issues is the fact that it breaks away from the victim emphasis and charts new territory, initiated by scholars like Matabeni, Reddy, Hames and others, in researching women's agency rather than victimization.

Although Sanger and Clowes (2006) study of lesbians in Mitchell's Plain had a positive influence on the study, her findings dealt mainly with the extent to which lesbians are marginalized, victimized and often physically violated. This study however aimed to highlight how many lesbian and bisexual women have become more assertive in celebrating their bodies, their sense of who they are, their choices and their sense of community. While such celebration does not always take the form of outright opposition to the heteronormative status quo, or even to the creation of wholly 'new' performances of gender, it is clear that many lesbians and bisexuals are refusing to be silenced or marginalized by patriarchy, despite the upsurge of horrific forms of homophobia in South Africa.



Echoing my own concerns in this thesis, Matabeni (2001) states that much work that is written about black lesbians in particular often positions them as victims of violence, hate crimes or relates their existence to those of gay men; in contrast to this, she develops an approach which I have sought to develop, namely tracing the perceptions and agencies of sexual deviants as they determinedly struggle to live independent, dignified and assertive lives.

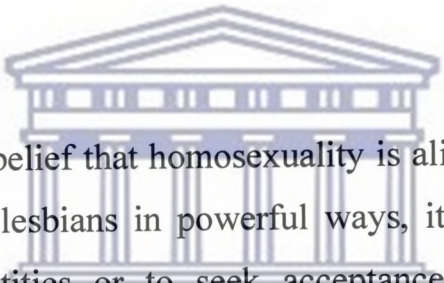
Hames' (2003) argument on the silence of lesbian and gay studies women's organizations and academic programmes which reinforce heterosexual biases in a heteronormative world also proved significant to the study. I therefore propose that more studies be undertaken on gender violence and the invisibility of gay and lesbian men and women in tertiary education in light of Hames' argument that many lesbian and bisexual women postpone

embracing a sexual identity until they leave the academy out of fear of being attacked, raped or beaten up. As Hames suggests, I would also be in favor of work that explores how institutions, organizations and structures that appear to be 'neutral' often reinforce homophobia by silencing, marginalizing or anthologizing lesbians and gays. While this may not be as extreme as the violence evident in the case of, for example, 'curative rape', it undeniably works to demoralize, disempower and constrain many lesbians and gays, preventing them from reaching their potential as students, artists and human beings.

Since Potgieter (1997), Matabeni (2001) and Hames (2003) also notes that few studies focus on agency, empowerment and the subjectivities of lesbians, I focused on and aimed to capture the extent to which certain lesbians and bisexuals in the Western Cape have defiantly and assertively created 'selves' that defy prescribed sexual identities for women, and the performances that are linked to this.

Tamale (2003) and Butler's (1990; 1993) arguments on subversion and agency also proved significant to the study in highlighting how theoretical work and empirical studies have explored subversion and defiance in relation to lesbian and gay struggles. Their findings of how homosexuals in various societies blend within the wider society and even live under the cover of heterosexual relationships while maintaining their homosexual relationships and subcultures underground to prevent possible prosecution greatly assisted me in my focus on agencies.

Drawing on Reddy (2005) and Gevisser's (1994) studies on space made it clear that the role of space was a crucial theme in understanding resistance and the creation of supportive communities of lesbians and gays. The abundant evidence of lesbians and gays claiming spaces in Cape Town – whether this occurs in urban, rural or peri-urban contexts, and whether this takes the form of clubs, sections on university campuses, individuals' homes or clubs on special days, as was the case with the well known Cape Town club, *Hectic*, a few years ago, is evidence that the idea of lesbianism or bisexuality being alien to a country like South Africa is a misleading myth, to say the least.

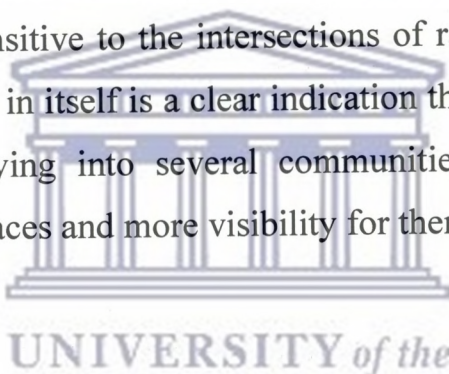


Although the common belief that homosexuality is alien to African cultures constrains many black lesbians in powerful ways, it has not led many to compromise their identities or to seek acceptance within the folds of heterosexual patriarchy. Although pathbreaking research has been done by Potgieter (1997); as well as Sanger and Clowes (2006), more research therefore need to be undertaken on space and the invisibility of black lesbians in particular and how culture influences the black society's beliefs and non-acceptance of lesbianism and homosexuality.

