EXPLORING MEANINGS OF LESBIAN SPACES IN CAPE TOWN AND THEIR PERCEIVED IMPACT ON WELL-BEING

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ABSTRACT

Cape Town is perceived as one of the 'gay capitals' of the world, yet many individuals who identify as homosexual still experience danger and harassment in this city in their everyday lives. This qualitative study was conducted with seven lesbians who live in various locations in Cape Town and who belong to different racial groups. The research focused on how lesbians experience and utilise social spaces to the benefit of their well-being. This thesis not only explores the meanings they attach to these spaces, it also ascertains that positive associations with places create a sense of wellness for the women in this study. Thirteen in-depth interviews were conducted, and the relevant parts pertaining to this research, were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic content analysis. The findings demonstrate how these women negotiating their sexual identities in public spaces on a daily basis. They are constantly aware of their surroundings which, in turn, determine the level of self-surveillance of their behaviour. When in predominantly heterosexual public spaces, they tentatively display affection towards their partners if they perceive that environment to be potentially unsafe. Lesbian-identified spaces are found to be places of safety and comfort for these women and offer the freedom for the exploration of their sexual orientation. I also illustrate that these women are not passive bystanders being subjected to potential violence, take control of their personal safety. They demonstrate agency - they cope with, and live beyond the threat of harassment and hostility.

DECLARATION

I declare that '*Exploring meanings of lesbian spaces in Cape Town and their perceived impact on well-being*' is my own work and that it has never before been submitted to any other university for examination or a degree. The sources used in this paper have all been acknowledged and the complete references have been provided.

Paschaline M. H. Stevens   February 2009

Signed...Stevens.......

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

South Africa's constitution stipulates that there shall be no discrimination against individuals based on, amongst other things, their sexual orientation (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). The brutal murder of Zoliswa Nkonyana (which prompted this research), a lesbian killed by a group of young men in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, in 2006, nevertheless indicates that the reality in the everyday life and experiences of homosexuals is often incommensurable with the legal clause (Human Rights Watch, 2006). Although there is more tolerance in this city than in the past, large sections of society still view lesbian women and gay men as somehow 'unnatural' and aberrant. Arguably, the murder of Ms Nkonyana shows that lesbian women in particular are often deemed not to conform to gendered and heterosexual 'norms' and are perceived as challenging the 'natural' order of patriarchal society.

In 2003, Human Rights Watch and the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission issued a document that reported the many and often violent ways in which lesbians are harassed. The document also emphasised that Black and Coloured[1] lesbians in South African townships are particularly vulnerable, often discriminated against and experience severe prejudice and ill treatment at the hands of their fellow South Africans. Lesbianism has also been perceived as 'spoiling'[2] African cultural norms and practices (which are represented as heterosexual) and even, at times, as demonic[3] (Human Rights Watch, 2003:187). I argue that living with this sort of prejudice in their everyday lives has an impact on how, where and when lesbians seek and create social spaces to escape such

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[1] Black and Coloured (as well as White and Indian) are racial categories that were imposed on South African society by the Apartheid Government. These groupings were determined by a person's skin colour, hair type and other physical characteristics. Unfortunately, 14 years into a democratic, post-apartheid South Africa, these categories still exist in everyday discourse.

[2] Homosexuality is believed to be 'imported' from Western society into Africa, therefore foreign from African 'culture'. Aarmo (1999) explains that African cultural norms and practices are characterised as heterosexual since they emphasise the role of women in reproduction. Women are supposed to be "mothers and custodians of cultural heritage" (Aarmo, 1999: 262). In this way, lesbianism is seen as 'spoiling' African customs.

[3] In some cultural contexts, lesbianism is seen as a disgrace to Christian values and referred to as sinful and evil (Morgan & Reid, 2003; Aarmo, 1999).

1

intolerance, which, in turn, influences their well-being. In the following section, I discuss the concept of well-being and how I will utilise it in my thesis.

The Concept of Well-being

The notion of well-being mainly originated from the biomedical or health perspective. In formal healthcare, which has a "problem-oriented" viewpoint, well-being is often seen as synonymous with health (Wolffers, 2000). According to Wolffers (2000), the latter is defined by biomedicine and is frequently represented through "quantitative outputs rather than by people's experiences" (2000: 269). This perspective gives the biomedical professional (the doctor) the authority to define what good health and well-being encompasses as well as who experiences it. To do so, doctors, who undergo extensive medical training, base their diagnosis of an individual's state of health or of sickness on what is measurable (Helman, 2001). Helman states that "phenomena relating to health and sickness only becomes 'real' when they can be *objectively* observed and measured...", e.g. through diagnostic methods (Helman, 2001: 79). Once this happens, the findings 'become' clinical 'facts', and only then a person's state of health (or ill-health) is defined. In my study I use and explore the concept of health and, in particular of well-being, from my participants' experiences and perspectives.

At the start of my research I was confronted with trying to make meaning of 'well-being', a concept which initially seemed somewhat self-evident. I wanted to conceptualise it for my participants, while at the same time trying to establish how they articulate their own sense of wellness (or the lack of it) and what this notion means to them. The idea of well-being nonetheless is often used in everyday conversations and interaction, without trying to unpack what it is we are referring to. I realised that well-being does not have the same meaning for each person; therefore I had to establish an understanding of the sense of the "subjective well-being" of my participants (Diener, Sapyta and Suh, 1998). I also realised that, even though the notion of well-being predominantly stems from the medical discipline, there are different understandings of the notion of wellness.

2

According to the ESRC's (Economic and Social Research Council) research group on well-being in developing countries: "Well-being is a state of being with others, where human needs are met, where one can act meaningfully to pursue one's goals, and where one enjoys a satisfactory quality of life" (ESRC Well-being leaflet). This concept of well-being is more meaningful for my research than the more rigid biomedical one discussed before. The ESRC definition refers to human needs, instead of to a lack of ill-health. This description takes into account the emotional significance attached to well-being as well as the positive social relations between individuals. These social relations can be in terms of good supportive relationships (support structures); feelings of belonging, i.e. identifying with others whom you consider to be similar to you, etc.

In this thesis the participants' views on what well-being is vary, because of the different meanings that were articulated during the study. I accordingly consider well-being as more than just the physical aspects of health, and acknowledge that it includes physical, mental, spiritual and social aspects in addition to feelings of happiness, contentment, peace of mind, feeling safe and secure, etc. I also want to emphasise that, for the purposes of my thesis the focus on this concept has a positive approach (i.e. maintaining positive wellness amidst existing prejudicial attitudes) and involves not only the lack of illness.

The paper explores how wellness is not only achieved, but also maintained by lesbian participants in the light of negative dominant societal attitudes and challenges that could possibly hinder or affect their own personal sense of well-being. As Ryff and Singer (1998) affirm: "human well-being is ultimately an issue of engagement in living, involving expression of a broad range of human potentialities: intellectual, social, emotional and physical" (pp. 2). They argue that more focus should be placed on the nature of an individual's wellness, and that well-being is not simply a lack of physical illness or other malaise as is often the basis of medical thought.

I nonetheless have to acknowledge that the notion of well-being, as the focus of biomedicine, and particularly primary health care, has increasingly shifted from involving a lack of physical health to encompassing quality-of-life. Although the attention is still on

treatment, the approach is towards a holistic nature (Ehlers, Zuyderduin & Oosthuizen, 2001; Le Roux & Kagee, 2008). It appears that health care professionals try to promote this positive 'view', yet still frequently end up 'medicating' the 'illnesses' – i.e. the lack of wellness. What I mean is that with biomedicine's intention of a holistic approach, well-being is still equated with physical health (Le Roux & Kagee, 2008) and whether health needs are being met (Ehlers, Zuyderduin & Oosthuizen, 2001).

When an individual experiences 'ill-health', physicians are mainly concerned with the physical (somatic) aspects of the 'illness' (Miettinen & Flegel, 2003). To emphasise this, Miettinen and Flegel maintain that well-being, since it appropriately refers to *feelings* of wellness, cannot define health. They acknowledge that, even though an individual might be in a latent stage of a serious illness, according to that person, well-being is still experienced. This is based on the lack of "patient-evident manifestations of ill-health (somatic) rather than from ill-health itself" (Miettinen & Flegel, 2003: 312). They argue that the mere presence of an illness, irrespective of its latency is, medically speaking, considered as ill-health – not being well. Therefore, this reiterates the notion that a person's well-being is subjective.

While agreeing with Ryff and Singer that the focus of well-being should be on positive health, Diener et al (1998) further add and emphasise the notion of 'subjective' well-being (people's evaluation of their lives) as another aspect of positive wellness that should not be disregarded. They claim that the importance of subjective well-being is that it:

> "…allows people to define well-being for themselves. Inherent in the concept of subjective well-being is that people have diverse values, goals and strengths. Thus, we allow people to decide whether their lives are satisfying based on their individual values, goals and life circumstances" (Diener et al 1998: 35).

Although Diener et al (1998) recognise that subjective well-being is not the only element of a healthy life; they acknowledge its characteristic importance. Therefore, contrary to medical thought, health is not necessarily a determinant of feelings of wellness. Miettinen and Flegel state that "medically, health is the absence of ill-health, illness (somatic) –

general health the absence of any illness, specific health the absence of illness in a particular part of the body" (2003: 312).

In an attempt to determine the wellness of individuals, some theorists use the General Well-Being Schedule (GWBS) as the measuring tool. This is an instrument used in population studies to evaluate their psychological well-being (Taylor et al, 2003). This instrument has 18 pre-determined categories of assessment including anxiety, depression positive well-being, self-control, vitality, and general health (Taylor et al, 2003: 31). Considering this, it seems evident that well-being is regarded as a 'lack' of these categories. Since the interest in an individual's well-being is the measurement thereof by professionals (i.e. health care workers, researchers, etc.), it reiterates Helman's earlier notion that the 'experts' determine wellness.

Although the general well-being schedule restricts the measurements to criteria that are decided beforehand and given value, I have found that space is very important for a sense of well-being for my participants. I argue that the achievement of positive, subjective well-being also comes from the frequenting of lesbian-identified social spaces. These locations are described by the lesbian women in my study as places of safety and comfort that provide them with a sense of ontological freedom: a sense of just 'being themselves', just 'being a lesbian woman'. I continue by further exploring these positive feelings (promoting well-being) that are experienced in lesbian spaces.

The Feeling of Safety and Comfort in Lesbian Spaces

I argue that feelings of safety and comfort have a significant influence on the procuring and maintaining of this sense of subjective well-being for the women in this study. However, it is evident that lesbians may not always have the freedom to be themselves i.e. just to be a lesbian woman in a public space, because of fear of being ridiculed and harmed, or even murdered. 'Being yourself' is an important factor which has a positive influence on well-being. The women in this study articulated that the ability to just 'be themselves' in "safe"

spaces gives them a sense of comfort. One of the young women also said that she loves going to the 'gay village' because, there she can be as 'gay as she wants to be'.

Living with the constant fear or concern that something bad might happen because of one's sexual identity may have an impact on a person's mental and psychological health and well-being. In view of the occurrence of the above-mentioned murder it is evident that homosexual persons need to be selective in relation to social spaces. Therefore, they 'create' their own spaces for exploring their sexual orientation. In so doing, they transform the meaning of 'space' into a 'place' where they can feel safe and comfortable to express their sexuality without constant fear or threat. Thaver (2006) explores these two notions and in this paper I use 'space' and 'place' as expressed by him:

> What is noteworthy is that what accounts for the transformation of "space into place" accounts for the very conditions that give rise to place since space is a receptivity in which nothing is present except a potential (2006: 21).

Tuan (1977) reaffirms that the notion of place comes from space because once space has been experienced and has a personal meaning attached to it, it *becomes* place. In other words, space has the potential to become a place of comfort and safety, or to become a place of danger and threat, etc. Thus, social space is not just space but *becomes* place as there are different connotations attached to it, depending on how it is experienced.

I use the concept of space as having the potential, for an individual or a group, to be comfortable and safe, or threatening, etc., to establish how its importance and practical use is transformed and how various meanings are ascribed to the same space. What I imply by 'safe' space in this context is any place where lesbians *feel* secure, comfortable, and 'at home' to explore their sexuality and sexual identity without the threat of being judged, ostracised or violated. I also explore how the significance and utilising of spaces have an impact on lesbians in terms of their sense of well-being. In this thesis, I investigate the importance seven self-identified lesbian women ascribe to 'social' spaces (clubs, bars, created spaces, etc). I want to gain an understanding of how these meanings influence their sense of well-being.

According to literature (Kennedy and Davis 1993) on gay bar culture, space is used as a way to interact with others who you may perceive as being similar to you. Consider a bar or a club, to most people these spaces may be just that: a place where a person can have a drink and relax with friends. Others, however, may attach more meaning to these spaces, thereby transforming them from simply being bars and clubs, to places where they feel at home to explore their sexuality. This is especially significant as the sexuality being explored is different and 'secondary' to the hegemonic heterosexuality. However, I found that accessing lesbian-identified spaces in Cape Town is somewhat challenging for some of my participants as they rarely have the means to go to Cape Town's 'gay village'. This is the area where most of the city's homosexual leisure spaces are situated.

Cape Town's 'gay village' or as some people call it the 'gay strip' or 'gay scene' includes Somerset Road and the surrounding area, De Waterkant. The leisure spaces within this locale are well-known gay/lesbian-identified places, not only by those who frequent them, but also by others. These spaces include bars, clubs, restaurants, etc. and are said to form South Africa's first 'gay village' (Visser, 2003). Since a few of the women in my study are rarely able to access these social spaces, they create their own leisure space in the neighbourhoods where they live i.e. at someone's house, at a restaurant, etc. Being unable to frequent these social establishments in Cape Town is an illustration that space has an accessibility dimension attached to it, which cannot be disregarded (Harvey, 1989).

Geographer, David Harvey (1989) maintains that there are four categories of space: *accessibility and distanciation*; *appropriation of space*; *domination of space*; and, *production of space*. For some of these women, the distance serves, as stated by Harvey, as a "barrier to human interaction" (1989: 219). The appropriation of space refers to how spaces are utilised and that they may provide solidarity and territoriality among its inhabitants. The third category refers to how a particular space is dominated either by individuals or groups. This category also manifested itself in Cape Town's 'gay village' as this setting was dominated, not only by the homosexual community, but by others who identify with an alternative, non-heterosexuality. The fourth category, according to Harvey, examines how new systems of territoriality are produced. I also found that this system of

7

territoriality is linked to accessibility of space. To highlight this, there were clearly defined boundary markers, in the form of bouncers, to facilitate the territorialising of space. Thus, some people were afforded access and others not. Harvey continues by saying that there is a constant shift of meaning in the experience of space. He states that the value of spatial practices in social life comes from the very structure of social relations they are manifested in. Since the women I interviewed are constantly aware of their surroundings, their experiences of different places shift. This causes them to either express their behaviours more openly or to inhibit their actions. It demonstrates that their behaviours are not only spatially defined, but are dependent on the social relations between the various agents in a specific social setting.

Harvey (1989) also makes reference to Lefebvre, who distinguishes between three important dimensions of space, namely *experienced space*, i.e. in terms of material spatial practices; *perceived space*, i.e. ideas of personal space, mental maps of occupied space, spatial hierarchies, symbolic representations of space and spatial discourses; and finally, *imagined space* – these include notions and feelings of attraction and repulsion, distance and desire, familiarity, ideas of hearth and home, of feeling safe etc. (1989:220-221). The different spaces are always in a dialectical relationship with each other and can accordingly shift. Consequently, an unfamiliar space might trigger fear for a lesbian, but once she becomes familiar with it, or she is accompanied by another lesbian, the meaning and the experience of that particular space can change. This encounter with space is also related to the everyday social occurrences these women go through in the midst of existing antagonistic societal attitudes towards homosexuality. This was one of the fundamental reasons why this particular research project was undertaken.

8

The Aim of the Research:

Conflicting views about homosexuality may exist within a given community, forcing homosexual individuals to explore their sexual identities away from their everyday living surroundings. This may cause them to seek freedom for sexual exploration in a space more accepting of their sexual orientation and where they feel more comfortable and secure. Under these circumstances there may be a constant awareness of their surroundings in terms of being accepted in a particular space or not.

In relation to Khayelitsha, it could be argued that heterosexual individuals living in the area may experience this township to be quite safe. Homosexual persons, on the other hand, may have a dissimilar perception and understanding of this location. It indicates that people's experiences of, and the meanings they attach to a particular place should not be taken for granted. This includes various encounters with and uses of geographical space, i.e. someone's house, a prison, a shopping mall, a church, a restaurant, a club, a lecture hall, etc.

Since Cape Town is perceived as a 'gay capital' there is supposed to be a high level of tolerance towards people with same-sex relationships. But do young lesbians, or homosexual persons, in this city, really have the freedom to be themselves and to be open and honest about their sexual identities? After 'coming out', is there a social space that allows the novice lesbian to interact with other lesbians and explore her sexual identity further without fear of being physically attacked or the feeling of being threatened? Do these young women feel that there is a connection between their state of being or wellness and the spaces they seek or create for sexual identity exploration? Below are some of the research questions this project attempted to answer. In chapter 3 (Methodology), I explain to the reader how these questions were addressed.

- What are the reasons for visiting lesbian spaces?
- Do these spaces render a feeling of freedom and comfort for the exploration of sexual identity?

- If so, how are these social spaces perceived as different from other spaces, for example: the home environment, other predominantly heterosexual bars, and etcetera?
- What meaning do these spaces have?
- Do the feelings of being safe have an impact on a sense of well-being?

My aim is to illustrate the symbolic meanings young women ascribe to different social spaces, and also the practices and subjective experiences of such spaces, after they have come 'out' (but not necessarily disclosed)[4], and the impact it has on their feelings of well-being. I try to give the reader an idea about how some of my participants deal with being lesbian in the light of the recent lesbian murders. The aim of this research is also to illustrate how clearly identified/created lesbian spaces have influenced these women's feelings of security and comfort, and thus their sense of wellness.
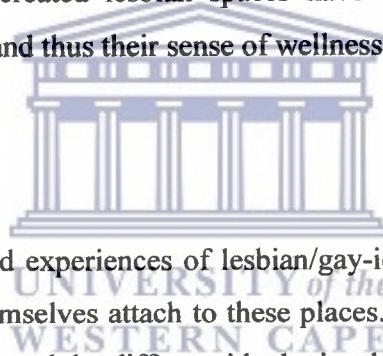
Thesis Outline

This study is focused on the lived experiences of lesbian/gay-identified social spaces and the meanings that the women themselves attach to these places. Chapter two discusses the social construct of gender identity and the different ideologies that exist around masculinity and femininity. The chapter also examines how the concept of social space has been explored in the realm of sexuality and sexual identity. In Chapter three the reader is introduced to the seven lesbian women in this study, and is also informed about the research processes that shaped this project as well as the ethical guidelines that were followed and adhered to. Chapter four starts to explore the personal accounts of the women's experiences in social spaces and their attached meanings, and Chapter five is a continuation of the participants' narratives about the ways they manage their safety. In

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[4] For the purposes of this study [and as explained to me by the manager of health services and research at the Triangle Project (an organisation in Cape Town that challenges homophobia and appreciates sexual diversity)], 'Coming out' involves the personal process of someone who admits to and articulate for themselves that they are homosexual; and 'disclosure' is the actual process when the individual informs others about his/her sexual orientation.

