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# Whose Gay Town is Cape Town? An Examination of Cape Town's Gay Village and the Production of a Queer White Patriarchy.

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WHOSE GAY TOWN IS CAPE TOWN?  
AN EXAMINATION OF CAPE TOWN'S GAY VILLAGE AND THE PRODUCTION OF A  
QUEER WHITE PATRIARCHY

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for South Africa; Multiculturalism and  
Human Rights.  
School for International Training, Cape Town: Spring 2012

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## Abstract

My ISP works to illuminate the diversity of LGBTQI experiences and lives in Cape Town. I do this through discussing the privilege necessary to “come out” in Cape Town and, subsequently, have access to The Pink Village, Cape Town’s gay district. By bringing in theory on “coming out” as a white experience and the queer movement as re-centering white normativity, I work to *openly* discuss how a history of exclusion has lived on in Cape Town’s gay district and pushed the more marginalized gay communities out of the city center. Through academic research, participant observation in both the gay village and in the townships, and five informal interviews with South Africans who identify as LGBTQI, I work to reveal how queer spaces are both places of inclusion and exclusion on the basis of race, religion, gender identity, etc. My conclusion is that white gay men, unlike black or coloured queer South Africans (especially lesbians), are able to utilize pre-existing racist and misogynistic structures to gain greater access and acceptance in Cape Town. Subsequently, queer identified black or coloured South Africans, especially women, are made more marginalized by the spaces and communities that are supposed to accept them. This is largely a result of a long history of apartheid in South Africa that has left the country with many questions and issues surrounding equal rights, access, and (in)visibility in Cape Town’s city center.

## Forward

On April 7<sup>th</sup> 2012 I made my way to Old Biscuit Mill in Woodstock, South Africa with some friends. We walked from where the mini bus left us to the market and I was instantly struck by the contrast between the two places (not to mention that a mini bus was not the means of transportation for most people at the market). I moved into the center of the market and noticed that the atmosphere and peoples occupying the market were very familiar. As I looked around I noticed queer people all around me, women holding hands, men intertwining legs, and people, regardless of gender identity, performing gender alternatively. Standing there, at Old Biscuit Mill, I thought to myself, I had finally found “the gays!” There they were amongst the vegan sandals, gourmet cheeses, and little boutiques. Once again I was met with the reality that within an almost all white middle to upper class environment I had found the largest and most concentrated population of queer identified people since being in South Africa. This experience served as a great starting place for the following month of research focusing on the privilege needed to be “openly” queer in Cape Town. Who can come out, who can occupy queer space, and, ultimately, whose gay town is Cape Town became the questions on which my research took form and which continually drive my passion and interest in queer “out” identity in Cape Town.

## Introduction

Today, as Africa's gay capital, Cape Town, South Africa, is home to a vibrant and carnival like "Pride" week, De Waterkant (gay district), and gay nightlife, which seems to uproot the myth that homosexuality is distinctly un-African. While not all parts of South Africa are coined the "Gay Town," South Africa, as a country, is the first to pass a constitution with an anti-discrimination clause on the basis of sexual orientation. South Africa is a leading country in the acceptance of gay rights allowing same-sex marriage and LGBTQI individuals to serve openly in the military. However, underneath the guise of progressiveness lies a much different reality. The incidents of corrective rape in South Africa and the whiteness which paints Cape Town's gay scene, bring to question: Whose gay town is Cape Town?

These hidden realities are what bring me to study LGBTQI rights and visibility. I argue that even under the new democracy, where all people regardless of gender, sexual orientation, or race have the same rights, only a privileged few can access and enjoy being gay in Cape Town. Moreover, I assert that "coming out" has manifested itself as a male, urban, and middle to upper class privilege in Cape Town that continues the history of exclusion and separation, which controlled this nation prior to 1994. I study, more specifically, the ways in which white male privilege has been transferred and I examine, closely, queer spaces. By focusing my research on geography, and the "marketed" queer spaces, I look at how and by whom these spaces are occupied. The objectives of this study are to enter into a discussion about the simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of people based on gender identity and race in Cape Town's gay village and to demonstrate the transferable nature of



privilege by examining white gay men in Cape Town in contrast to other LGBTQI peoples. Ultimately, I argue for the recognition of a plurality of LGBTQI communities that will better represent the diversity of the city.