This study has however identified much progress in identifying safe spaces that are being created for the gay community. The Pink Triangle in Greenpoint, Cape Town for example, consists of many gay friendly and gay owned spaces. The Pink Tongue, a monthly gay newspaper has also

recently been reporting on South Africa's first exclusive gay property development (*The Pink Tongue*, Issue 45 pg 5).

It is also important that more and more spaces are being created for less affluent and black gays and lesbians through, for example, Soweto Pride, which tends to complement the very white-centered and affluent tone of Cape Town's Pride March, or the events organized for black lesbians by FEW (Forum for the Empowerment of Women) in Johannesburg. All these argue well for the growth of multiple communities of gays, lesbians and bisexuals which are sensitive to the intersections of race, class, gender and sexual orientation. This in itself is a clear indication that the gay community (progressively diversifying into several communities) has progressed in efforts to create safe spaces and more visibility for themselves.

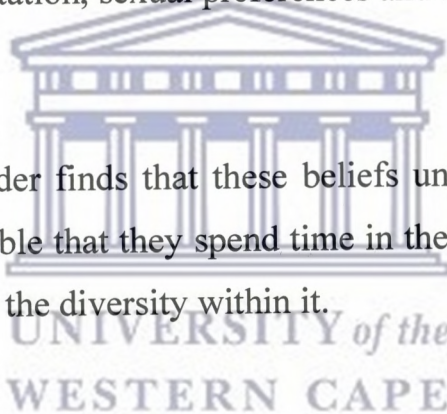


Finally, with regard to the research undertaken, the data collected and the subsequent analysis of the data, I recommend further research on the topic of agency both in theory and in practice. I also recommend that more knowledge be recorded on the topic of agency with regard to negotiating alternative sexualities.

I also wish to highlight the following questions to the reader as a challenge to evaluate her/his own ideas on how women construct their sexuality:

- What is the basis of my perception and beliefs about woman's sexuality?
- Are my underlying assumptions, beliefs and perceptions based on facts or on hear-say, the way I was socialized or my own inherent prejudices?
- Where do I draw the line in my assumptions of women's sexuality, their sexual-orientation, sexual preferences and sexual-identity?

Furthermore, if the reader finds that these beliefs underlie their individual worldviews, it is advisable that they spend time in the Lesbian and Bisexual community and witness the diversity within it.



Finally, if the reader is a member of this community and finds that they apply gendered expectations to women, they should specifically watch for instances of the fluidity of gender and replicating the institution of patriarchy with its many destructive connotations within the gay community. Last but not least, women should ask themselves and become introspective about why they are the gatekeepers of the oppression of women even among themselves.

ADDENDUM A
LETTER OF CONSENT

Dear Participant,

My name is Sharrone Mitchell. I am a Masters student in the Women's and Gender Studies Department at the University of the Western Cape in Bellville. I am currently conducting research on women's construction and negotiation of their sexuality in the context of culture and identity under the supervision of Professor Desiree Lewis.

I am looking for female participants between the ages of 20-30 to voluntarily participate in this study. You will not be manipulated or coerced into taking part in the study and you may only participate once you have given your written consent.

Your identity and personal details will remain anonymous and you will be referred to by a pseudonym. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time should you for any reason feel to do so. At no time will you be discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation or your personal views and/or opinions.

Findings of the research will be made public and you will have full access to it during and after completion of the study. Should any problems arise, you may make use of trained counselors which will be set up prior to the commencement of the focus group or alternatively will be referred to the Department of Student Counseling on campus.

You can reach me at:

Cell no: 083 383 1601

Email: 2341392@uwc.ac.za

Thanking you kindly

ADDENDUM B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

- 1) Do you sometimes feel that you have to justify your sexual orientation to others?
- 2) Do you feel freer about your sexuality in specific spaces? Why?
- 3) Do you feel more secure and safe to affirm and negotiate your sexuality within certain spaces or social groups than others?
- 4) Can you identify and share any challenges you face in negotiating and affirming your lesbian and/or bisexual identity in the heterosexual world
- 5) Do you compare your relationships with those of women in heterosexual relationships? How do you feel about your relationship?
- 6) How do you see your role in the relationship? Is it an equal relationship or would it have been different if your partner were a man?
- 7) Are you conscious of power dynamics in your relationships with other women?
- 8) Do you wear the same dress code to your family and friends than you would if you were among your peers in the gay community?