10

Chapter six the reader is given a summary of how spaces are experienced, taking into account the awareness of participants that all public space is considered to be heterosexual space, and how they negotiate their identities and everyday lives around this.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Education and public culture in South Africa has been greatly influenced by Western, as well as local culturally informed ideas concerning binary oppositions in the world, for example: biological sex (male/female), and gender (being a man/being a woman, masculinity/femininity). From a very young age, individuals are socialised into what is perceived as 'appropriate' gender roles and what is expected of them, socially, as males and females. It is the supposition of society that males and females grow up to be men and women, respectively, and fulfil their social roles and duties by getting married and reproducing. With regards to sexual orientation, heterosexuality is seen as the 'norm' and the existence of different sexualities i.e. homosexuality, bisexuality, transgenderism, transsexualism, etc., are easily viewed as deviance. Individuals who identify with a non-heterosexual identity are consequently often ridiculed, ostracised, discriminated against, physically abused, and sometimes even murdered (Huisman, 2006; Morgan & Reid, 2003). Therefore, to 'classify' oneself as part of the homosexual community means that the individual is not conforming to 'apposite' gender roles.

Gender roles play a very important function in our society. But what does this term *gender* really mean? According to Low and Lawrence-Zuniga:

> "Gender is defined as the cultural interpretation of perceived physical, anatomical, or developmental differences between males and females; although gender elaborates on biological attributes, it is culturally constructed." (2003:7).

According to Butler (1990), gender is not something one is, but something one does. Butler says that all gender is performative: that we *do* gender. She states that it is an ongoing process that is characterised by a set of repeated acts in a structure that is extremely authoritative. When examining these ideas about what gender is, it becomes evident why (discussed later, in this chapter) people tend to believe that their actions as gendered beings are natural.

12

As mentioned earlier, people are socialised to think that they need to act in certain ways as social and gendered beings, depending on their anatomy. From the time a person's biological sex is determined; they are already assigned their gender roles and are provided with, what Butler calls their "scripts", to fulfil these roles. These roles seem so natural that one unconsciously controls one's behaviour to conform to society's expectations. This is done without the presence of formal social control; which is perceived, identified, and associated with punishment when gender appropriate behaviours are transgressed. Retribution can be being reprimanded (as in the case of childhood socialisation), or people being beaten because they identify as homosexuals. When individuals, however, are aware of their own behaviour, and control it without the physical presence of signs, symbols, and authority of gender appropriateness, it is seen as a form of informal control. Foucault's (*cited in* Dirsuweit, 1999) concept of the panopticon is an example of informal social control. According to Dirsuweit (1999), Foucault uses the panopticon as a metaphor to explore subtle powers which are constantly present and that work as disciplinary forces to ensure self-surveillance. This self-surveillance, in turn, informally regulates the transgression of gender appropriate behaviour, reinforcing gender norms in society.

In relation to the above, homosexuality in general and lesbianism in particular, is perceived as transgressing this gender appropriate behaviour. Therefore, being a lesbian can potentially be a hazard to an individual's safety. The example of Ms Nkonyana, and her two friends who subsequently went into hiding, is a case in point. By declaring herself as a lesbian and wanting the freedom and space to explore this sexual identity she was put in mortal danger. In Khayelitsha, where she lived, lesbians were seen as 'un-African' and as 'perverts' (Huisman, 2006) who had to be punished or disciplined. Although most people had sympathy for the deceased teenager and her family, the murder was also representative of many people's attitudes towards homosexual individuals.

The murder of Ms Nkonyana apparently had a great deal to do with prevalent ideas about gender and what is perceived to be normal and abnormal in that locality (Huisman, 2006). The fact that she was beaten, stoned, and stabbed to death by a group of men for being a lesbian is indicative of possible underlying ideologies about what and how women are

supposed to behave and about notions concerning masculinity. Arguably, her lesbianism challenged and rejected heterosexual, patriarchal hegemony in this particular township and she confronted men's ideas about masculinity and the self. Her lesbianism may have challenged the embedded perceptions of what masculinity and femininity really is or is not supposed to be. Being born with a penis is often perceived as inevitably 'becoming' masculine. However, here was a young woman (Zoliswa Nkonyana), born a female (without a penis), who was probably understood by some men in that location as 'playing the role' of a man. Because of this perception, I argue that she challenged the existence of the belief of what a man really is. This is indicative that in some cultural contexts, beliefs about masculinity and femininity stems from a person's biological characteristics.

Ideologies about biological sex and the fact that they are linked to what are supposedly gender 'appropriate' roles are not the same cross-culturally. Thus, what is perceived as being masculine and feminine differs among various societal settings. Attitudes towards sexuality, but more particularly homosexuality, are socially constructed and shift from one society to the next and may differ within a given social context. In relation to gendered categories and gendered identities, Bolin (1996: 23) argues that sexuality (like gender) is socially constructed. Social constructionism has, therefore, been a dominant paradigm in gay/lesbian studies which focuses on the impact social issues have on sexual patterns and desires (Wieringa & Blackwood, 1999: 8; Young & Meyer, 2005). According to Wieringa & Blackwood (1999), a tenet of the social construction theory is that the patriarchal systems and institutions of society define what sexuality is.

Yet, even though lesbians are seen as deviating from 'normal' heterosexual patterns, they frequently still fulfil many 'appropriate' gender roles. Many of them dress like women, wear feminine hairstyles, walk and talk like women: in fact, they still perform part of their socially expected gendered roles. Ramet (1996: 1) calls this 'gender culture', and she explores the role it plays in the social construction of gender. According to Ramet, 'gender culture' refers to how society understands behaviour that is gender-linked: whether it is proper or not, while issues around gender culture are also concerned with social control (Ramet, 1996: 1; & Wieringa & Blackwood, 1999: 11).

14

Even though sexuality is defined by patriarchal systems and institutions, these social structures also define what gender is. They have a great influence on what individuals think masculinity and femininity should be. These patriarchal ideas are so deeply imbedded in society by those who have the power and authority to do so, that people act in ways which perpetuate those ideas.

Ideologies of Masculinity

What defines this concept of 'masculinity'? The answer to this question may differ from one cultural context to the next and may also vary among individuals within a particular society. In their study conducted in a black township in Umtata, Wood & Jewkes (2001) found that the ideas around 'successful masculinity' are reported to be quite similar among many young men in that particular township. Some of them mentioned, amongst other things, that having sex with as many women as possible confirms their status as men, not only to their peers but also to the rest of society. According to these young men, they can have many women and they have the right to beat these women if they refuse to have sexual intercourse with them. They make it known to the rest of their peers that they are having sex with many women so that their macho status can be recognised and confirmed. The women on the other hand are not allowed to date other men, and if they do, they are beaten for it because it is seen as a sign of defiance and as the breaking down of the men's "manly" reputations. As a result of this, the young men are mocked and teased by their peers for not being 'man enough' to put their women 'in their place'.

In this way, it becomes evident that it is not only men who define women's sexuality, but that the presence of women (and the availability of women to men) plays a fundamental role in the construction of these men's ideas about their own masculinity. Just as much as women's sexuality and gender roles are controlled by society and patriarchal systems, so too do women have the power to control men's ideas about themselves. I maintain that, to a certain extent, women in turn define what masculinity is and also validate this manliness. Therefore, it can be reasonably argued that masculinity is in some way confirmed by

15

women. If this is so, then lesbian women are an even bigger threat to some men's feelings of 'machoness' and 'maleness'.

Ideologies of Femininity

Just as ideas about what masculinity is, exist, so too do ideologies about femininity. Femininity is a concept that has been socially constructed in such a way that when the word is used, a preconceived image already exists. It is associated with being passive, subordinate and submissive, as opposed to masculinity which is seen as the strong, active, dominant gender. When looking at the different kinds of women in society, it is evident that femininity is not a static concept, but rather a fluid one as there are various forms or ways of being feminine. In her book *Formations of class & gender: becoming respectable* Skeggs (1997) describes the supposedly perfect image of the 'lady' as the dominant perception of what femininity is.

Skeggs mentions that the image of femininity became associated with the white middle-class woman. The image, however, is also portrayed in the media and in a television programme like *Desperate Housewives*. This is a series in which all the women are middle-class suburban women with one particular character (Bree) being the typical image (in   conduct   and   appearance) of femininity. The character plays the role of being the flawless housewife: taking care of the children and home; making sure the house is neat and tidy at all times and that dinner is ready promptly. Her appearance and conduct are perfect, portraying an immaculate vision of what femininity is "supposed" to look like. Skeggs says that this particular form of womanhood was seen to belong to the white middle-class woman, who, because of this, had the power to distinguish between herself and "other" (working-class) women, who are seen as not being 'properly' feminine, and hence, less respectable.

When confronted with this "ideal" representation of femininity, it is difficult to imagine that this persona could be at all threatening, as Riviere (1929) states, to the existing patriarchal social structure, as opposed to the 'assertive' woman in the public sphere (*cited*

16

in Tseëlon, 1995: 37). Riviere reiterates Butler's notion that we *do* our gender, by discussing femininity as a masquerade in her analysis of the way professional women (in the public domain) act. The author claims that women in the public sphere behave in such a way that they *display* their femininity to make themselves *seem* less threatening to their counterparts and to reassure (the men) that the power they possess is a façade. Just as the epitome of femininity is perceived as non-threatening, so too is the ideal 'feminine' (petite) female body. However, this body is often compared to the supposedly more 'masculine'-looking *lesbian* body. Since there is no biological difference between the heterosexual female body and the lesbian body, the probability exists that all female bodies are lesbian bodies.

A Lesbian Body or a Female Body?

Women who love women and who consider themselves to be lesbians confront and challenge this notion of masculinity (as described above). This proved to be both dangerous and fatal for Ms Nkonyana and other lesbians who have suffered the same fate. Because of people's perception and possibly lack of understanding of the homosexual population, there is a common ideology that lesbians take on the masculine 'role'. The perception is also that a lesbian has a certain (stereotypical) appearance: a masculine male-like appearance. However, Creed (1995) states that lesbian bodies do *not* have a 'certain look': that the lesbian body is no different from the heterosexual female body. Thus, all female bodies have the potential of being lesbian bodies.

It is difficult to establish who is a lesbian and who is not, especially if the lesbian body does not fall into the conventional view of what a lesbian is *supposed to look like*. In other words, there is a likelihood that any woman could be lesbian, but this possibility sometimes eludes our intellectual reasoning. Admittedly, for this stereotypical image of a lesbian to exist, there has to be some truth from which it stemmed. By this I mean that, while I frequented the 'gay village', I noticed some women who could easily have been mistaken for men. Their outer appearance: shaved/ short hair, the baggy clothing (some wore men's

clothing), and their demeanour were 'man-like'. Therefore, because of such images, assumptions about what lesbians look like do exist.

Creed explores two stereotypical views of the lesbian body: the *masculinised* lesbian body; and the *animalistic* lesbian body. In both instances, she acknowledges that these are merely misunderstood and generalised perceptions of what a lesbian body supposedly looks like. She states that there is a perception that the lesbian body has the appearance of a male body and that the lesbian is seen to be a man 'confined in' a woman's body. She opines that this body is perceived to be offensive and challenges the gender boundary in terms of 'physical' appearance. In other words, distinction between femininity ('passive') and masculinity ('active') should be clearly demarcated in a gendered, patriarchal society.

Another perception is that the female body (like animals) is associated with nature, reproduction and an insatiable sexual appetite that needs to be controlled (by man) (Creed, 1995). Thus, it implies that lesbians represent *the* female sexuality that cannot be 'contained' (by man). This is significant when one considers the ideologies about masculinity, concerning women's sexuality. Lesbianism manifests exclusion not only in companionship, but also in the reciprocal relationship of sexual pleasure. Creed (1995) talks about this sexual pleasure when she discusses another stereotypical view of the lesbian body: the *narcissistic* lesbian body. She says:

> "...lesbianism was seen as inextricably linked to self-absorption and narcissism. Men were shut out from this world – hence they understood the threat offered by the lesbian couple" (pp. 100). [...] "The threat offered by the image of the lesbian-as-double is not specifically related to the notion of sexual penetration. Instead, the threat is associated more with auto-eroticism and exclusion" (pp. 101).

She maintains that even though in reality no distinction can be made between the lesbian body and the female body, the lesbian body is nonetheless represented as "the pseudo-male, animalistic and narcissistic body" (1995: 101). According to Creed, there is a tendency to view the 'mannish' lesbian's body as a deviant body, while the body of the femme lesbian is overlooked, and thus 'invisible'. This demonstrates that the image of the lesbian body should be immediately identifiable. She emphasises that because of this, the femme

18

lesbian's body, which is perceived as less challenging to patriarchy, implies the possibility that all women could be lesbians. In other words, the image of the feminine woman, the 'lady', could also possibly be the image of a lesbian:

> "...the stereotyped mannish/animalistic/auto-erotic lesbian body hovers around the borders of gender socialisation, luring other women to its side, tempting them with the promise of deviant pleasures" (Creed, 1995: 101).

I argue that even though, the femme lesbian might not be immediately 'recognised' as a lesbian body, she can still be identified by her demeanour and actions. By, for example, showing affection towards her partner in public, she can reveal her sexual orientation. Since some of the young lesbian women in my study do not always want to be 'visible' as homosexuals, they control their behaviour. They regulate their actions depending on who is in that environment. This illustrates that, depending on the social contexts, they are, at times, not in control of their own bodily conduct. In other words, they do not act the way they want to because of their surroundings – the body's actions are often not autonomous.

The Autonomous Body?

Individuals' choices are sometimes controlled in some way or another by the different social contexts they are in. This control extends from actions and behaviours to the appropriate clothing one wears. For example, sometimes people stare if someone wears a shoe that does not have the 'correct' colour to match the pants, top, or dress. So each day, before going out and presenting myself to the rest of society, I stand in front of the mirror to make sure that everything is more or less according to society's standards to avoid being stared at or talked about. Hence sometimes I do not wear or do what I want to because of the anticipated consequences. This made me question: Am I really the one in control of my own attire or am I just conforming to society's hegemonic sense of fashion? This does not only apply to one's apparel, but is also relevant to other areas of our lives, including our gender roles and sexual identities.

The perception in society is that anatomy presupposes gender identity and hence, sexual identity. In society these two categories are not always congruent with social norms. In the event of this incompatibility being openly displayed, the "transgressors" are subject to stares and threatening slurs. Same-sex couples do not always have the same freedom of being affectionate towards their partners like heterosexual couples do.

There is a constant awareness of one's surroundings that either makes us 'overlook' the gender role we are supposed to play, or the social position we *should* be occupying. At times, individuals actually *do* unconsciously conform to these prescribed gender roles. People are socialised in such a way that they sometimes 'act out' their gender roles quite obliviously. But this, however, is not only because of socialisation, but also because of how one is exposed to the world and the way in which a person's body experiences the social order of society.

Thus, behaviour is controlled by the contexts we find ourselves in. The bodies' actions are restricted because they may be perceived as inappropriate or make other people feel uncomfortable. When someone restricts their body's actions, it indicates that they are aware of their surroundings, and also who occupies it. I found that my participants inhibit themselves from expressing a part of what encompasses their individual identities, particularly their sexual identities. What I mean here is that they display certain behaviours and withhold or conceal others because of the environment and people in those surroundings. These women, at times, do not express themselves the way they would like to because it might reveal their sexual orientation.

Mary Douglas (1970) discusses this controlled self expression when she talks about the two bodies: i.e. the physical body and the social body. She says that the body as a channel of expression is often controlled by the existing social system. According to Douglas (1970), the body has its limits depending on the context, and react to a certain perceived social setting. Bodily expressions in certain social contexts *seem* almost natural because of the general understanding of a particular situation. Because a perceived social situation is attached to a particular history and cultural context, the seemingly natural articulation of the

body is actually culturally determined. Mauss (1936, *cited in* Douglas, 1970) also states that all behaviour is a result of learning and that there is no such thing as 'natural' behaviour (pg. 93). He refers to this learned behaviour as bodily techniques.

An individual's bodily techniques change 'automatically' as the person encode certain situations and react to them without having to think about it. Our actions then, in a particular situation, become almost second nature. Douglas, however, says that the *tendency* to react a certain way to a particular situation is natural. Bourdieu (1990) extends from Douglas by referring to this situational behaviour as the "habitus", where people react 'almost naturally' to certain social situations. In other words, the manner in which one behaves in different contexts is done unconsciously (I discuss this in chapter 5). He states that social interaction (at any given time) is known as the social game and that when stepping into this social game, one need to have a "feel for the game" (Bourdieu, 1990: 66). This, in turn, will determine how one reacts to a given social situation to achieve the desired outcome, which for example (taking this research into consideration), could be the avoidance of conflict and confrontation. Arguably, the "social field" and having a "feel for the game" cause one to contain one's actions (knowing what to do and what not, and in various contexts). Our bodily techniques are thus controlled by the social contexts we find ourselves in. This is explored in the following section.

The Socially Controlled Body

Duranti (2003), in his work with Samoan communities, illustrates how certain social situations lead to informal control of behaviour. The author explores the way children are instructed to sit when in the presence of adults. He examines how Samoan adults try to monitor their children's potentially disorderly behaviour. They believe that there is a correlation between the child's behaviour (body position), space and people in that space. The posture of a child plays a very important role in showing respect to adults. Thus, there is a relationship between the child's body posture or position and adults around the child (2003: 114). Duranti notes however, that adults need not be around for the child to take up that particular posture and position of respect. Therefore, the child's behaviour is controlled

by the relationship between his/her body and the particular space he/she occupies. This is also a form of self-surveillance. During interviews with my participants, I found similar ways of how they regulate their behaviour. This demonstrates that they are sensitised to the fact that other people inhabit the same space.