After a look at the literature and theory surrounding these topics, I move into an analysis of my participant observation and interviews. I structure my analysis of my primary sources through a second wave theoretical framework in which I argue for the need to dismantle privilege and oppression non-hierarchically. The body of this paper is centered on four themes. The first section is focused on “coming out.” This section asks the questions of who can come out and who is out in Cape Town’s gay district by analyzing the stories told to me by my interviewees. Moving from talking specifically about “coming out,” I discuss more broadly visibility and invisibility in Cape Town’s Pink Village. This section discusses constructions of identity within these queer spaces and events such as “Pride,” which fail to highlight the wide variety of people who identify as LGBTQI in Cape Town. I then move into a closer examination of my two sites of study – Mzoli’s Place and the Pink Village – focusing, specifically, on how the spaces operate within a heterosexual framework. I discuss both the policing of LGBTQI identities and the production and normalizing of queer desire. Finally, I discuss intersectionality and, more specifically, how the intersections of race, class, gender identity, and gayness perpetuate the marginalization of certain LGBTQI communities and allow for the creation of, what Heidi Nast calls, a queer white patriarchy in Cape Town.

## Limitations

Although my research allowed me the time to talk with individuals who identify as LGBTQI in Cape Town, travel to queer spaces in Cape Town and in the townships, and do extensive research, the four week time constraint did not allow for the number of interviews or site visits that I would have liked. The more people I talked to about my research the more names I got of other people I should or could contact. Unfortunately, given the time constraints some people were away for this month or simply unable to meet until after the ISP submission deadline.

Another limitation of my research is that although I was studying the invisibility of certain LGBTQI communities, I could only gain access to people that consider themselves “out.” My ability to gain access to communities that are either intentionally or against their will made to be “closeted,” concealed, or invisible would have taken a much longer period of time in order to build trust between myself and them. However, the people that I did interview were incredibly valuable for my research because they were people that have experienced discrimination based on their sexual orientation, race, religion, and gender identity. Since I went through organizations to reach people, I was able to talk to people who are comfortable and willing to talk about discrimination, marginalization, and the intersections of their identities.

Finally, I would have benefited from resources that I did not have access to as a student not affiliated with any of Cape Town’s colleges or universities. Thanks to my advisor, I was able to gain access to certain articles and books that are central to my argument. With a longer time frame I would hope to have contextualized my

findings more and to devote more time and space to theory, which I believe is at the center of my argument.

## Literature Review

Today, the LGBTQI movement and the question of LGBTQI rights are at the center of politics around the world. From the United States and the slow but steady legalization of same-sex marriage, to Uganda and the murders of LGBTQI individuals, queer rights are at the forefront of debate. The international debates are not irrelevant to the debates happening in South Africa. Questions of space and visibility are pertinent to the lives of LGBTQI peoples around the world. As American theorists such as Judith Butler have discussed for LGBTQI individuals their lives are a continual process of “coming out” (Butler, 1990). Further, she argues that “coming out” sets up a dichotomy between “in and out” that in the end essentializes the gay, “out,” identity (Butler, 1990). Her point is to demonstrate how “coming out” fails to offer queer individuals that which it pretends it does – inclusion, recognition, and, at times, even love. Michael Warner discusses how queer children raised in heterosexual families are most often assumed heterosexual and then through sexual shaming once again “closeted” (Warner, 1999: 8). Through discussing the process of “re-closeting” an individual, Warner demonstrates the ways in which heteronormative society works to contain and exclude homosexual individuals unless they are willing to put on a heterosexual façade (i.e. remaining in “the closet”).

Therefore, one should understand “coming out” as a privilege felt and lived by those in the most privileged positions within their marginalized homosexual identity (i.e. white gay men). As Butler indicates, queer “has marked a predominantly white movement” and has failed to “fully [address] the ways in

which 'queer' plays – or fails to play – within non-white communities” (Butler, 1993: 228). Queer, in this sense, is not discussing gay or lesbian identities, but rather a movement – the queer movement – that is, at its basis, a movement to disrupt normativity. Butler’s assertion, that queer “has marked a predominantly white movement,” addresses the ways in which sexuality and not race has become the primary focus of the queer movement (228). In doing this the queer movement has failed to recognize, time and time again, the need to destabilize heteronormativity alongside white-normativity.

These theorists and debates are central to the issues at hand in Cape Town, South Africa. Since 1994 and South Africa’s turn toward democracy, Cape Town now appears to be inclusive of people regardless of sexual orientation. However, as Heidi Nast discusses,

[f]rom the lucrative West End in Vancouver and the Castro district in San Francisco to the gay white areas of Montrose in Houston, South Beach in Miami, Boys Town in Chicago, Mykonos in Greece, and enclaves in London and Amsterdam<sup>1</sup>, gay white male consumers and aesthetics are “in” (Nast, 2002: 883).