ADDENDUM C

TRANSCRIPTS OF INTERVIEWS

References for Transcriptions

I = interviewer

R = respondent (participant)

“....” = direct speech

[] = repeated words in speech

... = thoughtfulness on part of interviewer and/or
participant

() = denotes body language, background sounds, clarification on
previous word/responses.

TRANSCRIPTIONS OF INTERVIEWS

I: 1) Do you sometimes feel that you have to justify your sexual orientation to others?

R: Shireen - *(Can hardly wait to respond). I somehow feel that I have to justify my sexual orientation all the time because I was straight (heterosexual) for most of my life and now that I have developed feelings for my partner, Tasha, I am constantly bombarded with questions around my sexuality. It is something I hate but then I suppose people are just curios (throw her hands up in the air, pulling her face). I turned to women because I got fed up with faking my orgasms (Laughter from the group). Now I'm just telling whoever wants to know that I prefer women because they know how to satisfy me. I'm in my first same-sex relationship with a married woman and it feels great! I'm always asked whether I have at some point been raped or experienced a disappointment with a guy which eventually prompted me to go after a women but I just tell them that my feelings towards Tasha came naturally and that's the God's honest truth!*

R: Snazzy - *I don't have to do that because I am straight (a woman who has intimate relationships with women only) from day one. I'm a natural born woman-loving-woman so I didn't learn to be one. I don't know any other way than being with women so everyone that knows me knows I'm straight and don't ask me any funny questions. I also find it amazing that many people tend to think I'm a man when they first lay their eyes on me and that when they do discover I'm a female they immediately ask me if I'm a lesbian. If that's not enough, I've had more than one straight (heterosexual) and lesbian woman coming onto (flirting, seducing) me at the restaurant where I work! (Laughter from the group).*

R: Samuna - *Uh..... (Looking shy). I'm still a closet case so I don't have to justify my sexual orientation to no one at all. Just thinking about coming out gives me the creeps! (Knowing looks and sympathy from the group). You guys see, I've always been very active in the church and especially in the choir so it's not easy for me at all to just come out and say I'm a lesbian. I don't want our congregation, my family and some of my friends to lose their respect for me because people have always looked up (respected) me. I'm only out to a small group of people and has only been in an intimate relationship with one woman so far in secret so only a few people knows about me.*

I: What about the rest of you ladies? Are any of you also challenged with the issue of having to justify your sexual orientation?

R: Vovo - *I don't have to justify my sexual orientation to anyone. I live in a very accepting community and am fortunate that I don't face the same challenges so many other black lesbians face in the townships. As everybody knows in our culture we don't even talk about sex openly. I grew up like a tomboy but I knew I was lesbian when I*

couldn't wait to get to school because I was in love with my female school teacher. I actually ended up doing her (having sex) many years later! (Giving a devious smile with lots of laughter from the group).

R: Mariah - I pretend not to hear people when they ask me about my sexual orientation because it always sounds so confusing to them. I'm into (have a sexual attraction towards) both men and women and it's difficult enough for me to justify my sexual orientation or preferences so I prefer not to talk about it with just anyone.

R: Babalwa - I don't feel the need to justify my sexual orientation at all. I mean, do straight (heterosexual) people tell you they straight? (Murmur and agreement from the group). People should stop assuming that all men and women are straight and stop treating people based on their assumptions and prejudices (Sitting straight up in her chair looking very serious).

I: 2) Do you feel freer about your sexuality in specific spaces? Why?

Corina: I tend to feel freer about my sexuality when I'm in other areas than at home because where we stay people are more accepting of Moffies than lesbians, not to even mention bisexuals! Coming out as lesbian is already problematic so just think if I were to let people know I'm into both women and men! They'll treat me like a freak don't you think? (Throwing her hands in the air).

Snazzy: Well I'm not someone who flaunts my sexuality so I don't really feel more at ease in one space than another. I..... [I] mean, I act the same way I would in any other space except for when I'm intimate in bed! (Smiles from the group). That doesn't stop me if and when I feel like showing a little affection towards my partner though!

Mariah: Well as I've said before..... (Pause). I'm bisexual so I can't act the same way I would towards men or women in all spaces, because imagine if I want to flirt with a girl in a straight (heterosexual) club. I mean, you never know if she has a boyfriend who is also in the club for one and on the other hand, you don't know whether those people might commit a hate crime towards you.

Shireen: I feel free everywhere but my partner not because she's still in the closet. Most of our friends and family and even our close knit community suspects that we have a thing going on but for her sake I can't show affection towards her wherever I please. It's hard because I want to be myself when I'm with her but I always have to be careful when she's around so I don't embarrass her. When we're alone, it's another story though!