In the past (and still in the present) homosexuality was seen as wrong and shameful and some people say that it is against their culture: it is "un-African" (Aarmo, 1999; Morgan & Reid, 2003). These beliefs should be taken into consideration when looking at attitudes towards homosexuality in the present. The fact that Zoliswa was murdered is evident that lesbians do not have the freedom to be themselves and to be open about their sexual orientation. Depending on the immediate environment, being open about a sexual identity - which is different from the dominant one - might lead to exclusion and has proven, in some contexts, to be dangerous.

Spaces are created that allows for the expression of certain bodily actions, which are otherwise inhibited, depending on the social situation. These spaces are then transformed into places because they are experienced by different bodies, and therefore have particular meanings attached to them. Place, therefore, is used as a location where there is a constant interaction of individuals giving different meanings to that specific setting. So when I talk about 'lesbian spaces' I mean spaces that have been created for lesbians to meet. Places, on the other hand, are localities that have specific importance attached to them by lesbians because of the interactions that occur within these locations.

The inhibition of bodily actions is perceived as 'disabling' the body: when a body is unable to perform certain activities (Freund, 2001). According to Freund (2001), 'disability' is not only considered in terms of a sociocultural and biomedical category, but also as a state of 'not being able to'. He reiterates that there is a link between the body and space, and being 'disabled' at a particular time in space. As maintained by Freund (2001), even though sociological theory and its approaches to disability takes the individual body as a starting point, sociology, however, neglects social configurations and their enabling and disabling attributes, i.e. "neglect socio-material space and organisation" (2001: 691).

In many ways, depending on the different spaces individuals find themselves in, they are sometimes *not able to do* things they would like to do. This is due to social constraints or material restrictions that leave them somewhat disabled to perform certain functions. Therefore, "space is also important because of the way its organisation constructs bodies and offers bodily possibilities and constraints" (Freund, 2001: 694). Freund says that the concept of dis-ability can be used in different ways: the socio-cultural category or bio-medical status; or the restriction to perform an activity. With its roots in biomedical theory, the concept excludes different variations to which abled bodied individuals may be disabled in certain contexts, depending on design and spatial organisation (Freund, 2001). Thus, "social material conditions not only influence the body itself, but how one experiences one's body – the quality of embodiment" (Freund, 2001: 699).

As previously discussed, individual bodies interact with their environment. At times the surroundings 'control' the body's behaviour, which makes it 'not able to do things'. This limitation of behaviour also depends on the fact that individuals are gendered and sexualised bodies. Hence, in a space where there is interaction between social agents, that environment 'becomes' a gendered or sexualised place. In society, people are expected to behave in ways that are 'appropriate' to their gender identities. A person attracts attention when the gendered body is in the 'wrong' place. This is demonstrated, for example, when a man enters a women's restroom, or even when a woman walks into a hardware store. Because of this, I argue that space is both gendered and sexualised. I expand this assertion, next.

Gendered and Sexualised Spaces

In her article about *Lesbian productions of space,* Gill Valentine (1996) starts off by mentioning an actual incident which happened in Nottingham, Britain, where a lesbian couple was "thrown out" of a supermarket for kissing in the shop (1996: 146). She states that there are no spaces that are asexual and that all spaces are considered and taken for granted as heterosexual. This hegemonic sexuality of spaces is almost natural as it is never questioned or even given a thought, until someone challenges or disrupts the 'normal'

heterosexuality of space by showing affection in a non-heterosexual manner. She opines that the straight population have the freedom (to which some are almost completely oblivious) to show affection (kissing, hugging, holding hands, etc) in public, i.e. the street, shopping malls cafes, restaurants, nightclubs, etc. This freedom only illustrates the reality of the perception that space is 'obviously' heterosexual because heterosexual couples are hardly ever aware of, or scrutinise their own behaviour (Valentine, 1996). Thus heterosexual space does not need to be produced, it is already perceived as a given.

Skeggs (1999) agrees that, because we are living in a predominantly heterosexual world, all space is considered as heterosexual. Lesbians have to regularly negotiate their sexual identity and behaviour under constant heterosexual surveillance. In turn, they maintain the heterosexuality of the broader public domain (Skeggs 1999: Valentine 1996). However, Valentine (1996) states that maintaining this heterosexuality of the street and other public places does not necessarily involve violence and hostility, but there are subtle regulatory measures (looks of condemnation, whispers, being stared at, etc) that exist. This reaction causes many women to be cautious about their own behaviour when they are in various public spaces where they may feel 'out of place'.

The following section aims to emphasise the transformations of social or public spaces and the significance ascribed to these spaces. Individuals create meanings of spaces and the same place might signify diverse things to different people. These various connotations attributed to the same space are elaborated on later in the next section.

Different Meanings of the Same Space

Rodman (2003) states that the meaning of place in anthropological theory is often taken for granted and argues that the experience of place needs to be examined just as the experience of time or culture is examined. She mentions that the problem with place is that it is written about as an anthropological construct and that it is associated with ethnographic locales (Rodman, 2003: 204). Rodman argues that places are not lifeless entities and that just as intricate as multivocality is to anthropological theory, so too is the multifaceted notion of

24

place. She emphasises that places are not created by academia but by "the physical, emotional, and experiential realities places hold for their inhabitants at particular times" and that they "need to be understood apart from their creation as the locales of ethnography" (2003: 205). Thus, places are socially constructed, having a unique reality for each inhabitant in which meaning is shared with others.

Spaces are created and individuals, depending on the context, may either feel comfortable or uncomfortable in a certain space. Being uncomfortable in a situation, however, does not only mean that a person feels out of place, according to the participants in a study conducted by Moran & Skeggs (2004), but it is also a feeling of the individual's safety being compromised. According to Moran *et al* (2001), the creation of a safe space is juxtaposed with the exclusion of certain individuals or a certain group, thereby emphasising the visibility and inclusion of another. In their study, which they conducted in Manchester's "gay village", they explored spaces in terms of the "sustainability of safer gay spaces" (2001: 407). Some of their participants identified the 'gay village' (which are a few streets consisting of bars and clubs) as their private space, which, the researchers argue, does not imply the actual physical building, but that the space has a more symbolic meaning to these individuals (Moran *et al*, 2001).

Throughout their research, Moran and Skeggs (2001, 2004) explore the notion that, imbued in the public space is also a private space. For example: within a particular street consisting of clubs and bars, which are spaces available to everybody (heterosexuals and homosexuals alike), are also those clubs available only to and accessed only by homosexuals – their 'private' space. These locations are created for the purposes of excluding those who do not belong, and challenges the private/public dichotomy discussed by Moran and Skeggs (2004). They argue that, for example, home is considered as private space where an individual can feel comfortable and safe. In this case, home is associated with privacy and safety in contrast to public space, which is connoted with danger. However, a home (as private space) can also be a place associated with danger, for example: the possibility of someone being physically attacked in their own home, as in domestic violence (Gibson, Dinan & McCall, 2005). This contradicts the simplistic private (home)/safe and

public/danger dichotomies. Therefore, space in itself is ambiguous because the meaning and use of space constantly shifts.

Also exploring space, Andes and Shattell (2006) did research in an acute psychiatric care unit. They found that even in that setting: a location where space is shared by hospital staff and patients, both these groups long to have a place they can call their own. Their article is an investigation about the meaning of space and place in acute psychiatric settings and the effect it has on human relationships. What Andes and Shattell (2006) found is that both the nurses, as well as the patients, acknowledged the need of having a 'private' area to alleviate the pressures of what is expected of them from the other. There is constant evaluation and surveillance of the others' behaviour.

According to a study done by Halford and Leonard (2003), nurses enjoyed having a demarcated nurses-only place where they can engage in relaxed conversations that had nothing to do with nursing. By so doing, they elude the "ceaseless gaze" of the patients (Halford & Leonard 2003: 203). In the same way Thomas, Shattell, and Martin (2002, *cited in* Andes & Shattell, 2006) found that smoking, as well as non-smoking patients, used the smoking room as a way to escape the "watchful eyes" of nurses, enabling them to speak freely amongst each other. Thus, the pleasure of these sites arises from the need for separation and distance and is enjoyed by both the nurses and the patients because the one group cannot be seen by the other.

Since the power relations between the nurses and patients are noticeable, with the nurses having more power than the patients, nurses have the authority to move in and out of the patient's areas whenever they need to. The patients do not have much control over their own space as it is frequently occupied by hospital staff. Patients also do not have the authority to move in and out of the nursing stations as they are clearly marked boundaries, with the nurses, also acting as boundaries themselves (Simmel, 1971).

Moran and Skeggs (2004) explore locations where people, but more specifically homosexuals, feel safe and have a sense of belonging. The concept of "being at home"

evoked lots of discussion within their focus groups during their research (2004: 83-109). The actual and physical space of someone's home was considered to be a place where people feel comfortable to 'be themselves', and feeling safe when doing so. It is seen as a space for privacy: a 'restricted' place. The feeling of "being at home", however, does not only mean the physical location, but is also a state of *being*: a feeling. Thaver (2006), in his article about institutional culture, explores this concept of "at home" which he says is the affective state of being and thus "at home" can be any space or place. Accordingly, as Scraton and Watson (1998: 123, *cited in* Skeggs, 1999) highlight, space has many complexities and are also understood as places where power relations are reproduced, maintained or usurped (Skeggs, 1999: 213).

Space, with all its intricacies, however, is also seen by the participants in this study as something that can be 'claimed'. Thus, they transform it into place where they are comfortable to explore their sexual identity. In agreement with Thaver, I found that my participants feel "at home" in gay/lesbian-identified spaces. They maintain that they experience these locations as comfortable and those are places where they can interact with other lesbians.

The Comfort of Sexual Identity Exploration

In society, the lesbian community is an 'invisible' group (Wilton 1995: 121). According to Wilton, for the novice lesbian (young and old) is confronted by the 'indiscernibility' of lesbianism. Therefore, books about homosexuality provide a safe space for lesbians to explore and understand their sexual identity (1995: 121). She also states that this 'space' provides the 'first lesbian community'. Since, in some societies, declaring oneself as a lesbian is dangerous, the 'beginner' lesbian often learns about this 'new' life from the media and internet, etc. The first lesbian community in such a case is not composed of the physical presence of individuals. It is a virtual 'community' where the lesbian feels comfortable and safe to explore her sexual orientation, and overcomes possible obstacles in her exploration, like the threat of physical violence, etc.

According to Kennedy and Davis, in the 1930's, 1940's and 1950's, lesbians found ways to make themselves more visible by socialising together in bars. It was also a space for them to relax, have fun and form a community outside of the protective boundaries of their homes (1993: 29). In the 1960's, bars were seen by the social sciences as the core institutions that created gay and lesbian culture, where homosexuals can explore and also learn about their homosexual identity (Kennedy & Davis, 1993: 30). Isaacs and McKendrick (1992: 97) also identify safe spaces (such as gay bars, gay discotheques and gay clubs) for homosexuals, especially 'beginners' to find and interact with each other. They say that the gay bar as an institution is possibly the easiest meeting place for homosexuals. This setting provides them with access to form friendships, to meet potential partners, to learn about issues affecting lesbians and gay men alike, like AIDS and safer sex practices.

Taylor (2007), however, disputes the assumption that gay/lesbian bars are always relaxing, fun, and even accepting for the entire homosexual community. In her study conducted in different UK cities, Taylor found that the working-class lesbian is even more marginalised than other lesbians. She states that they do not feel welcome in gay/lesbian bars since it is predominantly middle-class patrons who occupy these spaces. Thus, these women feel rejected. Since she focuses on the economic status of social spaces, it is evident that a social setting is therefore also classed.

The women in Taylor's (2007) study state that as working class lesbians they do not feel entitled to their own space. These lesbian women feel that they do not fit in because of their status and appearance. They assert that fitting in requires the right clothes and the 'appropriate' (middle-class) look. Thus, Taylor's (2007) research serves as another example that all women, identifying as lesbian, do not necessarily experience the 'gay scene' in the same way. Whereas it is enjoyable and pleasurable for some, it is hardly ever experienced as pleasant by others.

Although I do not contest Taylor's (2007) finding, in my research none of the lesbian women experienced what she refers to. In fact, I noticed that women could wear anything

they felt comfortable in, irrespective of whether or not it was 'designer' clothing. Even though the women present were predominantly White and middle-class, it seemed as if everyone (middle-class or not) was welcome there, as well as the 'new' lesbian. These establishments also provide that opportunity for exploring relationships with 'potential' partners, and feeling at ease while doing so.

Butch/Femme Relationships and Space: exploring what feels comfortable

Considering the homosexual community, heterosexual society and feminists, according to Kennedy & Davis (1993: 152), explore the notion that homosexuals 'imitate' heterosexual relationships. The perception is that one person 'plays the role of the man' and the other 'plays the role of the woman': the butch-femme relationship. Nestle (1992: 214), however, says that the butch-femme relationship is not about role-playing, but an expression of what feels comfortable for individuals as well as sexual and emotional exchanges between persons. She says that the butch-femme (active-passive) relationship is an erotic partnership which gives women space and allows them to intimately explore their sexuality, which is a lesbian specific sexuality. The essential pleasure here is two women providing each other with sexual gratification (Nestle 1992; Kennedy & Davis 1993). In her study, Potgieter (1997) also found that lesbians get sexually stimulated in different ways: taking an active role and satisfying her partner arouse one woman, while the other woman's sexual satisfaction come from taking a passive role during sexual intimacy. Lesbian spaces also provide the opportunity for attaining potential partners. For the novice lesbian, this could be a place to explore her likes, dislikes and comfortability in terms of sexual partnership.

Conclusion

From the review of the literature above, it is evident that gender is a construct that is continually modified by individuals. The way they *do* their gender is dependent on the social situation they find themselves in, and on the audience observing their gender 'performance'. Often, the spaces people occupy also have an impact on how they *do* gender and heighten their awareness of the role they are supposed to play, causing the construction

29

of a feminine or masculine façade. This, in turn, illustrates that our bodily actions and behaviours, our 'autonomy' as gendered bodies are dependent on the surrounding social relations.

In this way, space is an important determinant of how individuals conduct themselves: they either express themselves freely, or their behaviour is restrained. When the environment limits one's actions, the capable body 'becomes' dis-abled – *not able to do* certain things. The spatial organisation and social relations of the surroundings constrains the body. Therefore, the chapter also explored how the experience of space varies among different individuals.

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30

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

For the purpose of this study, and because I wanted to record my participants' subjective experiences, thus gaining deeper insight into their understanding of different spaces, exploratory research (which is qualitative) was utilised (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995). I examined the ways in which these self-identified lesbians make use of, interpret, negotiate, and attach significance to spaces they occupy in their everyday lives (Gerson & Horowitz, 2002). To obtain this knowledge and to explore the meanings of locations in their everyday lives, in-depth interviews as well as observations were used.

Research Participants

I deliberately did not work with one particular racial group because I want to avoid potential racial generalisations that could be made. By doing this, I highlight that every individual had their own unique experiences, interpretations and opinions, irrespective of the fact that: all of them belong to the lesbian community, and that some of them belong to the same racial group.

Recruiting participants was not an easy undertaking. Unlike many other researchers who worked with a particular group of people at a specific site, I did not have one specific research site I frequented. My participants were located in various localities in Cape Town. Three of them were recruited from an all-girls soccer team in Gugulethu, of which Zoliswa Nkonyana was a member; hence my interest and motivation in tracing this particular soccer team. Establishing where they were situated was a challenging task. Since Zoliswa lived in Khayelitsha, I assumed that the soccer club was also located in that township. As a result, I contacted the Khayelitsha municipality to enquire about getting in touch with the relevant people involved with the team. However, I was informed that I needed to contact the Gugulethu municipality as the soccer club is established in that area. After I phoned the

Gugulethu municipality office and got the name and number of the team's coach, I phoned to set up a meeting with him.

On the telephone I introduced myself and briefly told the coach (Mr. T) what I planned to do. Our face-to-face encounter was at his workplace which was in close proximity to my house. I felt a bit anxious, but was reassured when he greeted me with a friendly smile. I immediately felt at ease and explained my research to him. I asked for his assistance in recruiting some of the members from the team. He sounded surprised at my request and explained that not everyone on the team were lesbians: in fact: there were not many. In spite of this, he was cooperative and said that he would brief the young women about me and what I planned to do. A few weeks later he called and told me that he set up a meeting at his house with those who were interested in participating. He gave me the directions to his house and told me that I could phone if I get lost.

On the day of the meeting, which was a Saturday, I drove through the busy and crowded NY-1, the main road through Gugulethu. The streets were buzzing. It seemed like everyone was taking advantage of, and enjoying the sunlight and warm weather. This weather was not going to last long as we were already in May and winter was approaching. As I drove I felt nervous about how the women will respond to me. When I arrived at Mr. T's house, I was the first one there. I did not have a problem finding the house as it was quite easy to find.

A few minutes later, the coach arrived with three young women who wanted to know more about the research. I introduced myself, told them the course I was enrolled in and what exactly I aimed. I wanted them to have a clear understanding of what the research was about. I informed them that Zoliswa Nkonyana's murder prompted my research. This was the introductory process I followed with all potential research participants at the initial contact, whether it was face-to-face or via cell phone.

Of the three women I initially met, and who were team members of Zoliswa, only two (Brenda and Sophie) were willing to be part of the research. Both of them came across as

being masculine in appearance – their demeanour, the 'mannish' clothing and very short hair. Since the road was busy and noisy, I wanted to sit and talk in a quiet place with the three interested women. Because there was no other place to sit (although my car was available) they suggested that we sit in the back of the truck the coach brought them in.

At the start of my fieldwork, Brenda was 23 years old. She is a Black (Xhosa) self-identified lesbian, who lives in Gugulethu with her grandparents, two sisters (one younger and one older), an aunt and three cousins. She was raised within the Roman Catholic faith as her grandmother is a staunch Catholic. Her secondary education level only goes as far as grade 11, but she is continuing her education. At the time Brenda was also in a relationship, with a partner who stays in a neighbouring township.

Sophie was 18 years old and in grade 11. She is a self-identified lesbian, and lives in Gugulethu. She resides with her mother and three brothers, as well as an aunt and cousin. She is a young Black, Xhosa-speaking woman who is a member of the Methodist congregation. At the time of the interview, she has just started a new relationship a few weeks earlier. Although I knew that I was still a long way from recruiting the desired number of participants and that it would be challenging, this was a positive start.