Nast calls this phenomenon “queer white patriarchies” and discusses how the gay white man’s “frontier is an abstracted one, dependent on previous exploitations, racisms, and misogyny” (881; 887).

Andrew Tucker uses Nast’s notion of queer white patriarchies extensively in his work saying,

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<sup>1</sup> And in Cape Town’s Pink Village

Nast's reading of white heteronormative patriarchy (which for Nast can be re-inscribed as queer male patriarchy and led directly to exclusion and marginalisation of women) might also function in South Africa to help exclude a particular community of queer men (Tucker, 2009: 187).

Tucker discusses directly the cases of exclusion in Cape Town's gay village in 2001 that indicate the continuation of "a racist undercurrent dictating, who is and who is not allowed access" (188). Tucker ties exclusion and marginalization in the gay village to "[a] long historical legacy of 'ranking' as part of a nation-building project among white groups" in South Africa (190). Peter Jackson discusses, similarly to Tucker, how

[i]n gay cultures across the Western world race and desire intersect to produce entire argots, specialized commercial venues, and social networks with tightly monitored boundaries of inclusion and exclusion based entirely on the ethnic background of the men one is presumed to find erotically interesting (Jackson, 2005: 182).

Scholars such as Tucker, Nast, and Jackson shore up Rubin's notion of a "charmed circle" in which liberal laws allow for greater inclusion of people who can benefit from certain privileges, while continuing, and to some extent, furthering, the marginalization and *invisibility* of others (Rubin, 1984).

Spaces such as Cape Town's gay village have failed to recognize how "identity categories such as race, gender, class, sex and sexuality are essentially interrelated and simultaneously experienced" (Matebeni, 2009: 100). Natalie Oswin, writing about the marketing of gay Cape Town, notes that South Africa, more specifically

Cape Town, “combines a utopian strain [...] with a liberalism that simplifies and belittles racial and class differences within Cape Town’s gay and lesbian community” (Oswin: 2005, 576). The failure to recognize difference within Cape Town’s gay village is exactly what I attempt to rectify in my ISP. Although scholars have and continue to write on LGBTQI rights in Cape Town and queer tourism, my ISP adds to the discussion by examining space, not only for gay men<sup>2</sup>, but for all people who identify as LGBTQI regardless of gender identity, race, religion, etc. Ultimately, I argue from a second wave feminist standpoint. Looking from second wave feminist critiques of white feminism and the creation of the third world feminist, I argue for an intersectional approach to dismantling exclusion. My argument is rooted in the thinking of feminists such as bell hooks and Angela Davis. The Combahee River Collective Statement says,

[t]he most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking (Kolmar et al., 2005).

This statement is at the center of my argument. As a group of black lesbian feminists, the Combahee River Collective was “outside” of mainstream feminism and worked to dismantle oppression, while rejecting a hierarchical approach that privileges one site of oppression over another.

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew Tucker focuses, specifically, on the inclusion and exclusion of gay men within Cape Town’s gay spaces.

The movement for queer rights in South Africa was, one might argue, started with the exact same goals as manifested in the Combahee River Collective Statement. After the formation of the Gay Association of South Africa (GASA) in 1982, which was “predominantly white, middle class, and male” and “primarily a social organization,” came the formation of the Gay and Lesbian Organization of Witwatersrand (GLOW) (Kovac, 2002:90). The founders of GLOW were Simon Nkoli and Beverly Ditsie, two black South Africans from Soweto, and for the first time greater attention was paid to the intersections of identities. As Nkoli said,

I am black and I am gay. I cannot separate the two parts of me into secondary or primary struggles. In South Africa I am oppressed because I am a black man, and I am oppressed because I am gay. So when I fight for my freedoms I must fight against both oppressions (De Waal et al., 2006: 19).

Nkoli’s statement expresses many simultaneous and intersecting frustrations held by many queer black and coloured South Africans. The failure to fight multiple oppressions alongside one another is not a failure specific to South Africa. Rather similar frustrations and feelings of “invisibility” were and continue to be expressed by black lesbian feminists in the United States who either feel ignored or essentialized, as is the case in the formation of the “third world feminist.”