Babalwa: I'm as free as I can be no matter where I am. I do however show respect towards the elders in my community like my culture expects of me. So I won't go kissing my wife in front of elders as many of them are old and set in their traditional ways and I respect that.

Samuna: *The only space I'll ever feel free about my sexuality is behind closed doors. As I said before I'm still in the closet and intend to stay there until I feel ready to expose the true me. Right now I feel I have too much to loose coz (because) respect to me means a mighty lot.*

Vovo: *I agree with Babalwa that we as black lesbian women have to act respectfully in the presence of our elders, but other than that, I feel free everywhere because I made a pact that no one will ever make me feel any less based on my sexual orientation!. (Applause from the group).*

I: 3) Do you feel more secure and safe to affirm and negotiate your sexuality within certain spaces or social groups?

Samuna: *Uh..... (Looking unsure). I can honestly say that I do to a certain extent feel safe and secure to affirm my sexuality but only by talking about it with only two of my close friends but definitely not by showing affection to a specific woman in any company. I must say though that I do seem to be much less shy than I used to be (Encouraging words from the rest of the group).*

Snazzy: *As I mentioned before I act the same in most spaces and social groups. I must confess though that although I'm gay I don't like to frequent gay clubs. I prefer straight clubs instead coz (because) I kinda (kind of) feel that we as a marginalized group are marginalizing ourselves more by hanging out (going to, frequenting) certain spaces only. (Gesticulating with her hands) mean what's the use of being gay and marginalized when you marginalize and distance yourself form the wider society? (Loud agreement from the group).*

Shireen: *As I said before I feel freer in certain spaces when I'm not with my partner. I personally do feel secure and safe to affirm and negotiate my sexuality in any social group or space where she is not known to protect her. We have been together now for a year and three months but in order to protect her and not have her family alienate her; I even agreed to let her marry a man just to please her family who wanted to see her married with children. I was the one who arranged the whole wedding just so she could feel safe and also because I didn't want her to turn back and blame me for not making the right decision. I even drove with her in the marriage car and became her husband's best friend! (Gesticulating with her hands) Unbelievable hey! That's how far I would go for the women I love. (Murmurs and shocked stares from the group).*

Babalwa: *Like I mentioned before, I as a black person and a lesbian on top of it all I'm very conscious on how I behave in certain spaces and social groups. (Pointing her fingers in the air). My culture don not condone me to show affection, especially to another women in public or where there are elders present. You see most elders in our community is old and very set in their cultural way so you don't want to get on their bad side and make life difficult for yourself. There are certain spaces I feel quite relaxed though like at houses and shacks owned by other lesbians in our township where lesbians get together, enjoy themselves and party with each other. Or you can*

just go there to see if you can maybe meet some single and available lesbians (Naughty smile).

I: You mean you can use these social gathering spaces for cruising too?

Babalwa: *Yes, I mean most lesbians know about these houses and meeting places so if you're single or just looking to hook up with another chick, you know where to go. Most of the time you can score a chick's (girl's) phone number, buy her a drink or even make a date! (Knowing looks and smiles from the group).*

Vovo: *I like going to Mzoli's in my township. There you can eat, drink and just let your hair down (just be yourself). Many gay people from in and around Cape Town come to Mzoli's and I like the fact that Mr Mzoli himself is very anti-homophobia. He has on many occasions publicly declared that gays and lesbians are as welcome at his place than any other person and that he doesn't tolerate or condone homophobia or any forms of hate crimes towards gay people at his place or in the townships at large. Because of this we as black lesbians feel very safe to go there because we are very much targeted by black guys who feel that we steal their women from them. (Roaring laughter from the rest of the group). I mean, how stupid can you be? A chick either wants you or not so if she doesn't want a guy but a woman instead, how can lesbians be blamed for that? (Knowing looks and smiles from the group).*

Shady: *In (Bishop) Lavis we have a lively culture of gay house parties. Everybody's welcome as and party together by clubbing (contributing) money or things to eat and drink. The vibe (atmosphere) is cool (nice) and we all just have a cool time and let our hair down (enjoy ourselves). Other than that I feel quite comfy (comfortable) wherever I chill (relax) because I don't hang out with just anyone. I choose my company well and everyone knows I don't take no (any) shit (nonsense) from no-one! (Applause from the group).*

Mariah: *I prefer going to pubs and gay clubs. I feel safe and secure as long as I don't chase (try to seduce) the wrong sex at the wrong place. I think with time it will get better coz I mean I just started getting down (having intimate relations) with women a couple of years ago so I'm still kinda like (kind of) trying to play it safe you see? Like I won't chase a guy at a gay club coz what if he has a male partner who is also there? At the pub I don't mind chasing both sexes and I'm quite assertive in affirming my sexuality there than any place else.*

I: Don't you ever feel the least bit threatened when you flirt with either sex in a pub setting?