The next two participants (Nadia and Shelly) were recruited from the lesbian club, LUSH, I frequented in Cape Town's 'gay village'. The first time I arrived at the club, which I located via the internet, I spoke to the manager and she introduced me to Nadia (who worked there at the time) who was the person collecting the entry fees. I told Nadia who I was and what I was doing there and she said that she would be willing to assist me with my project. She called Shelley (her girlfriend) over, and Shelley also agreed to be part of my research.

Nadia is 25 years old and Shelley is 21 years old. They are both self-identified lesbians. Nadia is White and comes from an Afrikaner background. She lives in Edgemead with her parents and younger sister, and is a non-practising Christian. She completed her secondary education and is now studying Corporate Forensic Investigations. She is also a disc jockey

in her spare time. Although she is immediately recognised as a woman, her style of dressing is a bit masculine – jeans, t-shirt and blazer, with short hair.

Shelley is also White and is an extremely feminine-looking young woman, with long, dark hair. She comes from an English-speaking background. She is in her honours year studying science and still lives with her parents in Constantia. Shelley is the only child in the house although she has an older brother. She is not religious and refers to herself as an Atheist.

Another participant, Candice (also masculine in appearance) heard about my research from my cousin (they worked together) and expressed her interest in my research to my cousin, but wanted to know more about it. I got her cell phone number from my cousin and contacted her, and explained what I aimed to do. We agreed to meet face-to-face so that we could discuss my research again, and so that she could ask me any questions she had. Candice is 26 years old. She is a Coloured, Afrikaans-speaking woman who lives in Parow with her sister, brother-in-law, and their two young children. She has two brothers and one sister, was raised in the Roman Catholic faith, but is a Born-Again Christian. Candice was married and has one child. She completed grade 12 and is employed in the retail industry.

From the above participants, I was referred to four other people whom they thought I could speak to and who would be interested. So I recruited my last two participants via the snowball method (Hall & Hall, 1996). Even though four of them were suggested, after contacting all four, only two were willing to participate.

I met Lindiwe on a Friday, the day before she turned 21. At the meeting with Brenda and Sophie, the coach gave me an invitation to the birthday party, but I wanted to find out from Lindiwe personally if it was acceptable to her if I attended. Brenda said that she would show me where Lindiwe lived. They had already informed Lindiwe about me and she did not have any problems with me attending her party. When I met her (a masculine-looking woman), I told her the same thing about myself and my research, as I did with the others. She is also a resident of Gugulethu and a member of the same soccer club. She is Xhosa-speaking, and lives on the same premises as her parents and younger sister. She lives in her

own 'granny flat' in the backyard, which is separate from her parent's house. Lindiwe has an older brother, who is no longer living at home. She completed her secondary education and practices the Methodist faith.

Theresa is 24 years old. Although she was born and raised in Botswana, she has lived in Cape Town for more than five years. She is a Black, self-identified lesbian, and her first language is Setswana. Although she comes across as masculine, she does not refer to herself as such. She was raised as a Christian, but says that she is more a spiritual person. Theresa has an older sister and was reared by her aunt and grandmother as her mother passed away when she was six. After completing high school, she came to the University of Cape Town (UCT), not just because she wanted to study in Cape Town, but "because of the gay scene". She resides in one of UCT's student residences in Rondebosch.

All participants were recruited on a voluntary basis from different racial and social contexts: Brenda (18yrs), Sophie (21yrs), and Lindiwe (23yrs) are Black; Candice (26yrs) is Coloured; Theresa (24yrs) is also Black; and Shelley (21yrs) and Nadia (25yrs) are White. All of them stated that they are all self-identified lesbians. The reason why I use the term 'self-identified lesbian' is because there have been evidence that people who engage in same-sex sexual activity do not necessarily refer to themselves as being homosexual (either gay or lesbian). I did not want to impose the term/identity 'lesbian' on my participants. I felt that it should be an identity they claim for themselves.

What sensitised me to this claiming of self-identification was the article by Carrier (1998), *Homosexual Behavior in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. In her article, Carrier explores the issue of sexual identity in different contexts and cultural settings. She says that labels such as 'homosexual' and 'homosexuality' are culturally constructed and that we must be careful not to impose what we call homosexuality in our culture on other cultural contexts practices: or an individual's practices. Just because sexual practices which occur in another cultural grouping seem similar to what we view as, e.g. homosexuality in our own, does not mean that it has the same meaning and purpose in another setting, or for an individual. And

35

so, meeting the research participants, I was careful not to impose my construction of homosexuality on them.

Research Process

When I started this research project I was aware that access to potential participants will be challenging, as I am not part of the lesbian community and therefore the social distance would be an obstruction in terms of gaining this access (Gerson & Horowitz, 2002). I feared that I would not be accepted by the young women and that it would be difficult to get information from them: that they would not trust me.

Before I started with the interviews, I tried to build rapport by having as much interaction with them as possible (when they allowed it), whether it was in person (just sitting around talking and socialising with them), or whether it was on the phone (speaking, text messaging, or mobile chatting via mxit). I did not want to start with the interviews immediately as I wanted them to become familiar with me first, and I with them, so that my participants and I were comfortable with each other when we started with the interviews.

This paper is based mainly on in-depth interviews, with seven research participants. I also visited them at home and spent time in gay establishments where I could observe people and have informal conversations. My focus is on the meaning of space and for this the elicitation of narratives are the most useful. In my case, I had to draw on my own subjective and embodied responses to the spaces in which I did the research, while I also observed the behaviour of the participants. I had to continuously discuss the way in which I understood and made meaning of my own experiences as well as of the spaces and people I observed. The process of 'meaning making' was thus very intersubjective and developed in a process of what I can only describe as 'negotiated understanding' between the participants and myself. I was also aware that the kind of information I received during interviews as well as the relationship between myself and my participants during the interviews depended on the kind of rapport established prior to the commencement of the interviews (Hall & Hall, 1996; Gerson & Horowitz, 2002).

36

The content of the dialogue is also dependent on the perceived characteristics of the interviewer, like race, age, sex, social class, etc. I was aware that the discussions may become biased because the participants may tell me what they thought I, as interviewer, wanted to hear (Hall & Hall, 1996; Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995). My presence as interviewer, as well as the recorder, were factors that could have obstructed the flow of the conversation. This could have caused participants to refrain from articulating their true opinions and feelings, and not sharing their genuine experiences (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995). When the recorder was an obstruction during the interviews, I covered it (after obtaining permission from participants to record), and used simple conversational language during our interviews. I did not want to come across as 'the professional who knew it all'. In fact, I told them and tried to make them understand that I did not know much and that I was there to learn from them, which seemed to help.

Even though it was not intended, I was aware that my presence was creating an unequal power relation during the interview with some of my participants. To eradicate this, I downplayed my role as the interviewer, the MA student. I emphasised that this was not only my project, but that they had a say in what information I can and cannot use, and that this project would not have been possible without their cooperation; all of which was true. I always encouraged them to ask me any questions, because I did not want them to see me as 'the professional researcher' who can probe into their personal, everyday lives, and they just have to succumb to it. I wanted them to realise that we were on the same level and that they can also ask me anything, as long as it is in line with the discussion. Even though their questions were very few, one of the questions most of them asked had to do with my sexual orientation. They wanted to know whether I was a lesbian.

The interviews were recorded with their permission, and the relevant sections of the thirteen interviews were later transcribed verbatim. The initial recordings were between 30 – 45 minutes for two reasons: either we met much later than the arranged time, not leaving much time for the interview; or it was just a 'test run' for those who were nervous, to get used to the recorder. As mentioned above, there were times when the recorder was covered so that they were not too focused on it, inhibiting the flow of information. After they got

used to the recorder, and our meetings started on time, the interviews lasted between 50minutes and just over 2hours. Even though I wanted them to speak freely by asking open-ended questions, I also wanted to procure information that was relevant to the study by having an interview guide. This was needed to collect the data in a manageable way to facilitate later analysis, but also leaving space for discovering unexpected data as well as new ways of conceptualising (Gerson & Horowitz, 2002).

Since I wanted them to feel as comfortable as possible during the interviews, I let them decide on a place and time, which was convenient for them, where the interviews were to be conducted. Three of them suggested that they wanted to meet in a familiar, public place which was convenient for them to get to. The other four said I could come to their homes. For Brenda, Lindiwe, and Sophie, when I went to their homes, my car served as the setting for their interviews. Even though they have disclosed their sexual identities to their families, they felt more comfortable talking about it outside in the car. The presence of my car became quite symbolic in this research process as it allowed these women the space to express themselves in length, providing an informal atmosphere which facilitated a more conversational style interview (Hall & Hall, 1996).

In addition to the in-depth interviews I conducted, I also used the research tool of observation whenever I came into contact with my participants and when I frequented the homosexual-identified spaces. At times my observation was non-participatory or simple observation (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995) in nature, as I would just be seated at the bar in these social settings and observe the behaviour of patrons frequenting gay/lesbian spaces. Even though I socialised with my participants whenever I got the opportunity, I still did not feel like I was part of the group and participating "as one of its members" (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995: 105) because I still felt like and thought I was perceived as an outsider. Also, whether a researcher engages in either non-participant- or participant-observation, the mere awareness of the presence of the researcher could have implications for the validity of the data collected, i.e. they might act differently by refraining from articulating their views honestly or by restraining their behaviour.

In the paper, however, I not only included information I received from the recorded interviews and informal conversations with my participants and their friends, but also discussions that I've had with different individuals while visiting lesbian/gay bars. I also include my own observations while doing my fieldwork as well as personal reflections I made while conducting this research.

During the interviews and after transcribing them I noticed that there were some interesting themes which arose from the transcriptions. Because some of my participants gave similar accounts of their experiences of social spaces, a thematic content analysis was appropriate for this study (Hall & Hall, 1996). Their similar opinions and experiences were grouped together under the themes that will be discussed in the next two chapters. However, I will not only look at the common themes which came about in the different interviews, but will also explore some interesting points which were specific to a few participants and which were important to them in their unique experience of being lesbian.

I attempt to explore the unique individual experiences of these young women by asking them about their own subjective experiences of different places, whether they frequented clubs, bars, and pubs, or house parties, restaurants etc. Just because these women belong to the same marginalised group in society, based on their sexual identity, does not mean that their experience of the social world is the same. Even though there were many similarities, which will be discussed later, there were also quite unique ways of encountering the same kinds of spaces. Everyone has their own way of experiencing everyday life in the world. No two people's experiences are exactly the same because this knowledge of the social world and practices within this world is not objective. Our lived understanding of the world and of different spaces is influenced by race, class, age, gender identity, sexual identity, etc.

Ethical Considerations

I conformed to the ethical guidelines of the Research Ethics Committee of UWC as well as the ethical guidelines of Anthropology Southern Africa. I received written informed consent from most of my participants; others just provided informed verbal consent. My

participants were also informed that their participation in this study is completely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

I made sure that they were aware that all the interviews were recorded, with their consent, and no covert recording took place. They were assured that all their information will be kept anonymous and confidential and that only I will have access to the original material by storing it in a safe place, therefore, pseudonyms are also used. Participants were also made aware of the research process (e.g. transcribing the recordings) following their interviews as well as the writing up of the paper.

Conclusion

In this chapter the reader was introduced to the seven young women (using pseudonyms) who participated in the study. They are all self-identified lesbians who come from different racial backgrounds. I discussed why I used the term 'self-identified lesbian' by referring to Carrier's (1998) work about homosexuality cross-culturally. I explained how I overcame the challenge of recruiting these women as well as building trusting relationships with them by immersing myself into the lesbian community. Even though I 'successfully' gained access to these women, I was aware of the influence my presence as researcher had on the interviews with my participants.

CHAPTER 4: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF PLACE

Introduction

Since I started my study, my own sexual orientation came under scrutiny and fellow students speculated whether I was a lesbian. This was very reminiscent of Bell's (1991) notion of 'guilt' by association (*cited in* Valentine 1993: 246), a notion I recognised as a result of the questions people around me asked during my research. Many people assumed I was a lesbian (and some probably still do) because of my study topic. Others thought I was lesbian because I was regularly associating with lesbians, and I was always interested in meeting other lesbians. Since I tried to immerse myself into the lesbian community, I often felt like a lesbian; as if I was *becoming* a lesbian, although not in sexual preference but in ascribed identity, and perception. I started to regard myself like a lesbian.

Yet, I only felt like a lesbian, and saw myself as such, when I moved into spaces where I interacted with homosexual women, which was quite often. In order to contextualise my *becoming* a sexual 'other', I draw on Lindegaard's (2009) work with young males and physical aggression and violence in Cape Town. She discusses the social categories often assigned to them by society - these are attributed to notions of race, class and gender. Lindegaard shows how they 'navigate' their identities through these categories. The author argues that the ability or need to move between places is influential in social navigation, and she emphasises the relationship between the individual and the social in this process. The author finds that social interaction always takes place in "relationships between people, places and moments in time". Lindegaard (ibid) defines intersubjectivity "as the process of becoming a subject in a relational sense between subjects interacting". Thus in such an interactional relationship a person 'becomes' a subject (Lindegaard, 2009). It was also through this interaction between the people 'there' at a particular moment, in a specific place, that I felt I was becoming a 'subject': becoming a lesbian.

Lindegaard maintains that the process of *becoming* further depends on whom the interaction takes place with, as well as where and when it occurs. This was analogous to my

41

own intersubjective experience during my fieldwork. I agree with Lindegaard that becoming a subject depends as much on the interaction between subjects as on the surrounding environment. I further argue that this process is also affected by others who perceive the communicative relationship between the subjects. I did not 'become' a lesbian all the time while conducting my research. But, when I was interacting with a participant (all my participants knew my sexual orientation) in the presence of others, my perceived sexual 'category' would 'change'. I would *become* a lesbian.

I went to Gugulethu for the first time (as I mentioned in chapter 3) to introduce myself to potential participants during the meeting set up by the soccer coach. I felt anxious because the surroundings were unfamiliar to me and I did not know what to expect. While Brenda, Sophie and I sat in the truck, I was extremely aware of my heterosexual identity. I thought that people would somehow 'see' that the young women I talked to were lesbians and would probably assume that I was one as well. Because of this I was very tense, and aware that I could potentially be perceived as a 'lesbian' - in a Black township where, according to some of my participants, homosexuality is not really accepted.

As we sat and talked, a group of young men walked in our direction. I could feel my stomach muscles start to contract. I became very anxious and fearful, because Zoliswa Nkonyana had been killed by a group of men. I was worried that they would say something negative about us, or do something harmful to us. Although it was daytime and we were in a busy street, I kept thinking that Zoliswa was attacked by a group of men. I was afraid that we may be harmed by the approaching men. I was terrified.

The men greeted Sophie but made no comments about us. They talked among themselves and walked past without saying anything threatening. I was relieved. I realised that, while I was fearful that something might happen to me because they might perceive me as a lesbian, I was equally vulnerable as a woman. I also realised how the anticipation of perceived danger shifted when I was in a particular context: from fear of being harassed as a woman, to fear of being taunted and threatened as a 'lesbian'.

During my research I tried to separate the two identities (gay and lesbian) by referring to gay (men) and lesbian (women). My participants used 'gay' referring to both homosexual men and women. I therefore also used the term 'gay' in the same way. Thus, in this chapter and the next, 'gay' refers to both men and women, unless otherwise specified. In the next section I discuss the themes which arose from my interviews with the young women.

Observing the Environment

When we went out and entered a 'straight' space, I observed that my participants seemed to be more watchful and alert. They also mentioned that when they step into a place, they observe whether it is safe or not. The 'feeling' of security often stems from the level of comfort they feel when entering an environment. This sense of safety and reassurance is determined by who occupies the space as well as the particular time. They make observations about the social agents and the social interaction occurring in a place, getting a sense of their surroundings. Getting a 'feel' for one's environment is seen as an embodied experience in which the body 'picks up' certain cues from the social setting as to its safety. This includes the social relations in a specific location.

According to Jaye (2004), medical anthropology and sociology define embodiment:

> "as being specifically concerned with the lived experience of one's own body. This lived experience refers specifically to the way that individuals negotiate their everyday lives via the utility of their bodies, and how they mediate, interpret, and interact with their physical and social environments." (Jaye, 2004: 41).

In other words, individuals do not only use their bodies and their senses (touch, smell, sight, etc) to experience their surroundings, but the embodied self lives in and through the social world. All bodies are alive in the social world, and for a body-self not to experience the social world means that it is a dead body (Hall, 1959: 62). Medical anthropology also approaches the concept of embodiment from a holistic perspective thus

arguing against the reductionist, dualistic Cartesian approach that so many discourses employ (Jaye, 2004).

43

Things participants like Sophie 'read' from the environment and how she perceives and interprets the information around her apparently causes her to react in certain ways. Because of this embodied perception and interpretation, Sophie reacts differently to various situations. At times Sophie (and I as well) become more aware of, and alert to, what is going on around her. This leads to certain kinds of action. Thus, her body is the mediator between her (embodied) experience of the environment, and her reaction or behaviour that follows. Sophie's experience and perception (below) of certain spaces informs her subsequent action. Instead of staying in a place where she does not feel at ease, she rather goes to another place where she will feel more comfortable. By doing so, she enhances her own (and her friends') safety.

> <u>Sophie</u>: …in a place that is not safe, I must first think if I'm in a right place and doing the right thing…it annoys me, you see.
> <u>Me</u>: How would you define a safe place and a place which isn't safe?
> <u>Sophie</u>: By the reaction of people, you see…by the people around me. …What I do when I don't feel safe, I just tell my friends "no man, we can't stay here, we must go find another place to stay…because I can see there will be a problem here, or there's gonna be a problem", you see, because we don't want anyone to get hurt, you see.

Sophie has to continually assess whether she is "in a right place and doing the right thing" - an indication that she is always aware of her sexuality when she enters a place. She has to sense whether there will be a problem in a particular environment. Her bodily interaction with the environment – including the people in that space, as well as the way in which she bodily experiences her surroundings – is also influenced by different aspects of her individual identity, e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. As mentioned above, interpretation of situational cues is important in this interactional relationship between the body and the environment. It is influenced by various factors that help her make sense of not only visual and audible stimuli, but also of the things she 'feels' and senses in her surroundings.

> You always look at your environment and the people because you can always kinda read from…I know it sounds weird, but you get this feeling from your environment. It's okay now because everybody's doing their own thing. (Nadia)

I met Nadia and Shelley at the Mugg & Bean restaurant, in Canal Walk, which is an upmarket shopping mall. The mall is big and some cafés are located in the huge walkways. There is a continuous movement of people who pass by the tables. Mugg & Bean is also situated in a corridor, and there is a flow of people on either side of the restaurant. When I arrived, Nadia and Shelley were seated at a table not too far from the entrance of the café and they seemed quite relaxed.

Nadia and Shelley were holding hands under the table, and two women seated at a table behind us, kept on glancing at us while they were speaking, as if something puzzled or interested them. They seemed to be trying to figure out whether we were lesbians, but they did it in a subtle, non-threatening way. They did not stare openly. When Nadia and Shelley openly held hands above the table, the two women above seemed to lose interest in us – it appeared that their inquisitiveness about our sexuality had been confirmed and accepted.

When Nadia (above) says that she can "always kinda read from" her environment whether she will be comfortable or not, it suggests the nonverbal interaction between that atmosphere and her body, which she in turn interprets. When we were at the table Nadia was aware that the women were trying to 'figure out' whether they were lesbians, but once their curiosity had been met, they stopped looking at the couple. This response was more or less what Nadia had expected in an upmarket setting where a wide variety of people interact. Thus, when considering a social setting, everything Nadia sees within those surroundings, or "read" from that situation is linked to how she behaves and presents herself in that situation. This, in turn, has an influence on how she interprets her social world. According to Bourdieu (1990) the social world can be perceived like scenes from a theatrical play, with the different social agents performing various parts or displaying various behaviours. The social world is a theatrical production and is interpreted when the performances are "read". Therefore, any social situation can be seen as some kind of representation of the broader society and thus the given social situation is a microcosm of the larger world. Accordingly, the behaviour of social agents (like the two women at the table) already within a particular environment influences the conduct of other social agents who enter that space (Nadia and Shelley first held hands under the table).

Nadia talks about getting "this feeling from your environment". This suggests that the self and body are not entities separated from the surrounding world, but that the body is linked to the social world through "feeling" and emotion (Lyon and Barbalet, 1994), deriving from the cognitive experience of that particular surrounding. As Friedman states:

> "emotions have strong experiential aspects, crucial to daily functioning since they may motivate action. All of these aspects of emotion have implications for interpersonal relations, whether it be in sensing or sharing the feelings of others or in responding to or communicating one's own feelings" (1979: 4).

Nadia experiences an embodied response to her surroundings by sensing the 'mood' of, and in the space, as well as that of the people at a given moment – this affects her level of 'comfortability'. Her body reacts to senses or 'gut feelings' that one picks up from different settings, depending on the perception and interpretation of a particular situation. This causes physiological reactions like contraction of stomach muscles, increased heart rate, sweating, etc.

The fact that she felt "okay" at a specific point in time in a particular place meant that she was satisfied that they were not being noticed as 'different'. They did not attract attention "because everybody's doing their own thing". Nadia suggests that the place itself, who occupies it, and the social interaction between the occupants, makes her feel comfortable. This, in turn, enhances her feeling of well-being.

Theresa expressed a similar kind of sensation when she enters a place and gets a sense of discomfort from it. She identifies a specific group of people, "a lot of straight men" whom increase her embodied reaction of unease. This, in turn, is influenced by her interpretation of the hegemonic sexuality and gender of the particular group.

> ...I just go with my instinct. Like if I go to a place and then all of a sudden I just feel uncomfortable, then I know that is causing that discomfort... Also the people...I don't like being in places where there's a lot of straight men who are so proud of being... masculine...Like, where they're like...uhm, you know, "I'm a man and like I should be

For a woman, the presence of a big group of men in a public space can be intimidating and can cause a sense of discomfort. This is even more so in the case of a lesbian. Theresa's uneasiness is double-edged. She can be perceived by a group of men as a heterosexual woman, be sexually objectified and approached by them as such. This makes her uncomfortable both as a woman (a gendered 'other') and as a lesbian (a sexual 'other').

Studies in South Africa have shown that women often perceive (and experience) men as potentially or even 'naturally' aggressive, violent, and fearless (Gibson, Dinan &McCall, 2005) – characteristics that Theresa also associates with masculinity. According to Day (2001) men are expected to act 'tough' to uphold their 'reputations' of masculinity, and not to lose face in the presence of their male peers, and occasionally, of women (Day, 2001). Arguably, some men also demonstrate their 'machoness' to women by displaying their 'protective' ability to their counterparts [other males?). These 'performance' of manliness and lack of fear in public spaces sometimes go further than simply being brave. According to Katz (1988), they are often used as ways to generate fear in others: as a "badass" masculinity (*cited in* Day, 2001: 117; Sauls, 2005).

Day (2001) found that this performance of gender identity is equally a strategy for some men to keep themselves safe. They drop the façade when there is no perceived danger to them personally, or no threat to their masculine identity. Interestingly, several men in Day's study also frequently made reference to the stereotypical perception of men as being the perpetrators of violence against women. They opined that men are "sexually frenzied and without scruples, unable to control their animalistic urges" (2001: 122). This perception, as well as the reality of gender violence, accounts for the feeling of vulnerability of women in public spaces.

places where you can *soma* (instantly) see here, don't go there. Just the way people talk man. Or the way they approach you, stuff like that. (Candice)

...there are places that you would see that are...the people who are around like not cool with you...with lesbians, you see. So you have to first check people who are around, you see, so you can do whatever you want to do. (Lindiwe)

From the above narratives and previously established, social agents within a social environment play an important role in the individual's perception, interpretation, and experience of a particular place. However, none of the participants mentioned that they also encoded the physical characteristics of a place to ensure the level of safety. Whyte (1988) found that it is not only the people in a particular place that makes it feel safe or unsafe, but also the physical environment itself (like "dark and shadowy spaces, high blank walls, empty spaces, spaces with only one entry and exit point and high hedges"), that provides clues to safety or danger (*cited in* Skeggs 1999: 215).

As discussed earlier, the people in a particular space have an influence on how these women experience a social setting in terms of safety and comfort. Most public spaces are predominantly occupied by heterosexuals. In order to feel safe, lesbian women in my study frequent public spaces where the dominant group is homosexual. While such spaces are accessible to everyone, the homosexual community has 'claimed' and 'privatised' certain social spaces, asserting 'territorial rights' over them. This territoriality can be seen in Cape Town's 'gay village', where certain public spaces have become more 'exclusive' – thus creating a place where the non-heterosexual community dominate: a 'private' place of their own.

The Privatisation of Public Space

According to Duncan (1996), there is no longer a clear distinction between public and private spaces. It (space) can be claimed, challenged, and made exclusive to only a certain group of people. Such privatisation of public space, especially by a marginalised, minority group such as lesbians, provides a sense of empowerment, and transforms space into place.

48

Most of the venues my participants frequented were places occupied mainly by non-heterosexual individuals. These include bars, pubs and clubs, and house parties 'created' by, and catering for, the homosexual population. During fieldwork I explored the concept of gay/lesbian clubs/pubs/parties and wanted to establish whether lesbians prefer to exclude the heterosexual population. This is what some of my participants had to say:

> …I don't think that gay clubs should strictly only be for gays. Not all of them. You can have one or two. Uhm…because I wanna take my straight friends with me when I go party. Maybe they wanna see my environment, you know, and let them because it means that they're interested. (Nadia)

Here Nadia refers to gay clubs as "my environment", thereby claiming the space as hers and as a place where she belongs. By doing so she is indirectly rejecting 'heterosexual space'.

> …Uhm…you do have gay clubs where, if you're gay and you have a friend with you, you can go in…if it's a straight person. But parties of straight people…not allowed, because there are so many straight clubs and… leave the gay people alone. Let them have their place. (Shelley)

Shelley is against the idea of allowing "parties of straight people" into gay clubs. This can be seen as a way of protecting "their" terrain, by preventing the gay club from being taken over by the straight population. She is opposed to "their" environment becoming another straight club. Shelley's desire for a place where only homosexual individuals interact is also expressed in her narrative. She reiterates that there are "so many straight clubs" and does not want the few existing gay clubs turned into heterosexual social establishments.

> I think gay clubs should be for whoever wants to go. But, at the same time… I don't know; it's like double standards. Gay clubs, I think, should be a place where gay people should go, I think. It's annoying when you get there and then you try to talk to someone, or if you're interested in someone and you realise that they're straight, because where else are we supposed to find other gay people. But at the same time, I think it's cool that like straight people can go into gay clubs. I don't think bouncers should like say: "Are you straight? Are you gay?" things like that. (Theresa)

From Theresa's comment above, it is clear that when she enters a gay club, she expects that the women present are lesbian. In fact, this is quite understandable because when I enter a straight club, I presume the women present are heterosexual. Just like many other places, clubs are (hetero)sexualised and the assumption is that "women there are straight". Theresa is annoyed and frustrated when she has to speculate about a woman's sexual orientation in a gay club. Her assumption is that everyone in a gay space is the same in terms of non-heterosexuality.

Beaulah Bar is the only known women's bar in Cape Town's 'gay village'. It was first called LUSH and was located above a male gay club called Sliver, in Somerset Road. The club relocated and is now situated on the corner of Somerset Road and Coburn Road, opposite a Catholic Church. My initial contact with this establishment occurred with the bouncer: a big sized man. He looked intimidating, but happened to be very friendly. The bar, which also has a lounge area and a dance floor, has an intimate and relaxing ambience. Patrons, of whom the majority are White, middle-class women, are welcome to have a drink after work as they open at 5pm every day, except Sundays and Mondays. During weekends (Friday and Saturday nights), they have local DJs (disc jockeys) providing music for dancing and entertainment. The bar staff and DJs are all women.

Although Beaulah Bar is known as a predominantly lesbian (or woman's) bar, it caters for the entire gay population. However, it is also visited by a few heterosexual women and men. Nonetheless, the assumption is that the women who frequent it are all lesbian. One night, when I was at Beaulah with two other female friends, a Fergie music video played on a big television screen inside the bar. The three of us watched her video and admired the man (her supposed 'boyfriend') who featured in it. As we stared at this male character in the video, a woman who sat at a table next to ours said to us "She's really hot, isn't she?" And we just said "Yeah, she is." This woman assumed that we admired Fergie; in the meantime, we were ogling the male. This scenario reiterates that women in the lesbian bar assume that all its patrons are lesbians.

Not all my participants frequented the 'gay village'. According to the women in the township, they had to 'produce' their 'own' space in their locality, as it is difficult for them to access the 'gay village'. Most of the time they do not have the means (financial constraints, transport, etc.) to go there. Because homosexuality is frowned upon in the townships, Gugulethu has no homosexual-identified spaces. Therefore some of my participants 'create' their own 'lesbian' spaces at particular times. Sophie expressed her desire for a gay/lesbian-only place in Gugulethu.

> Sophie: Yeah, because it will be only us, you see, only us lesbians and gays, so that's why it will be like fun.
>
> Me: Do you think that lesbian and gay clubs and parties must only be for the homosexual community?
>
> Sophie: Yeah! Because some of straights, they don't understand us and they come and spoil our party, you see. So that's why I would like it to be like only gays and lesbians. And you would be more comfortable if people that are surrounding you are like you.

Lindiwe, on the other hand, was strongly against parties that only included homosexuals. This is what she said:

> I don't like a lesbian party. No man, we're the same. If we like keep on like staying out from straight people like…they won't get used, you see, to that…to that thing, like lesbian thing, you see…I am going to gay parties, but mostly I like open parties, you see, with straight people… (Lindiwe)

We also spoke about heterosexual women who frequent lesbian-identified spaces. We discussed that not all women in those particular spaces are lesbian.

> Yeah, I know, but the ones who do (visit lesbian bars), I assume that they're comfortable going into a gay bar and they know that if they get hit on, not to be offended. (Theresa)

> You find like at Bronx, you had girls, straight girls, going there because they felt safe. They felt that they can have fun with all the gay guys and wouldn't be hit on by any strange men…And that is fine… You can't go to a lesbian club and get offended if someone hits on you… If you go to Beaulah you don't have to worry about if the girl you're hitting on is she straight. You know where you stand and you feel comfortable. (Shelley)

51

Nadia added to what Shelley said:

> And if you're not (gay), then you have to deal with the consequences because you're in our turf now. If a girl comes up to you and you're not gay and she says: "Hey, so you wanna hook up?" or whatever, and you say…or you don't like it and you gooi 'n vloermoer (throw a tantrum), then it's your problem. (Nadia)

It is apparent from the above that a deep sense of territoriality exists for my participants: protecting what is 'theirs' and what happens in that space: defending their own. The term territoriality generally means "behaviour characterised by identification with a geographic area in a way that indicates ownership and defense of this territory against "invaders." (Knapp & Hall, 1992: 149). Evidently, connected to "their" space is the concept of belonging. Going to a place and knowing what to expect, provides a great sense of comfort for my participants because everyone there is the 'same'. They expressed their frustration at being in a gay establishment and dealing with the uncertainty of a 'potential' partner's sexual orientation. My participants also argued that a heterosexual woman who visits in a gay space should not feel offended if approached and propositioned by an interested 'occupant'.

Skeggs (1999) also found in her research in Manchester's gay village, that many heterosexual women frequent gay spaces to feel safe, i.e. away from the advances of heterosexual males. She says that the male gay space makes it easier for women to utilise public space because it protects them from being exposed to an "objectifying and sexualizing male gaze" (1999: 225). When I go clubbing with female friends, I am constantly aware of my heterosexuality and am cautious around men in the club. Some men have a way of looking at women to indicate that they are attracted to them. At times they look at me in a way that makes me extremely uncomfortable, as if they are 'undressing you with their eyes': the looks become very sexual, creating discomfort. There are times when I go to nightclubs and I do not want to be approached my men. Thus, when a male 'makes a pass' (sexually approach) at me, I make sure that my demeanour is not friendly. I do not want him to think that I am interested, when I am not.

When I went to a gay nightclub with my female friends, I did not have to worry about unwanted attention from heterosexual men. I felt 'shielded' from such 'sexualising' looks. I thus 'become' a lesbian to the male gaze (and to other lesbian women who assume I am 'one of them'). Skeggs (1999), however, notes that the presence of straight women in gay clubs comes at a cost of making the lesbian women uncomfortable. The lesbian women in her study felt that the male gay space they (as lesbians) also occupied was no longer a place where they felt they belong. They stated that they did not feel comfortable to display affection in 'their own space' because of the stares from heterosexual women. They emphasised their unease at showing same-sex affection in (heterosexual) public spaces, thus do not want to feel inhibited in a 'private' space where they used to feel comfortable.

Public Displays of Affection

Making a clear distinction between the public and the private is a challenging task. 'Private' is taken for granted to include places like the home, places away from the street, away from the gaze of others. Privacy is usually equated with restricting a certain group of people from a specific location. This exclusive space affords my participants the freedom and comfort to 'be gay', without being stared at. Through their depiction of the social spaces they occupy, or the social spaces they create, my participants challenged this dichotomy, expressing that they feel comfortable in some public spaces, but not in others. They say these social settings also give them a sense of privacy, even in the presence of strangers. Therefore, their notion of 'private' space goes beyond the home and the absence of strangers, but can also be easily located within public space. In the case of this research, public space is associated with 'heterosexual space', meaning that whatever is public (outside the home), is taken for granted to be heterosexual. This includes the street, the neighbourhood tuck-shop, the workplace, the mall, the church, the gym, etc. Alternatively, the women in my research equate 'private' space to 'homosexual space'. It is experienced as a non-judgmental place in which these women feel safe. However, it is not restricted to the home, but created within 'public' (heterosexual) space, which then 'becomes' homosexual.

When I asked my participants how they felt about displaying affection in public, this is what some of them had to say:

> That is very difficult (showing affection in public). Maybe I can do that in town, you see, but here, in the locations… You see, people are not good man. They will start calling you names if you do that, or like you can have enemies through that, you see…We can't be open up here like I mean kissing and what in public, you see. That is very dangerous here. So it's difficult. It's not that uh…I don't want to be seen that I'm a lesbian; it's just that I'm afraid, you see, of what people might do… (Lindiwe)

Lindiwe makes a comparison between the townships and Cape Town central. Her perception is that the centre of the city is much safer for the display of same-sex affection than the townships. This is because the 'gay village' is situated in close proximity to the centre of Cape Town. Here homosexuality is more accepted. The fact that she cannot openly kiss her partner in public, especially in her township, is an indication of her fear of possible harassment. Even though Lindiwe is anxious that she might be in danger when she displays same-sex affection, she is proud of being a self-identified lesbian.

> …at Beaulah (the lesbian bar)…you can be with whom you want. So if you have a girlfriend you can feel free to kiss her, but not in a straight club. I don't think I'll show that much affection at a straight club to my girlfriend as I can in a gay bar: where it's an environment where it's not something amazing. You don't become an object of attention at a gay bar when you're with your girlfriend … But in Long Street, if I do that, I'm at risk of somebody following me with a bat or something. (Theresa)

In a straight club, Theresa is aware of the limitations regarding showing affection towards her partner. She fears that she might be harmed by saying she is "at risk of somebody following me with a bat or something". She controls her actions because she is anxious about possible assault when she leaves the straight club. Theresa indicates that she feels free to 'be herself' and kiss her girlfriend without becoming "the object of attention". She experiences 'liberation' in the 'privacy' of the gay bar where homosexuality is "not something amazing". Nadia related an incident at the Waterfront when she and Shelley displayed affection by holding hands:

Nadia: The other day we were at the Waterfront, and we were walking holding hands. And we walked past a table with a young couple, fifteen or sixteen, and the guy said to the girl: "Check the lesbians". So I told her (referring to Shelley)... You know what, I felt like turning around and telling them: "Please don't feed the lesbians", but I just can't do it. I just don't like stepping on people's toes because it's a sensitive issue. I'm always like that...I always...to a point that I irritate myself. I feel like I have to respect other people...always think what other people are thinking, you know. ... I love holding her hand. I don't care where I am, I'll hold her hand. But when it comes to hugging and kissing, that's when I'll be careful where I do it. If I feel comfortable, then I will do it.

Me: And what makes you feel comfortable?

Nadia: When people around me are. ...That's why I'm so reluctant to be affectionate in public.

Nadia feels at ease holding her partner's (Shelley) hand, irrespective of where she is. However, she is apprehensive about hugging and kissing. This illustrates that the immediate environment may place lesbians in an unsafe or uncomfortable position. Dibiase and Gunnoe (2004) reiterates this by claiming that the "setting is a potent mediator of touching behaviour" (pp. 60). The fact that Nadia loves "holding her hand" suggests that doing so has special meaning - it represents that they are more than friends; that they are in a relationship. Arguably, the actions of hugging and kissing take on a constructed sexualised meaning. This is indicated by Nadia's, as well as other participants' hesitance towards this kind of affection. By displaying same-sex adoration in public their sexual identity is revealed, thus attracting negative reaction from others. Consequently, different settings bring about different kinds of behaviour. The fact that Nadia only feels comfortable when people around her are at ease, illustrates that she is sensitised to possible disapproving and even hostile responses to her and her sexuality.