Mariah: *Not at all! (Suddenly sits up straight and points her finger up in the air). As they say all is fair in love and war so it don't matter what sex I score (seduces) I just go in for the kill (do my thing)! If da (the) guy or gal shade me (rejects her advances) I just move onto the next coz (because) sometimes you lose some and other times you win some. I just go with the flow baby! (Laughter from the group).*

Corina: *I'm not a club or a pub person but lately I've been hanging out with Mary (Mariah) at a pub in Parow. (Fidgeting in her chair, scratching her head). I'm still kinda (kind of) in the closet at home but some of my friends know about me. I don't want my mother to know coz she's like this church woman and you know she soema create her own list of sins. (Laughter from the rest of the group). I used to chill (relax) with other lesbians in Mitchell's Plain but I didn't even let on that I'm bi (bisexual) with them coz (because) you guys know mos what lesbians are like when it comes to us bi's (bisexuals). (Knowing looks from the rest of the group). So I basically affirm my sexuality where ever I go with Mary (Mariah) coz (because) I feel safer in those spaces and social groups.*

I: 4) Can you identify and share any challenges you face in negotiating and affirming your lesbian and/or bisexual identity in the heterosexual world?

Corina: *As I mentioned before, I'm not really totally out of the closet (open about my sexuality) but in a way I am kinda (kind of) challenged to just be myself in a straight (heterosexual) world. I.....[I] mean, although I do my thing(do what I want) in certain places I still feel a sense of unease because somehow I always find straight people looking at me as if I'm an alien when they see me showing affection for another female. I mean if they (straight people) do their thing in public for all to see it's accepted as normal but when gay people do the same thing, we are frowned upon. (Agreement from the rest of the group). It's not nice having a double identity because I sometimes feel as if I'm living a double life and it can 'nogat' become tiring. I mean my boss is gay but because he and my mom have such a good relationship after meeting at a company function, I'm too scared to make my sexual identity known at work.*

Vovo: *Well as I've said before I always respect the elders in my community. I do feel like a freak sometimes when my partner and I go out of our community and like go to Town (Cape Town) and walk hand in hand or publicly show affection to one another. I'm not sure whether it's because I'm female, black or both. (Roaring laughter from the group). I don't allow that to get me down though and just carry on as if whatever I'm doing is normal. I have come to that decision that I'm not going to allow others opinion of me and my lifestyle influence the way I treat my woman in public. (Applause from the group). I mean, I love her. I'm not ashamed of her or the love that we share so I absolutely refuse to treat her as if I'm ashamed of what we share and feel for each other!*

Shady: *I kinda (kind of) get pissed (upset) when some of my (heterosexual) colleagues try to hook me up with their single guy friends! (Throw her hands up in the air). I mean, what the fuck are they thinking? (Gesticulating with her hands and sitting straight up in her chair). I was born this way and no one can change me. I mean doesn't the fact that I used a donor's sperm to receive In-Vitro Fertilization to have a child of my own speak of how truly lesbian I really am? I mean I inherited R25 000 when my Granny died and I used all of it to have the procedure done because I couldn't see a man sticking his dick (penis) into me! (Roaring laughter from the group).*

Babalwa: *I don't really have that much of a struggle affirming my sexuality as I'm out to my family, my close friends and the wider community. They accept me as I am and unlike my partner, I don't really go out there in the heterosexual world feeling the need to show people that I'm into (have a sexual attraction for) women which sometimes causes some sense of discomfort. I just live my life as though being with a woman is the most natural thing in the world! (Laughing as she's saying it). I will hold her hand when I feel like it and even kiss her in public even when people stare at us as if we're aliens. I just don't allow people's opinion of my lifestyle get to me. (Agreement from the group).*

Snazzy: *I have no problems affirming and negotiating my sexuality in the heterosexual world but lately I find my mother always being on my case to try a heterosexual relationship because I have just experienced my third breakup (end of the relationship) with a women. Somehow all my steady partners cheat on me and since my mom is always there to help me pick up the pieces, she tries her best to get me into a straight relationship to see if it would work out better. I decided to stay single for a while but there's no way I'd ever get down be in a relationship or intimate) with a guy ever! That would be like going against everything I believe in and stand for! (Agreement from the group).*

Samuna: *I do at times get people asking me that stupid question of "How do u do it?" to which I always reply "Come lie down and let me show you!" (Loud agreement and roaring laughter from the rest of the group). What's with straight people always wanting to know how we do it? (Knowing looks can and smiles from the group). Other than that as I've mentioned before, I sometimes get pissed at my work colleagues in particular who has this crazy idea that they "toor" (change) me straight (heterosexual). (More laughter from the group). I really couldn't care less coz (because) my family and friends accepts me as I am so who cares a damn?*