...at first I was like, I was always like self-conscious, man, because like I would walk in the street with my girlfriend and people would look at you in a certain way and then I would be too scared to keep her hand, or like you know, like a boyfriend and girlfriend would walk. I wouldn't do that...But then I got used to it. The more I got used to it, it was fine, 'coz then afterwards I thought "Ag, you can think what you want. You don't know me so why must I care what you think about me". But I always care about what other people think... (Candice)

Candice used to be careful and "always self-conscious" about displaying affection in public. She was afraid to hold her partner's hand because of the 'looks' people gave her. Thus a look is not simply a look, but is filled with meaning. It also creates an embodied response (in this case fear), that spurs or controls certain behaviour. In this case, Candice refrains from holding her partner's hand in the presence of others.

Knapp and Hall (1992) examined different kinds of 'gazes' that occur between married couples. They argue that gazes can communicate different things, depending on the situation at a particular time. Thus the "look" Candice and other participants referred to, is an exchange between social agents. This communication conveys different messages, which are either pleasant or unpleasant:

> "...increased gazing serves to emphasize the confrontational nature of the relationship while simultaneously providing a way to monitor each other's reactions during critical moments. ...a hostile or aggressive orientation may trigger the use of staring to produce anxiety in others. A gaze of longer than ten seconds is likely to induce irritation (if not outright discomfort) in many situations. ...we can insult another person by looking at that person too much, that is, by not according him or her the public anonymity that each of us require at times. Sometimes you can elicit aggressive behaviour from others just because you happen to look too long at a stranger's behaviour." (Knapp & Hall, 1992: 305).

From the above comments, the public/private dichotomy not only controls gender 'appropriate' behaviours, but also regulates sexuality (Duncan, 1996). Sexuality is said to be something private, and should only be displayed in the seclusion of the bedroom or your own home. However, displays of sexuality and affection *do* occur in public spaces, but it is not 'seen' as such because it involves heterosexual couples. These displays of heterosexual affection are unnoticed and consequently 'invisible' to society. However, the demonstration of homosexual affection heightens the visibility of actions 'supposed' to be private because of the perceived 'aberrantness' of this affection. It is frowned upon by society or restricted to the private. In other words, even when same-sex couples display the same affectionate behaviour as heterosexual couples, *they* are disapproved of by society. This is an illustration that the 'normalised' heterosexuality of public spaces itself is invisible (Duncan,

1996). Consequently, same-sex displays of affection are controlled and self-regulated by the individual. This is done because she fears what might happen if her (non-hetero) sexual identity becomes known.

> If I'm walking like in this street, I can't kiss her (referring to her partner) here because it's in public and there are many people walking here... I can kiss her at a party; I can kiss her at my place or in her place. (Sophie)

When I asked Sophie why she felt that she can kiss her partner at a party, since other people are present, she said:

> Because I know at a party I'm secured. There won't be a person to come and tell me "Hey, what are you doing?" I've got many backups...so I can kiss her at a party. The parties are usually a mixture (of homo-and-hetero sexual people), but I can kiss her. (Sophie)

> Brenda: If I feel like kissing her, I kiss her.
> Me: It doesn't matter where you are?
> Brenda: It doesn't matter...but...it does sometimes... It depends man. Look, you see, here in Gugulethu, yeah, I would kiss anywhere. In Crossroads I wouldn't kiss anywhere. I'll first check if the coast is clear, then I'll kiss.
> Me: Why?
> Brenda: It's not my area, so I'm not comfortable.

In Brenda's case the location, the neighbourhood or area plays an important role in whether she feels (un)comfortable in 'unknown' places. Not knowing an area, its unfamiliarity is apparent because she is cautious about displaying same-sex affection. The fact that she feels free to kiss her girlfriend anywhere when in Gugulethu (the area where she grew up), but not in Crossroads, demonstrates the connection between comfortability and familiarity. This, in turn, creates feelings of safety for her. Because Brenda is not accustomed to Crossroads she does not display same-sex affection in public when they are there. The unfamiliar causes a degree of discomfort, and thus creates a sense of being unsafe. She adjusts her behaviour and in so doing, avoids potential conflict and threat. Day, Stump, and Carreon (2003) also found similar trends in their study about men and fear in public space. They found that the men attributed fear to 'new' territory, because they have insufficient

knowledge about their surroundings and can get lost. The men also reported being fearful when they are in places with strangers.

When Brenda is in Crossroads, she first checks "if the coast is clear" before taking the chance of kissing her girlfriend in such unknown public surroundings. She does this to make sure that the threat of potential danger is minimised. This indicates that she is alert to possible danger and takes the appropriate action to avoid it. By so doing, she actively takes control of her own safety, displaying agency. As Lyon and Barbalet state: "the body cannot be seen merely as subject to external forces; the emotions which move the person through bodily processes must be understood as a source of agency: social actors are embodied" (1994: 50).

Mason (2001) argues that the abovementioned self-regulation of individual behaviour is actually a mechanism to control one's own safety and security (*cited in* Corteen 2002). It thus displays a certain amount of agency. These women self-govern their own behaviour to avoid conflict and threat. Thus, they take responsibility for their personal well-being. Another way these women take control of their own safety is by frequenting lesbian-identified spaces. This minimises the threat and discomfort they experience, which is caused by some individuals in society.

Lesbian Spaces as Places of Safety and Comfort

In her study with lesbian women, Valentine (1993) found that the women feel safe, at home, and able to freely express their sexual identities in lesbian-identified spaces. Duncan (1996) furthermore states that the privatisation of space (making it a lesbian/gay only space) provides a safe base for the open expression of sexuality, away from the heterosexual surveillance and control. Besides meeting other lesbians, lesbian spaces are also used to explore this sexuality and to form intimate relationships with potential partners.

You know, you feel safe at a gay club because…you can have girls hitting on you, and it's like you can handle it… I don't know; I just feel more comfortable surrounded by people of my own kind…It's the reason why coming out all you wanna do is go to the gay clubs, because everyone's the same as you and you talk to people, you discover through other people, you experience things because you're meeting people…and you're maybe hooking up with them…and you feel safe. (Shelley)

From the above statement it becomes apparent that the lesbian-identified spaces are places where lesbians, after "coming out", experience a significant feeling of belonging. They are part of a community where "everyone's the same as you".

…you feel more free there to do what you wanna do. If I now feel I wanna kiss my girlfriend I can kiss her…and you meet a lot of people. Straight clubs you can also meet a lot of people, but it's not the same for me. You have to watch what you do, when you do…that type of thing. (Candice)

Candice continues:

If you're with another girl on the dance floor, kissing her, they (people in straight clubs) would look at you. So I won't go where I feel uncomfortable. I wanna be comfortable. I wanna do what I wanna do, and feel like, okay, I'm enjoying myself, and not worry about, okay, what is this one gonna think if I kiss that girl. That's why I'd rather go to places like that (gay clubs/bars, etc.), where I feel comfortable. (Candice)

I prefer to hang out at Beaulah Bar. It used to be LUSH at Sliver, and I liked going there…and especially the small community; that you will get there and people will know you. They're like: "Hey, Theresa, how you doing?" where like the owner recognises you because you keep going there all the time. And it's like; it's a safe place for me. …safe in a sense that it's a place where I can like, you know, express myself as a lesbian. (Theresa)

I like going to straight places, but I love going to a girls' club because all my friends are there and I just feel comfortable. (Nadia)

The above comments demonstrate that lesbian spaces create a great sense of comfort for these women. They are places that are experienced as safe, associated with the freedom for sexual expression, and a place where you can meet people who are the same as you; who

59

are familiar. And because it is a "small community", other lesbians quickly become accustomed and friendly with the 'novice' lesbian.

> When I'm there (in a created lesbian space) I feel happy. I don't…I don't just hold on to myself, you see, I feel free…that's why they mean a lot to me…I can explore my sexuality…I can explore it because I'm safe and there will be no problems. I feel great. I feel more encourageable in a safe place, you see. (Sophie)

> …We go to Maphindi's (a restaurant in a neighbouring township). We know there we're gonna have a safe place…You wouldn't get people who's teasing you all the way. I mean people who are after you. Yeah man, it is kinda safe for me 'cause I know we're gonna sit and then nobody's gonna come and disturb you…If you know a guy, he would say "yeah, greetings" and stuff like that, and passes. There wouldn't be any remarks and stuff like that, after that. If you wanna kiss, you kiss. Nobody's gonna say "Ah you!" what, what, what… Other people would just…they'll look at you and then they will gossip, but they wouldn't come and say to you "Why are you doing that?" and stuff like that. (Brenda)

Since there are no gay/lesbian identified places in Gugulethu, some of my participants reflected on how they feel when they themselves 'create' a homosexual space within a heterosexual environment at a particular time. Brenda (above) referred to Maphindi's, a restaurant located in Nyanga. I accompanied Brenda and her girlfriend to this establishment. I parked my car and as we walked towards the entrance, people stood outside drinking and listening to music which blared from their cars. We entered through a small gate, and I immediately saw that the restaurant had its own butchery where patrons stand in line to order the meat they wished to be prepared for them. We stood in the queue and Brenda explained that when the meat is chosen, it is weighed, paid for, marinated and cooked. We wanted to buy a half-a-loaf of bread to eat with the meat, but the bread was sold out. There was no bar and we ordered soft drinks to have with our food.

The patrons (Black, White, and Coloured) at Maphindi's seemed happy and many were laughing. Some danced to the music on the small dance floor inside. It was a warm day and the mood was quite festive. We went there on a Sunday afternoon and the place was filled with people. Sunday afternoons are busy times at Mahpindi's. Brenda and her partner

seemed at ease in this space. It was evident that they did not feel threatened, and that it was a place of comfort for them. Although they did not express physical affection towards each other, they were obviously a couple – their body language, though not sexual, showed that they cared about each other. Perhaps, if we had been in a larger group that day, they would have openly shown their feelings towards each other in a physical way. Mahpindi's was clearly predominantly heterosexual. Patrons who danced were clearly heterosexual couples and many were kissing, dancing against each other, etc.

My participants in the township did not always have the means to 'escape' their neighbourhoods, thus they cannot access and experience lesbian-identified places in the 'gay village'. They nonetheless negotiate their surrounding space all the time. When they *do* create their own space, it brings about feelings of being "happy", "safe" and "encourageable". They are content with the fact that "nobody will come and disturb" them. Displaying affection in these spaces is not experienced as threatening but rather becomes a safe place for them and their partners. However, as they move in and out of these created spaces, it is evident that different locations do not always have the same significance. The meanings of various spaces are not static, but shift continually.

The Shifting Meanings of Places

People experience the same social situations in diverse ways. A person can also be subjected to a particular place differently at various times, depending on the social agents and relations in a place, causing the experience and importance of that specific place to alter.

> …my friend was having like a braai at her place and initially, it was just a bunch of girls who all knew each other. Some of them were straight, some of them were gay. And then, well, for a moment it was like, you know, a comfortable space. And then these guys started coming in and then people started leaving, others were coming in. So, by the end of the night, I knew only one person. So I would say I wasn't very comfortable, and I was like…very…guarded, like, I just stayed away from everybody and then I just sat with the one person that I knew. (Theresa)

61

It is not always the meaning ascribed to *public* places that can shift, but also in relation to *private* spaces, like the home. Lindiwe had disclosed her identity to her family, but is still not free to be open about her sexual orientation within her home. Hence she now lives in a 'granny flat', on the same premises, where she is more comfortable to be open about her same-sex sexuality. This is also the specific reason why her interviews were conducted in my car.

> I told myself that, yeah, I'm a lesbian, but one thing neh, I'm like uhm…I don't talk about that stuff here at home, you see. The reason why…they know that neh, but they don't really like that neh. But since like it's my choice, so they've got no choice, you see. They have to like understand, but they don't like it. That's why I said we mustn't do it (the interview) here inside. (Lindiwe)

A study by Moran and Skeggs (2004) shows that, for some of their participants, the home is perceived to be a private space where a person is comfortable and unrestrained. It is located as a site of safety. However, for others, such as Lindiwe, home, i.e. her parental dwelling, is associated with insecurity and discomfort. Lindiwe is not encouraged to 'be herself' in her parents' house because they "don't really like that" - the fact that she is a lesbian. Moran and Skeggs also found this in their study. They call the parental home the 'straight' home, adding that "the negative aspects of home are made apparent through contrast with the home of choice." (2004: 89). This also demonstrates that, within an already perceived private space, a person can also have their *own* space.

> Before I sleep at the back neh, I was sleeping inside (her parents' house) so I couldn't bring my girls to sleep over here…But as time goes, I'm just open about it…that's why I've got my private property now. I'm sleeping at the back, you see, so that I can do my stuff. (Lindiwe)

The meaning attached to private space (like the home), however, can shift as there is also a degree of self-surveillance in one's own private space. This depends on who enters into it (Valentine, 1993). Therefore, as lesbian women move in and out of public and private space, they are aware of their environment and the 'occupants' in their surroundings. They

are selective of various places because of their sexual orientation. Controlling their behaviour is a manifestation of their agency in managing their own safety.

Conclusion

The way these women experience their surroundings depends on the embodied perception and interpretation of a place. In medical anthropology, it is generally accepted that embodiment is a holistic process that does not reduce the body and mind to separate entities (see, e.g., Jaye 2004). Thus environments are experienced through bodies and this interaction influences the individual's responses. Therefore, my participants emphasised that they can surmise when a place is safe or not by the feelings they are subjected to.

Having to deal with prejudice and homophobic attitudes in their daily lives, certain public spaces have considerable importance for these women when it comes to exploring their sexual orientation. They desire places where they feel safe and comfortable to just 'be themselves' without having to be subjected to judgemental stares. In order to achieve this, some of them frequent Cape Town's 'gay village', while others create their own safe spaces within their immediate locations. They make 'territorial' claims over public space, transforming it to a 'private', exclusive gay-identified site. Since many of these locations are also frequented by heterosexual men and women, the meanings they ascribe to these social establishments are constantly shifting. The connection between individual, setting and social agents is continually modified and behaviour is often adjusted to enhance safety and comfort. This demonstrates that the women in my study play an active part in ensuring their own security and well-being, hence displaying their agency. The next chapter will explore, using their narratives, how my participants manage their safety.

CHAPTER 5: TAKING CONTROL OF PERSONAL SAFETY

Introduction

This chapter argues that lesbian women are not passive in their everyday lives and experiences of spaces, but take active control over their own safety. They employ various safety tactics and display a great deal of agency in the way they manage their daily lives in the light of potential harassment and intimidation. This is demonstrated by exploring their narratives concerning ways they protect themselves from harm, and in so doing, maintain their well-being.

Negotiating Sexual Identity

Generally, it is often assumed that everyone is heterosexual and this assumption is made manifest in everyday discourse. Valentine (1993) argues that lesbian women often 'pass' as heterosexual - both because of this assumption, as well as the stereotypical imagery of lesbians as butch. Thus, they decide when and where to disclose their sexual orientation. Valentine found that this decision is made on the basis of people's possible reactions to an alternative, (non-hetero) sexuality.

> My grandparents still don't know I'm gay. I don't wanna be the cause of their heart attacks. They've met her and everything. They think she's a friend who stayed over the weekend … It's unnecessary for them to know … I just pretend not to have a boyfriend…when they ask… And I told her (her grandmother) "You know what, I don't have time for a boyfriend these days because I'm studying and I'm working. I'm just…I'm not interested right now." (Nadia)

According to Valentine (1993), lesbians can create different sexual identities: they can construct an;

> "asexual identity by denying any sexual relationships; ambiguous identities by avoiding talking about a personal life; or fictional heterosexual identities by, for example, making up a male partner's name or by changing the pronoun she to he." (1993: 242).

From the above I want to postulate that Nadia creates, or 'claims' an asexual identity, which she presents to her grandparents. This she does by intimating that she does not "have time for a boyfriend" and that she is "not interested" in a relationship.

When Valentine talks about the "fictional heterosexual identity" (1993: 242), it is exactly the identity which Shelley portrays, when she was asked by her grandmother whether she had a boyfriend:

> With my gran...I described her (meaning Nadia) but I just said she was a boy. (Shelley)

Valentine (1993) asserts that, because the dominant sexuality is heterosexual, the interactions that occur between men and women *with* sexual identities, and *not* between asexual individuals, take on a heterosexual discourse (1993: 241). When confronted with this everyday, normalised discourse, some lesbians negotiate their sexual identity by 'playing along' and 'pretending' to be heterosexual. Because she was assumed to be a heterosexual woman, Nadia gives an example of when she 'played along' and 'acted' as if she was straight:

> I was in the bank in N1 City last week to sort some stuff out. I was standing in the queue. I was by myself...and this old oomie...he was probably around 70...was standing behind me...and I could see that he was moving closer and closer, but not into my space...and I hear him say: "Yoh, you have beautiful eyes." And I turn around and say: "Thank you, Oom". And he says: "Does your boyfriend tell you that?" And I said: "Yes, all the time." (Nadia)

Nadia's example above of the normalised heterosexual discourse illustrates that no space is asexual. Rather, sexuality is present in all places as well as in everyday dialogue. The fact that the man in Nadia's narrative simply assumed that she was a straight woman and talked to her as such - asking her about her "boyfriend" - is a demonstration of this.

> If I go to a straight bar, I ... you can't come out to everyone. When a guy hits on you, you can't just tell him "no, I'm gay" because...I mean...obviously, I think you've heard about all the gay-bashing going on in Joburg, in Cape Town...you can't come out to everyone

because you don't want to risk that. So you've gotta be polite and say "No, I'm not interested, sorry". (Theresa)

By not saying "no, I'm gay" and rather opting for "no, I'm not interested, sorry", Theresa consciously negotiates her sexual identity and moves into an assumed 'position' of heterosexual femininity. She mentions gay-bashings, which suggests that fear triggers her 'taking on' of a heterosexual identity.

When I read Valentine's (1993) article it occurred to me that during this research process, I also negotiated my sexual identity all the time. I attended the discussion groups at the Rainbow Society at UCT, a student organisation that deals mainly with LGBT issues. Even though the group was open to anyone (irrespective of sexuality) who wanted to attend, the predominant group was non-heterosexual and I felt like I was invading their space. I felt out of place in that environment, as if I did not belong.

When I introduced myself at a meeting, my sexual orientation was not an important factor and no-one asked about it. I later realised that I was assumed to be a lesbian. But even after this realisation, I did not make my sexual identity explicit and, as a result 'passed', as Valentine (1993) puts it, as a lesbian.