Shireen: *The one challenge I have to face the most is that of pretending to be straight (heterosexual) when I'm with Tasha. I totally hate it but I do it for the sake of love coz (because) I would always protect the women I love even if it's to my own detriment. I also face the challenge of having to justify my sudden switch to women coz I was straight for most of my life. It does' nogal' get boring to have to explain it over and over again. Not to mention the converted family members! (Rolling her eyes and gesticulating with her hands in the air with knowing looks from the group). They always wana (want to) give you the whole lowdown (speech) of how being lesbian is a sin and how all gays and lesbians are condemned to hell! You know whenever they start with that I usually ask them if the Catholic priests who molest boys are condemned to hell as well! I don't mean any offense to Catholic members in the group but that normally shuts them up point blank (immediately)! (Laughter from the group).*

Mariah: *I go with the flow (take things as it comes). I mean I can assert myself if need be but then I also know when to take a step back. I always try not to give people a reason to make life difficult for me but then I also don't step back from challenging situations. On the other hand, whether I swing (are intimate) both ways or not, in the*

end they are just people. To me it's not so much what you are but who you are and what you have to offer me physically and emotionally that really counts.

I: 5) Do you compare your relationships with those of women in heterosexual relationships? How do you feel about your relationship?

Shireen: *I'm a femme (feminine) Lettie (lesbian). (Stroking her hands over her body in a suggestive way, smiling and making faces). Tasha is a bit butch (masculine) but I don't have an issue with that as long as she can sort me out (give me good sex). (Loud agreement and roaring laughter from the rest of the group). I've never had a man make me feel as good as a woman does before and I like the fact that she knows what to do to me and when unlike men.*

I: Why do you think does a woman make you feel different, or better in your case than a man has done before?

Shireen: *I suppose it's because a woman knows what a woman wants. (Loud agreement from the group).*

I: Do you thereby say that woman makes better lovers than men?

Shireen: *(Can't wait to answer). Off course they do! (Knowing smiles and agreement from the group). I mean no man has ever made me feel more like a woman than a woman does! (Everyone clapping hands in agreement). To me there is no comparison in my relationship with Tasha and any heterosexual relationship I've ever had coz there just is no comparison (throwing her hands up in the air).*

Snazzy: *I really think that same-sex and heterosexual relationships are the same to a certain extent. What I've experienced this far is that me and my partners go through the same sort of issues like finances and general misunderstandings like my twin brother and his girlfriend go through. I mean, I've seen the two of them disagree on some of the same type of issues me and my partners used to disagree about all the time so there is some kind of similarity in intimate relationships whether you gay or straight (heterosexual). What I do feel is different between straight and gay relationships are the fact that men seem to be more physical in their intimate relationships while women are more emotional and caring. What I'm trying to say is that same-sex couples tend to know what their partners emotional needs are while women in straight relationships might not be met on an emotional level like lesbian women. (Pause.....) Don't know if you guys get (understand) what I'm saying. (Loud agreement from the group).*

Mariah and Corina: *(Both start responding at the same time).*

Corina: *I totally get (understand) what Snazzy just said coz (because) that's how I experience my relationships with both sexes. (Fidget in her chair, scratches her head). You know people tend to say that bisexuals are confused but I know exactly what I want form any relationship I'm in. I want to feel loved, appreciated and satisfied in more ways than one and I can honestly say that I do get that, maybe not all of it at the same time from both sexes.*

Mariah: *I beg to differ with my esteemed fellow bisexual friend (Smiling while putting her arm around Corina's shoulder). I.....[I] mean, yes bisexual relationships can at times be compared to heterosexual relationships and I'm so sick of always having to hear that bisexuals are confused! I must say though that I'm so not confused (waving her index finger in the air) and that I get whatever I want from my bisexual relationships. In my case if I just want a good screw (sex) I'll most likely get down (be intimate, have sex) with a guy coz (because) they are generally more active and physical when it comes to sex. When I feel like some TLC (tender loving care) and mind-blowing, emotional lovemaking, I'll definitely wana (want to) share that with a woman because we are deeply caring, emotional beings. That doesn't mean that it can't work the other way around because the reverse might just work for another bisexuals.*

Babalwa: *I sometimes feel I might as well have been in a heterosexual relationship because I don't see any difference between me in being in a relationship with a man or a woman. JT (her partner) is very butch and bossy like most men while I'm the more passive and submissive partner like most women are in heterosexual relationships. She's the one who calls the shots (decide how things should be) and when and where we spend our spare time. She's very caring and overprotective of me but I'm kinda (kind of) used to it by now so it doesn't bother me at all like it used to before.*

I: 6) How do you see your role in the relationship? Is it an equal relationship or would it have been different if your partner were a man?

Shady: *I prefer to play the femme (feminine) role in my relationships and only go for (have relationships) with butch numbers (masculine woman). (This revelation drew some amazement from the group since Shady looks quite butch herself). I'm not in a committed relationship at present but when I am I don't mind doing the cooking but when it comes to other housework I like my partner to pitch in (help). As soon as I find out I've got a lazy partner its tickets (gone) with her! (Throwing her hands up in the air). I'm nobody's servant so if you want me you better deliver (lend a helping hand) or hit the road (get lost)! I mean if I wanted a man I would have taken one in the first place!*

Babalwa: *JT (her partner) and I don't live together but when we visit each other we help around the house with housework if there's something to be done. I don't feel that our relationship is an equal partnership and it bothered me at first but I've given up on arguing over the same issues all the time so I just let it go and keep the peace. I kinda feel that I'd get the same treatment and issues in a heterosexual relationship so since she's butch I kinda (kind of) feel maybe it's her way of asserting her masculine identity.*

Shireen: *I don't feel that our relationship is an equal one because I tend to do all the sacrifices while Tasha has things her way. I mean I always have to check myself in any company so that I don't send any negative vibes (feeling or ideas) Tasha's way that might land her into trouble and lead to her family and fiends finding out she's a Lettie (Lesbian). I think most women in straight relationships make a lot of sacrifices for the loved ones and families so that's why I can compare our relationship with a*

straight (heterosexual) relationship. The difference for me is that she treats me with a deeper sense of love and compassion than a man has ever done and that's why I love her so much and don't really mind the sacrifices I make coz (because) I feel more content being in a relationship with her than any other man.

Snazzy: *I don't know what it is but I tend to find myself at work way more than at home. I enjoy my work and managing a restaurant is quite a lot of work. All my partners I've been with has accused me of being a workaholic but I feel that me working so hard is to the benefit of both me and my partners. I mean the time I used to be a simple waitress I earned more tips than my salary and could carve out a comfortable lifestyle for me and my partner at the time. It also happened that my partners tended to be more dependent on me financially. I'd say that I see my role as that of the provider which might have still been the case if I were a man.*

I: 7) Are you conscious of power dynamics in your relationships with other women?

Vovo: *I'm definitely the butch one in the relationship and I expect my partners to be femme and passive. I'm not bossy towards my partners but I make it clear that I'm the butch one and I want femme, passive partners. It's important to me that my partners know that they need to respect and treat me as the head in the relationship and that I'm there to take care of their emotional needs and desires. Some people might think of me as being bossy and controlling but I believe that there should be boundaries and a sense of leadership in any relationship.*

Corina: *I must confess that I'm more interested in my own needs than that of my partners (shy smile). I tend to treat my partner accordingly if he or she satisfies and take of my needs be it physical, emotional or financial. Other than that I'm not in the business of looking down or being bossy over my partners but I do make sure that my needs are met first before I focus on that of my partners (amazed looks on the faces of the group).*

Samuna: *I can't really say much on that question because I'm not in a relationship as such but I'm a very independent and strong willed person so I'm kinda (kind of) anxious about being in a relationship and the possibility of having to change my ways to compliment or suit my partner.*

Babalwa: *JT likes to be in control of any decision making. She decides how and where we spend our free time, when we should hook up (meet) and how we spend our money. Up until sometime ago the same applied when we were in bed coz she would always be on top and I was initially never allowed to touch her down there (her genitals).*

I: Can you please elaborate on that if you don't mind?

Babalwa: *What I mean is that in our culture woman are not allowed to initiate sex and if she does most men would think of her as a slut. Because she sees herself as the butch (masculine and more controlling) figure in the relationship, she did not allow me to touch her down there (the genital area)*

for a long time. She's from the Eastern Cape where butch black lesbians apparently don't allow their partners to touch their genitals with their hands (murmurs, shocked stares and much head shaking from the group). (At this stage the researcher agrees with the respondent as the researcher has also been in a relationship with a black lesbian from the Eastern Cape in which the same rule applied). Since I've always been the passive, more laidback one in the relationship, I just condoned her behavior and thought maybe its just her way of showing me that my pleasure is more important to her than her own pleasure. Things started changing when I told her that she makes me feel like and inadequate lover if I can't do (be intimate, make love) her as well so she allowed me to start touching her too. It didn't happen overnight but now we on the same page (have an understanding) when it comes to doing our thing (being intimate).