Valentine says that:

> "…some lesbians appear to negotiate a sexual identity either by deliberately 'playing' a heterosexual role or by unconsciously 'fitting in', not admitting or representing their homosexuality and therefore effectively projecting a heterosexual identity through the way they present themselves physically to others." (1993: 241-242).

When I think how I was perceived, not just at the Rainbow Society, but in any gay and lesbian space, I realise that I was 'playing' a homosexual role by (un)consciously 'fitting in'. I did not reveal my heterosexuality and therefore, effectively projected a lesbian identity. For my participants, negotiating their sexual identity is not only about 'fitting in' or "passing" as heterosexual, but also serves as a way to avoid possible threat and to manage and take control over their own safety.

Managing Personal Safety

Lesbians are not only identified as sexually different from the "norm", but they are first and foremost women and are recognised as such - the lesbian body cannot be separated from the female body. The female body is susceptible to harassment, sexual assault and violence, etc., and women are warned to take certain precautionary measures to avoid falling prey to it. This potential of threat and unpleasantness heightens the already existing apprehension of women.

Fear is a powerful emotion which controls the behaviour of individuals. This is caused by the perception of potential danger, either imagined, or actual. People do, or refrain from doing certain things because of trepidation. There are many factors that influence moments of fear: the time of day, empty spaces, the number of people around as well as their appearance, the physical appearance of certain places, etc. Women are often warned not to walk, or drive alone at night in order to keep safe. Danger is thus associated with nightfall, with the darkness, with what cannot be seen, increasing the perception that women are even more vulnerable at this time of day.

Brenda spoke about her lesbian friend who always walked on her own at night.

> I told her "No man, you must stop walking at night, it's not safe... You're gonna put your life in danger". I told her "Look here, if you walk at night, there's a fifty/fifty chance that you would...you could get raped because of the way you are". (Brenda)

> ...I'm more scared going out at night...by myself...walking down a dark street...because I'm a woman, not because I'm a lesbian...because I'm by myself. I'm more scared as a woman than I am being gay. It's every woman's concern. I'm scared of being raped, not because I'm gay...because I'm a woman. (Nadia)

From the above it is apparent that the time of day, and being alone, are important factors that influence personal safety, especially for women. Brenda's warning to her friend to "stop walking at night, it's not safe", is an illustration that night-time itself is seen as dangerous. Brenda also mentions that the level of vulnerability might be higher since her

67

friend is a lesbian. Nadia, on the other hand feels vulnerable because she is a woman. She identifies the factors that intensify this feeling of physical exposure: being "out at night", being by herself, and "walking down a dark street".

Women learn to adjust their behaviour at various times of day, according to the perceived risk of threat or because of fear that something might happen. Often behaviour modifications and actions are done instinctively. Emotions, specifically fear in this case, cause females to alter their behaviour to ensure their security. They utilise safety strategies and are active negotiators in their own well-being. Therefore, emotions are a source of social agency which triggers the individual to act in a particular way (Lyon & Barbalet, 1994).
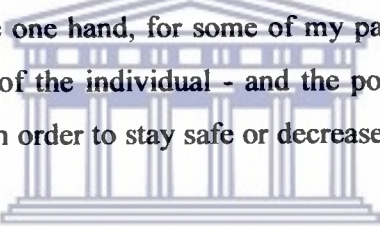
While frequenting the 'gay village', I was overcome by a sense of fear when I went to the lesbian club. Although the particular street and surrounding area is known as the 'gay village' - because there are many gay bars and clubs – I was still uneasy when walking to my car by myself. I always tried to park as close to the entrance of the club as possible and somewhere where the lighting was good. When I left the club and walked towards my car in the early hours of the next day (around 2am), I was fearful. My safety as a woman was not the reason for my fear (as always when I am out at night driving alone), but it was my safety as 'a perceived lesbian' that heightened my anxiety. I always thought: "What if someone is following me? What if someone jumps out of nowhere and attacks me? What if they drive behind me and try to force me off the road, or something?" All these questions and worries went through my head, not only because I am a woman, but also since a potential perpetrator might see me as a lesbian.

My level of fear of crime and aggression was actually much higher than my actual experience of violence. In fact, I never experienced any sort of harassment or violence while I frequented the 'gay village'. My apprehension was that a potential perpetrator may perceive me as a lesbian and harm me. My feeling of fear is reminiscent of an observation by Moran (1995) that "incidents of homophobic violence have been influenced by the perpetrator's perception of the visible signs of sexual orientation" (*cited in* Corteen 2002:

272). Such anxious thoughts occurred to me although I was in a gay-friendly environment - a known gay/lesbian-identified space where I was supposed to feel safe, especially since it was a space that was 'my own'. In other words, because I was perceived as a lesbian – someone who 'belongs' in that space – the perception was that I was on 'my turf'. I was supposed to feel secure; after all, I was in 'my territory', but I still felt vulnerable. If I was part of a group I may have been less fearful. Being alone increased my susceptibility to being attacked, as groups deter possible attackers. In the next section, my participants explore this notion of whether being alone or in a group determines their sense of safety.

Power and Safety in Numbers

The women interviewed gave different and contradictory views with regards to whether there is safety in numbers. On the one hand, for some of my participants, walking around alone heightens the vulnerability of the individual - and the potential for being harassed, threatened or attacked increases. In order to stay safe or decrease the potential for violence, they go out in groups.

> I find that the bottom line is: if you're a group of girls you can go anywhere you like, but if there's just one or two or three girls, you will always go to a gay club. A group of five to ten girls can make their own vibe, their own atmosphere at a straight club, or at Cubana's, or whatever. But if you're one or two, you're always gonna go to Beaulah because you'll feel safe. (Shelley)

According to Shelley a big group of lesbians can go to a straight club and create "their own atmosphere" there. This illustrates that space can also be claimed in a predominantly heterosexual location.

Day et al. (2003) also found that the bigger a group, the more empowered members feel: the group size decreases their "vulnerability to danger" (2003: 319). Their participants (82 undergraduate male students) consciously used the strategy of associating with a group to avoid conflict and confrontation in public spaces. Day et al. also cite different authors who reiterated that an individual's level of safety is increased when with a friend.

However, one of my participants, Theresa, said that walking around or going out in groups in public (heterosexual) spaces is perceived as risky, draws attention, increases visibility and thus amplifies the possibility of threat and danger. To stay safe and to some degree 'invisible' as lesbians, they do not walk around or go out in groups:

> ...the group of girls that I hang with is like...subconsciously we make sure that it is in a safe place, like at Beaulah, or a gay bar, or at somebody's house. Never...well, sometimes at a restaurant or something. It's never where you go into like, say... you all go into a taxi and then you drive through to town, and you start walking around as a group of lesbians...None of that. If it's that kind of situation, it'll be like two, three of us, and we're not overly dressed...It's not a conscious decision, and I only realised that now...that for some reason we've been like only going to certain places...we never walk as a group...during the day, and maybe Long Street. (Theresa)

Theresa is adamant that being in a group creates the possibility of danger and that is why she and her group of friends almost never go out in big groups, except if they meet at a gay bar. During the interview, however, it became apparent that she was never aware that they alter their behaviour in this way because she "only realised that" then. Occasionally they adjust their behaviour automatically, depending on where they are and what their previous experiences of the place are. Above, Theresa indicates that when they go out, it is "two, three" of them and that they do not get "overly dressed...it's not a conscious decision", therefore it is something that is done unconsciously.

Bourdieu argues that the unconscious "...is never anything other than the forgetting of history which history itself produces by realising the objective structures that it generates in the quasi-natures of *habitus*" (1990: 56). Therefore, I maintain that what Theresa and her friends do when they go out, is motivated by history. Their past experiences, those buried in their unconscious, become alive or active again in the present. This makes their embodied response to the social world *seem* almost natural. I also argue that their habituated behaviour is not only influenced by direct contact and experience of the social world, but also by the lived experiences of others in society. This includes stories heard about others' experiences [which have, in the case of this study, negative connotations (crime and violence) attached to it]. Even though, as Bourdieu states, the habitus is a

product of history and will always produce history, it "ensures the active presence of past experiences" (1990: 54).

Below Brenda indicated that it is safer for herself and her friends if they move around in groups, especially when they have to walk to a party, etc. And if someone is alone, it is sensible to take a taxi. Brenda articulates that walking alone creates potential danger and causing the lesbian to be even more susceptible to harassment or being attacked, especially at night, and in an area that is not 'friendly' to homosexuals.

> ...we're a group. We don't go as one person. If you go as one, take a taxi that's gonna drop you at the nearest house that you going to. But if we are a group, we go together. (Brenda)

From the above it is apparent that the notion of 'safety in groups' is perceived and experienced differentially, depending on the location (see also Sass, 2005). Shelley feels there is safety in a group - it gives lesbians the freedom and comfort to go anywhere, including straight clubs. However, if she is in a small group (four or less), the place where she feels safe is in a gay club - not a straight one.

When they are only two or three lesbians together, Theresa, on the other hand, experiences straight clubs or public (heterosexual) spaces as more secure. For her there is more danger and potential for threat when in a group (of lesbians). Theresa also mentions that groups are safer in (private) gay/lesbian places.

The participants in Corteen's (2002) study support the latter view as they also found that being in a group - or even socialising with your partner, other lesbians or gay men - is dangerous, and that in certain venues it is better to go alone. However, some of the literature on personal safety for women advises just the opposite: that women should avoid going out alone, especially when it is dark (Corteen, 2002). Some of my participants stated that when they are in a group, whether it is during the day or night time, they attract unwarranted attention from groups of men. The men also verbalise their opinions about lesbians.

71

Men's Perceptions of Lesbians

My participants spoke a great deal about the attitudes of some men towards lesbians: they call them names and accuse them of stealing 'their' women.

> ...some places they don't like, they don't dig lesbians or gay guys. They just don't like it at all. Some of them like think: "Oh, you're here to check out our girls", or "you come here for our guys", stuff like that. (Candice)

Lindiwe and Brenda said about comments from men:

> Yoh, all the time...They're always saying that we're taking their girls, you see...we must be beaten, all those stuff man, silly stuff, but I don't care what are they saying. (Lindiwe)

> They always talk about that, you see. That's the slogan they use...like the guys...in terms of talking to us. There's an area called Crossroads...it's that side (pointing her finger)...whenever we go there, I'm telling you, they would sit on a corner and then they would say "Yoh, *bafetu* (slang for 'guys')! Here's this lesbians! Take your chicks!" They would say "Hide your chicks, here come the lesbians!" They would say that... "Hide your chicks, *bafetu*, here come the lesbians!" (Brenda)

This kind of harassment is probably in response to the perceived threat to the men's masculinity. As mentioned earlier, some men see having sex with women as a confirmation of their own manliness. In this regard lesbians are viewed as being in competition with men for 'chicks'. Since some men have these attitudes towards lesbians, the participants were selective of their male friends.

Selecting Male Friends

Brenda said that she is very careful when choosing male friends and deciding who she goes out with. When choosing her friends, she feels safe when she is familiar with them. This illustrates that there is a potential danger in the unfamiliar.

> You see, when you hang out with boys you must pick the right boys to hang out with. You mustn't just hang around with like people who smoke weed, stuff like that, mandrax, watte watte (whatever). 'Cause when you hang out with those you can put yourself in trouble. (Brenda)

> Yeah, definitely, I choose. If I don't see you that you are… "No, this guy is very nice and he understands that I am this kind of person", so I'll go with him. (Sophie)

Not just as a lesbian but as a woman too, it is very important to select your friends, especially male friends. Brenda does not consider befriending men who use drugs because she associates this with risk and threat to her personal safety. Sophie expresses similar feelings about who she makes friends with and who she socialises with.

The Influence of Gay-Bashings: Zoliswa Nkonyana's Murder

The murder in 2006 in Khayelitsha, which prompted this research, had a significant impact on some of my participants. Several of them knew the victim, Ms Nkonyana, and live in similar townships. It was evident that gay-bashing and the reality of lesbian murders influenced their everyday lives.

> Hey, that thing scared me, because ever since then I never went there. She was killed in Khayelitsha. I never went there and I don't think I ever will. I've got family there, but don't think I can go there anymore. That thing really scared me. Something like that never happened here in Gugs…but I also don't trust them, you see, because you don't know what the people are thinking, you see. So that thing scares me, you see. (Lindiwe)

Lindiwe's comment reveals the fear she experienced as a lesbian living in a township after the murder. She states that "something like that never happened here in Gugs, but I also don't trust them". In the aftermath of the murder, her awareness of her own surroundings, locality and people in her vicinity heightened.

> …I'm a bit more cautious. I used to be very careless about it (being open about her sexual identity). I didn't care like who knew and who didn't know, but I was scared. Because that's just the way I wanted to live my life. I wanted to be like free. As a matter of fact, you have

to be really cautious about where you go and…what time, especially…and who you come out with. (Theresa)

I was scared. I was very scared because I thought it might happen…I mustn't say "I thought"… It might happen anytime. I must be aware that it might happen. I still feel scared, even now, because you must count places that you can go mos…Must first think before I go somewhere… "is it right to go there?" (Sophie)

I don't even go to Khayelitsha. When there's parties at Khayelitsha, I must be sure there is a car that's picking me up here… and, if I'm there, I stay indoors all the way. I don't go out. The minute I'd go out…ha uh, I'm not open. It's like "something's gonna happen, something's gonna happen". It's better if I sit in one place…So I, for myself, I wouldn't go to Khayelitsha. Before this I did go to Khayelitsha a lot…and I've got family there. So if I go there, I have to like, you know, go with a car, but I don't go there 'cos my family stays in the same street, near the guy who killed Zoliswa. I wouldn't put my life in danger… (Brenda)

The everyday lives of these women were affected by Zoliswa's murder. It made them more aware of the potential dangers that exist because of their sexual orientation. The constant awareness that something terrible "might happen anytime" influences their state of wellness. In the next section they articulate what the notion of well-being means to them and how the social spaces they occupy influence their subjective well-being.

Notions of Well-Being

The concept of well-being is more than just physical wellness; it includes mental and social wellness too. I want to explore how my participants achieve and maintain well-being and what it means to them. Because I am aware that well-being signifies different things to various people, I let these young women express their understanding of this concept.

Well, well-being would mean that I can just live around other people comfortably as a lesbian…without being judged all the time. (Theresa)

When I asked Theresa about going to the 'gay village' and the impact it has on her well-being, she responded:

> I go there, and the moment…it's so weird, 'coz the moment I get into Green Point, I just feel this…comfort. I just get overcome by this comfort, and I'm like I know I can walk down this street here and I can be as gay as I want. It's just so comfortable for me being there. If I could I would be living in a flat in Green Point. That's how much I love that place. (Theresa)

> Well-being is like how you cope with it (being a lesbian). With being who you are. Or in relationships, like "Is this relationship healthy for me?" stuff like that. It's about being healthy and comfortable. I dunno, like, how does it make you feel. Are you more happy as a lesbian or being straight? That's well-being for me. (Candice)

> Well-being is that I'm safe in my area; I'm safe in where I go…my safety. If she's with me…I have to like put her first, you know. I have to take care of her first…then I'll take care of me after. (Brenda)

For these participants well-being involves different things. Even though they have various conceptualisations of well-being, the thoughts and experiences mentioned above are linked to the lived interactions within these lesbian locations, and to spaces. For my participants, well-being is about experiencing your surroundings "comfortably, without being judged". It is about 'just being' and feeling secure while 'doing' it. Candice said that well-being is also linked to coping with "who you are" and about being in healthy relationships. One participant said that it is not just about being comfortable, but it is also "about being healthy" and feeling "happy". For Brenda, on the other hand, well-being is not only about her feeling safe in her own area, as she mentions above, but it is also about knowing that she is providing safety to her partner, and protecting herself *and* her partner against potential danger.

Possibly, the areas where these women live do not provide this sense of well-being and they seek it from the lesbian spaces they occupy and create. With the violence occurring against homosexual individuals, lesbian/gay-identified spaces offer a safe place for them. These establishments help them cope with prejudice and encourage them to live their lives beyond

the hostility, thus maintaining a healthy well-being. Pritchard et al. (2002) found that gay and lesbian spaces were experienced as empowering places. Amidst the heterosexual hegemony, they have "emotional and psychological importance" (2002: 118) for these women.

During the interviews, unique themes arose with some of my participants, illustrating that the everyday experiences of being lesbian are diverse. Nadia alerted me to the fact that visibility is not simply about being seen – there are also disadvantages to being identified as a sexual 'other'.

Visibility of Lesbians and Lesbian Spaces: potential danger?

During my fieldwork I noticed (and some of my participants also mentioned) that the lesbian community is small and not very visible within Cape Town's 'gay village'. What I mean here is that my observation of the village was that the presence of the male gay population was much stronger than that of the lesbian population. Whenever I went to the gay clubs, the majority of patrons were men. Most of the time they were going from one bar to the next, walking in pairs or in bigger groups. There were not many women walking around. On the street, they were 'invisible'. Their absence was conspicuous. When I went to the women's bar, however, I found many women there. But compared to the establishment's capacity to accommodate more patrons, the venue was not even half-filled with women.

I wondered whether the presence of lesbian spaces created a sense of 'visibility' for lesbians. However, Nadia asked an interesting question about something I had not thought about:

> Nadia: Probably does, I mean it depends on who knows about it...probably everybody. I mean everybody knows Cape Town is one of the gay capitals of the world, so...that already is out there. Yeah...Uhm... do you mean like it can be potentially dangerous, or...is it inviting..?

> Me: You know, I wasn't actually thinking about it being potentially dangerous, but it's a good point.
>
> Nadia: Mm…it can be potentially dangerous, 'cos last year we had the police…uhm…raiding the whole gay strip every single weekend. The clubs had trading licences till four. They would come in and close the club at two. So we all felt that the police was ganging up on all the gay people. And suddenly, it just disappears. So I think something happened there…I don't know what… But yeah, I think it can be very uhm…it can be either bad, or good exposure, you know, having a gay club on the corner. It can go either way.

Nadia's comment that visibility can be potentially dangerous gives new meaning to this concept in my research. I had naively, only considered the ability to be seen as being open and 'out there' about sexual identity, forcing society to accept same-sex relationships and that it brings about empowerment. Nadia's question, however, made me consider this from a different perspective. The issue of being noticed or not is not as straightforward as I assumed. There are complex processes that come into play. Visibility, instead of conveying a message that lesbians are acknowledged and accepted, can actually make them vulnerable to increased harassment, threat and danger.