Shady: I'm a controlling bitch and not shy to say so! (Throwing her hands up in the air). I like my partners to provide for me. I like to be spoiled and taken out now and then. I mean, I am independent but it's nice to have someone else to spend time and money on you. They can't expect me to cook, give them the goods (sex) and provide for entertainment too! (Laughter from the rest of the group).

Shireen: My relationship is very stressful at times. Tasha is extremely jealous. I like to dress femme and look attractive but she has a problem with it. I'm only supposed to look sexy when I'm with her and I'm not allowed to spend too much time chatting to other people in the company when she's around. I mean, you imagine this: I have to act as if me and her are only friends but at the same time she still wants to have power over me and monitor who I have nice conversations with. Once when we got home she gave me a slap across the face coz (because) a guy I was chatting with at a braai we went to was looking at my tits (breasts) while he was talking to me. She told me my top was much too revealing and forbade me ever to wear that type of clothing. She even went further and cut up all of my sexy clothes. What she doesn't know is that I bought new sexy clothes that I store at my cousin's home! (Roaring laughter from the rest of the group). Whenever we go out and she's not going with, I dress up at home then go to my cousin's place and dress sexy there before we leave. The bad thing is that I have to repeat the process before I go back home and that's nogal tiring!

I: 8) Do you wear the same dress code to your family and friends than you would if you were among your peers in the gay community?

Vovo: I only wear cargo pants, jeans and men's t-shirts to assert my butch identity and I wear it wherever I go. I like my chicks (girls) to wear nice feminine clothing like silky blouses, tight fitting pants and make up. She must be the envy of other chicks and men must be jealous of the type of chick I have on my arm (Giving a naughty smile).

Samuna: I don't think my dress code is a problem at all because I wear the same type of clothes wherever I go. In the week I wear jeans and t-shirts and when I go to church or formal functions, I wear nice feminine suits so there's no difference of what clothes I wear I the gay community, family or friends.

Shireen: *I like brand name clothing that shows cleavage and body. I mean if you got it flaunt it (show what you have)! Only problem is that I can't wear what I want when Tasha's around. She tend to wear very butch clothing when we go out though and act butch too but at home her behavior is very passive and submissive. According to her I'm "too out there" when I dress sexy and I prove to be a temptation to other men and women out there.*

Mariah: *I wear the same type of clothes around my peers, family and friends. I like pants and tight fitting tops. You see that attracts both sexes so I don't have to wear a specific type of dress code to attract attention and it saves me the time and money to have to buy and dress up in certain clothes too (big smile on her mouth).*

Shady: *I also wear the same type of clothes around friends, family and my peers. I like to shave my head, wear tights, short skirts and nice tops. Although people see my dress sense as though I'm butch, I'm actually feminine at heart.*

Snazzy: *I like butch clothing and I wear them wherever I go and with who ever I go out with even at work. That's why most of our customers think I'm a guy and when they find out I'm a girl they tend to assume or ask me if I'm a lesbian. (Knowing looks and smiles from the group). I like my women to be attractive, good looking, have long hair, be well behaved and good mannered, sexy, interesting and fun, have loads of sex appeal and very feminine.*

Vovo: *Well as I've said before, I always like to take charge as the head in the relationship. That's why I like power dressing in good quality men's clothing and I only shop at Truworths Men Stores. I like clothes that make me look like a man and I enjoy seeing other men admiring my clothing and dress sense! I generally wear this kind of clothing among friends, family and peers and like my woman to compliment me by looking all femme and gorgeous. That way I can enjoy other woman admiring her and see men green with jealousy that I as a lesbian can score (have) such a good looking woman by my side. (Laughter from the group).*

Corina: *I wear whatever I want wherever I want. To me it's more important that I look and feel good in whatever I wear.*

I: Are there any last comments or something anyone wants to add to the previous questions? Anything at all?

I: Has anyone have any last comments.....?
(Everyone quiet.)

I: Well, then I sincerely thank you all for taking the time out to participate in this interview. Your cooperation is highly valued and as I have mentioned before you are more than welcome to view the final paper as soon as it is completed. Once again, thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW.....

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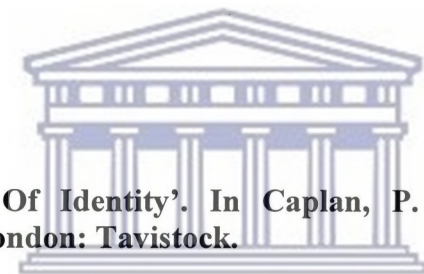
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