Skeggs (1999) also discusses the idea that creating public visibility of the gay population initiates attack. She argues that increasing visibility of gay identity, also amplifies the risk of potential danger as this jeopardises the "normalised" heterosexual public space (1999: 221). What Nadia stated above is supported by Skeggs' comment that: "The existence of a marked gay space may provide some measure of protection but it can never be guaranteed" (1999: 222). In other words, individuals may feel safe and protected in a gay space, but because it is a recognised gay space, the potential for danger equally exists and safety cannot be completely ensured.

Steinbugler (2005) also explores the concept of visibility among heterosexual and homosexual interracial couples. Some of the participants in her study want to be visible and be recognised as a couple. They achieve this by reducing the physical distance between their bodies and by publicly displaying affection. Steinbugler's study participants state that, since they are interracial couples, they are frequently not recognised as being together; thus

they are visually dislocated in public spaces (2005: 430). However, their level of visibility and invisibility changes, depending on their location and the people in that setting. Interracial couples are often stared at and subjected to hostile comments when they are visible - which creates and increases the risk of potential conflict. Steinbugler found that this is especially true for same-sex interracial couples. In some settings they are regularly compelled to decrease their visibility by increasing the physical distance between them and thus pretending to be friends. Space or distance between bodies can therefore be said to communicate important information to other social agents in the surroundings.

The Communication of Space: Brenda and Candice

Distance and space between bodies, bodily proximity, 'converse' and convey different 'messages' to those around it. When I first visited Brenda in Gugulethu, I was nervous because I was not familiar with my surroundings. However, in time, I felt more comfortable in Gugulethu; I became familiar with the area. But as soon as we moved into an unfamiliar space, I felt uneasy again. Whenever I came into an unknown area, I felt the need to protect myself against possible danger, actual or imagined. One day, I accompanied Brenda and her father - he needed to withdraw money to buy a few things in the nearby mall. Brenda and I strolled slightly behind her father, talking and laughing. We walked alongside each other, but I realised, however, that I was consciously *not* walking too close to her. I did not want people to get the 'wrong' impression about us and to think of us as a couple. I imagined that, when people in the mall looked at her, they would 'know' she is a lesbian from her appearance. She presents a stereotypical lesbian image. Her hair is very short, resembling a boy's hair cut. She wore big, baggy pants and a loose-fitting top. The style of her shoes was heavy and thick, and she has a 'manly' walk. I surmised that people would therefore assume I was her partner and gay as well.

Since we were in close proximity to the township, the majority of people in the mall were Black. As some of my participants mentioned earlier, same-sex relationships were not really accepted in townships, in fact, it was dangerous. The appearance of some of the people in that mall seemed "shady" - as referred to by Sass's (2005) participants – which

made me very distrustful of them. The place itself did not reassure me that we would be safe if 'we' were identified as lesbians. This did not seem to bother Brenda, as she was very relaxed in her conversation with me.

The interviews with Candice were conducted at her house, in her room. With the first meeting that took place there, she said I could sit on her bed, which I did. I left enough space for her to sit next to me. Although it was not far away, she opted to sit on the opposite side of the room. I did not say anything then, but later that night we had a conversation on mxit (cell phone chatting) and I asked her about it. This means of mobile chatting, however, has its own 'language' and ways of articulation. When I asked Candice why she chose to sit so far from me during our interview, she responded:

> Candice: I didnt wna make u fl uncomfortable gtin 2 close
> Me: Really? Y wud I b uncomfortable
> Candice: Duno mybe coz a lot of pple say i flirt wit my eyes nd my bodylanguage, tho i do it unintentionaly

Candice assumed that I would be ill at ease if she sat too close to me. She thought I might interpret her closeness as flirting and she did not want that. Perhaps, what heightened this perception for her was the fact that we did not sit in the livingroom, but in her bedroom. Arguably, my gender might have had an impact on the initial interview process; therefore she created that space between us. Because she knew I am a heterosexual woman, she presumed I would respond in a certain (uneasy) way. Possibly, she was the one who felt uncomfortable that I might misconstrue her 'unintentional' flirting with her 'bodylanguage'. As Hall states: "the flow and shift of distance between people as they interact with each other is part and parcel of the communication process." (1959: 204).

Brenda often raised the issue of curative/corrective rape of lesbians as a concern. She never experienced this sort of violence herself, but her lesbian friend was gang-raped in order to 'cure' her. Brenda was threatened in that way, but ensured her safety by using a counter-threat of violence against the potential perpetrator.

Curative/Corrective Rape

There is this belief among some people that homosexuality is a sickness, and the only way to "cure" this illness is by having sexual intercourse with the opposite sex. Such a sexual encounter, because it probably happens against the homosexual individual's will, is seen as curative or corrective rape. The belief is that, if the homosexual person has sexual intercourse with someone from the opposite sex, he or she will be 'turned' straight.

In this regard, Brenda told me about a friend of hers, also a lesbian, who was gang- raped by the 'friends' she socialised with. According to Brenda and local rumours, the men raped this young woman to 'change' her.

> …she smokes with these guys…so this guy was like "You know what, in the end you a girl". I don't know what came to this guy, you know…and then they gang raped her…all of those boys…they raped her… And then they were like thinking maybe she could change after raping her, but now she's still the same person… (Brenda)

 A young man also approached Brenda and told her that she must sleep with him - then she will "turn and be straight". The threat of being sexually harassed or raped does not only exist for her as a lesbian, but also as a woman. I want to argue that for lesbians the fear of rape is doubled. The strategy Brenda uses to safeguard against such intimidation is a counter-threat of violence. She warns the potential perpetrator that she can and will get someone to harm him.

The Threat of Violence as Safety Strategy

Brenda utilises the threat of violence to keep herself safe. She makes it clear that a few men (gangsters, her uncles, etc.) whom she knows in the area can inflict physical pain on someone who threatens her. The threat of having something violent done to the potential offender is used as a safety strategy. She does this because she says police have a passive attitude concerning homophobic crimes.

Brenda met a young man at a party at her uncle's house. The man was romantically attracted to her but she told him that she was not interested. She said that she is a lesbian and has a girlfriend. The man continued to pursue her and implied that he will use force if necessary 'take' her.

I told him "Look here, I'm a lesbian. So what you gonna do after that?" "No, I'm not gonna give up. Even if I see you on the road, I'm gonna talk to you". …And really, when I see him…I'm lucky 'cause when I see him, maybe I'm here, here by the gate or standing here, not there on the corner, you see. And then he said the other day "Look here, if I see you I'm gonna grab you". "And then what you gonna do after you grab me?" He said "Nah, we gonna go and sleep". I said "You mad! Now the thing is, you do that to me, you're gonna die…If you ever even touch me, you're gonna die, dude". I said "Look here, I've got friends and like I've got killer friends … and my uncles would smash you". He thought I was joking…then I told my uncle. He was mad! He said "I'm gonna *moer* (beat) him". I said "No man, don't *moer* him…just…If something wrong happened…if I got raped, you must know that it's him". And then, he bumped into him…they spoke and stuff like that. Then the following day I saw him. He said "Come here…you're uncle is like, he's mad. He threatened me; if I ever did something to you, if anything happened to you, if you got raped, then it's me". Yeah, that's what you're gonna get. If you touch me, you're gonna be *moerd*". (Brenda)
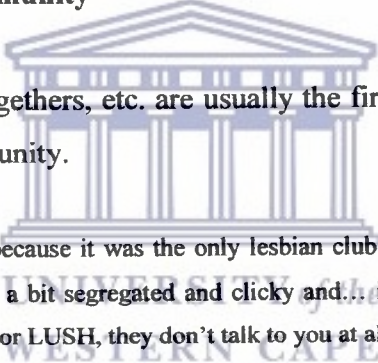
Later in the interview she said:

I've got these guy friends, you see…so yeah, if you do something…you're gonna be *moerd*. 'Cause you do something to me I'll go to my friends and then we'll talk. I'll tell them "Look here, this is what happened…and…what you gonna do about that?" And they would say "Did it happen to you?"…So if something happens to me…Yeah, you can talk and talk and talk, but the thing is, I'm gonna talk back. But, if you start violence, you're gonna get violence back…'cause I'm not gonna go to the cops. I know cops don't, you know, take you seriously when you're a lesbian or gay. Your allegations like disappears, just like that, I don't know why. So it's better if you take it into your own hands, you see, when you're a lesbian. That's why you have to have friends that are like skollies (gangsters), known skollies, big skollies, you see, then you can be free. 'Cause I can walk there now, nothing would happen. 'Cause if they would do something, I'd know…they know… (Brenda)

The above narrative is an illustration of how Brenda uses the warning of violence as a safety strategy. Brenda's distrust of the police stems from her perception that they are supposed to uphold the law and the constitutional rights of civilians. Yet the police, she surmises, cannot be depended on to keep this marginalised, minority group of lesbians safe because their "allegations disappear".

Theresa often referred to a "lesbian community" and believed in the necessity to meet other lesbians by networking and increasing her circle of friends. She moved from Botswana to Cape Town a few years ago to live openly as a lesbian. She went to lesbian bars as often as she could to meet and interact with other lesbians.

Networking in the Lesbian Community

Lesbian bars/clubs, parties, get-togethers, etc. are usually the first point of interaction with the rest of the small lesbian community.

> Well, I started going because it was the only lesbian club I knew about. And then, in the beginning I felt it was a bit segregated and clicky and... it wasn't like a normal... When you go to Beaulah Bar or LUSH, they don't talk to you at all, which was strange. And then I was like; maybe if I start showing my face there a couple of times, then I will actually meet other lesbians because that was my aim. I wanted to meet other lesbians...from Cape Town who... yeah, who had other lesbian friends, and I could just be around lesbians because it started getting frustrating for me being around straights... (Theresa)

Later she says:

> ...What I've realised, especially with the lesbians who go to Beaulah, my White friends, we either meet at Beaulah, or at birthday parties or house parties where you can go and meet with other lesbians. So, it's a small community and the only way that you can like really socialise is by knowing people. It's like a network. In straight bars it's not a network, you just go with your friends, they hang out and have fun. At Beaulah Bar it's a network. And it gets bigger and bigger, but at the same time it's small. Like, if there's a new lesbian introduced into the crowd then she meets everyone through association. (Theresa)

Pritchard et al. (2002) state that the women they interviewed in their research in Manchester's 'gay village' expressed a need for their own space to validate their sense of belonging in the village. They claim that it will promote the expansion of social networks for lesbians in an antagonistic heterosexual environment. Being a small community, it could be that the patrons of the lesbian club are cautious of strangers. They protect themselves against 'new invaders'. The fact that nobody talked to Theresa and that she experienced the club as "segregated and clicky" illustrates that she was possibly seen as someone to be watchful of: as an outsider. When the lesbian patrons saw her for the first time, they were not too responsive, but as she became a regular patron they became friendlier.

Initially, I had a similar experience when I visited the club. With the exception of the manager, Nadia (who worked at the door) and Shelley, nobody attempted to speak to me. I noticed that everyone who came there seemed to know everyone else, or either had a group they joined. I thought they could see that I did not 'belong' in that space. But, the more I went there, the friendlier women became and the more people I met. I became familiar to the place and the patrons, and they to me. Somehow, and to a certain extent, it slowly became my place too.

Avoiding Going to Township bars with Lesbian Friends

In order to remain safe and to manage their personal safety, my participants sometimes avoid certain people or places. This depends on previous experience, or on what was heard about those particular people and places. In this way Theresa perceived a pub/restaurant in Gugulethu as possibly dangerous if her sexual orientation was revealed. However, she has a 'way', a strategy, to reduce the possibility of her sexual orientation being known, thereby decreasing potential harassment.

> …when we go to Mzoli's like, for a braai or something. …when I do go there, I make sure I'm not with my gay friends. I go with my straight friends. …But also, as a lesbian it's very difficult to go…it's just safer to stay in zones where you know you won't feel threatened. (Theresa)

When I asked Theresa why she only goes to Mzoli's with her straight friends, this is what she said:

> Well firstly, it's a huge crowd at Mzoli's and, as it is, when I go with my friends, who are mostly female, when we get there we already have like funny comments thrown at us, or whatever, because we're women. Now, if you already have to deal with the fact that you're a woman when you go there… You're a Black woman and when you get there, just because you have like tight jeans on, people assume that you're looking for a man or something… Just traditional ways of thinking that are in that place, which I don't agree with. Already I have to like deal with that, now I don't want to have to deal with the fact that I'm a Black lesbian when I get there: I'd rather not. And if I have the option, why not. (Theresa)

Mzoli's (above) is quite similar to Maphindi's mentioned and described earlier. At Mzoli's the crowd is much bigger, as Theresa mentioned above. Mzoli's is quite upmarket and the patrons park their expensive cars outside. Mzoli's has a bar and alcohol can be bought on the premises. Sundays are also the best time to go, but to secure a table, patrons have to be there early, around 1 o'clock, as this place gets packed with people. When I went there it was a late Sunday afternoon and all the tables were already taken. The queue for the meat was very long.

There were a few homosexual males in Mzoli's, but they seemed unthreatened by the large crowd. The men were quite effeminate and some of them met up with friends, and others showed up with people who seemed to be their partners. I was with Brenda and her partner, and noticed that they were uncomfortable to be there. If I had not known them, I would never have guessed that they were together as a couple. They kept a physical distance from each other. This was on the same day we went to Maphindi's. The change I noticed in their behaviour as we moved from Mzoli's to Maphindi's was quite remarkable. I immediately noticed that at Maphindi's they felt 'at home'. Brenda and her girlfriend, like Theresa above, were very careful of displaying their sexual preferences in this space. In Mzoli's they were both females and thus subject to the gaze of heterosexual males, and lesbians, a sexual 'other'. Unlike in Maphindi's they did not in any way signal that they were a couple.

84

Theresa's avoidance of going to a township bar with her lesbian friends is a tactic to negotiate her sexual identity. She does not 'expose' her homosexuality when she is in that environment. Theresa's actions are illustrative of her awareness of potential violence or harassment. Corteen (2002: 260) cites Mason's research which demonstrates that the gay/lesbian population "are aware of potential violence due to being visible" as a non-heterosexual person. Her avoidance of frequenting township bars with her lesbian friends is a way for Theresa to remain 'invisible' as a lesbian woman. By so doing, she evades confrontation. Stanko and Curry (1997) argue that fear of homophobic violence is closely linked to fear of being visible, as visibility may potentially lead to harassment, threat and aggression (*cited in* Corteen 2002: 273). With her research, Corteen also found that it is the desire to be invisible, rather than "pass as heterosexual" (2002: 275) that prevents her participants from going around with friends who may be noticed as gay or lesbian.

Conclusion

Since my participants are viewed by society as sexual 'others' they are constantly subjected to discriminatory views about their sexual orientation. Some of them deal with intolerance on a daily basis and because of this, negotiate their sexual identities regularly. When they feel threatened, they utilise certain safety measures, or adjust their behaviour to ensure their avoidance of hostility and confrontation. Thus, my participants choose when and where to disclose their sexual orientation. The fact that they take active control over their personal safety by the tactics they use, is illustrative of their agency. They are not passive 'bystanders' when it comes to their well-being, but do what is necessary, in their everyday lives, to make sure they stay safe. Although common themes were discussed, the chapter also explored various issues that were prominent during the interviews with participants, about their unique experiences of being lesbian.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Cape Town, one of the 'gay capitals' of the world has experienced a brutal murder in 2006, where a young woman was killed in her own neighbourhood because she identified herself as a lesbian. This thesis explored the living experiences of lesbians in social spaces and the meanings they attach to these spaces. The seven young women whose ages ranged from 18 to 26 were recruited differently from various social spaces, including homosexual identified spaces like bars, clubs, pubs, etc., soccer clubs, and some heard about my research and expressed interest and willingness to assist.

The experiences of spaces are an important aspect of their everyday lives. My participants constantly move in and out of different spaces and the way they experience these various places has an impact on their actions and social relations within those spaces, which in turn impacts on their well-being. Scholarship suggests that the spaces experienced on a daily basis are not asexual spaces, but that they are assumed to be "naturally" heterosexual (Valentine, 1996). This is evident within everyday discourse between sexual beings: males and females. Normative (hetero) sexuality and affection in public spaces are so taken for granted that the 'visible is invisible'. However, as soon as same-sex affection is displayed in public, sexuality becomes something that should be reserved for the bedroom and not flaunted for everyone to see. This visibility is perceived as a threat to the existence of what is 'normal'.

The data taken from the narratives of the women in this study is an illustration of how everyday space is experienced and how social agents and social relations within a given environment influence their behaviours. They control or adjust their behaviours according to the social contexts they are in, and their perception and interpretation of that context influences how they behave. Consequently, they either appear invisible or render themselves as heterosexual in order to avoid the possibility of threat. For the purpose of safety and comfort, they frequent homosexual-identified spaces, or create their own spaces where they can just 'be themselves'. However, it is mentioned that they do experience the

86

shifting meaning of places and that the same place can have different connotations depending on who is in that particular place at a specific time.

Those who frequent lesbian/gay-identified spaces, or who create their own spaces have mentioned that these places render feelings of safety and comfort, and that they give them a sense of freedom even in the presence of strangers. They get a feeling of belonging when they are in these places because it is an environment where the other patrons are similar to them (in terms of sexual orientation). They have expressed no concerns about showing affection to their partners or being judged when they do.

Since they are first and foremost identified as women, some have articulated their fear as members of both categories: woman and lesbian. Thus, the fact that they are gendered 'other' and sexual 'other' (and some racial 'other'), increase their vulnerability to potential harm. The thesis explored the fact that these lesbian women are not only subjected to fear of violence and crime; but that they take action in response to violence and manage their own safety. Consequently, the safety strategies they utilise to keep themselves safe and to live beyond the everyday threat of potential harassment are a demonstration of their agency.

These women are also very selective when it comes to choosing their male friends and have a heightened awareness of whom they go out with. They felt Zoliswa's murder proved that nobody can be easily trusted because one cannot always be sure about what others are thinking. My participants have a heightened awareness of their surroundings in general. Even though they share similar views on some issues, their opinions about whether it is safe or unsafe to go out in groups differed. Some felt that being in a group is a method of protection which discourages potential perpetrators, and others felt that being part of a group increases visibility which in turn increases the threat of conflict.

From this study it is evident that the way these women manage their safety, and going to places that allow the free expression of non-heterosexuality without judgement, has a positive impact on their well-being. They expressed feelings of comfort, happiness, security, etc. when they experience these spaces. Therefore, the meanings of places should

not be taken for granted to be the same for everyone. Individuals experience differently. Social spaces for these young women are places where they can just be; representing comfort, safety and freedom.

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