Today, one must continue to raise questions about how a history of exclusion is maintained and continued in Cape Town’s “marketed” queer spaces, such as the Pink Village. These questions must be analyzed through a theoretical framework, set up by scholars such as Butler, Warner, and Nast, in which “queer visibility” becomes a question about physical space and both pre-existing privileges (i.e. white male



privilege) and the privilege to perform LGBTQI identity *openly* (Tucker, 2009). This is, ultimately, a study about the intersectionality between human rights and identity politics. As Reid and Dirsuweit note, “[u]rban citizenship entails freedom to move, use, and express identity in the city” (Reid et. al, 2009: 5). Subsequently, this ISP hopes to contribute to a debate, both international and local, about the *invisibility* of peoples who cannot or are conditioned to believe they should not “come out” and perform their queer sexualities in the city. Moreover, it works to dismantle the misconceptions that Cape Town welcomes all people regardless of sexual orientation to its city center. Rather the city center, as indicated by Tucker, continues to exclude people based on race and gender identity; these exclusionary practices are rooted in a long history of inequity.

## Methodology

My ISP is centered around academic research, participant observation, and interviews I carried out with LGBTQI individuals. Through these three modes of research I was able to gain intimate access into the lives and realities of LGBTQI peoples living in Cape Town or the surrounding areas. My information was collected throughout the month through time spent doing participant observation at Mzoli's Place in Gugulethu and the gay village in Cape Town. While visiting Mzoli's Place and the gay village, I informally had conversations with people about topics that pertain to my research. These conversations are used in this ISP because, given the time frame, they were one way to gain different perspectives on the issues which I am examining. I also interviewed five South Africans about their experiences being LGBTQI in Cape Town through organizations that work on gender or LGBTQI advocacy. Finally, I support my findings with academic research in order to establish a theoretical framework and add to the work already done by scholars in South Africa.

The first set of interviews I did was with staff at an organization working with the Muslim queer community. This staff ranged in age from young adults to middle aged and they consisted of two women and two men. All of them identify as LGBTQI. They all practice Islam and are coloured. I met with all of them on 16 April 2012 at their office. On the 25 April 2012 I met with another coloured woman, Jennifer<sup>3</sup>, who works with a gender advocacy group in Cape Town's city center. She has previously worked with a LGBTQI advocacy group and now works to

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<sup>3</sup> Name Changed

mainstream LGBTQI issues into the work that they do at the gender advocacy organization. These interviews were structured around questions concerning their personal experiences accessing queer spaces. Although some spoke more generally and others more specifically about their own experiences, they all discussed exclusion on the basis of gender identity and race. They all were willing to discuss their own participation in queer spaces and the work that they have done to create other, alternative, safe spaces.

All of these interviews were conducted informally, which allowed the people being interviewed to feel at ease and to be more willing to discuss difficult topics such as invisibility, unsafe places, and “coming out.” However, the informal nature of the interview did not allow for the voice recording of any of these meetings.

I use my secondary sources in order to contextualize my interviews and set up a theoretical framework through which one can make sense of these interviews and my observations. Since this paper utilizes a feminist and queer theoretical framework, it is especially important that I position myself. I use a second wave feminist framework through which I maintain an intersectional approach to my analysis of identity and oppression. In this sense I strive to use my academic research and my particular theoretical stance to draw conclusions, which will only allow for a partial perspective (or picture) of a much larger issue. For these reasons I follow Donna Haraway in “arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims” (Haraway, 1988: 92). Finally, as an American researcher, doing feminist work, questions arise at the very start of my

research concerning who can write and for whom do I write? I, as a queer identified white woman, understand my own privilege and power in being able to write this paper and conduct this research. I hope to avoid using my pen to inscribe a story upon the LGBTQI communities in Cape Town, but rather, through interviews, I have worked with individuals to tell a story through which I, and hopefully they, can start to understand the importance of my research questions.

## Glossary

**Corrective Rape:** Is an act of rape committed against a woman who is or is perceived to be lesbian in order to “fix” her. This term is problematic because it names the act through the eyes of the rapist not the survivor.

**GASA:** Gay Association of South Africa

**GLOW:** Gay and Lesbian Organization of Witwatersrand

**Heteronormative:** Is the idea that heterosexuality is the norm and all other sexual orientations are outside of the norm and deviant; is a system which privileges heterosexuality at the expense of queer subordination.

**Heteropatriarchy:** Is the idea that the heterosexual procreative father is the head of the household; is a system which privileges the heterosexual father at the expense of female (and potentially queer) subordination.  
Deriving from: heteronormative (see above) and patriarchy (see below)

**Heterosexist:** Is the idea that heterosexuality and male supremacy are the norm and queer sexualities and women are outside the norm and less than; is a system, which privileges the heterosexual man at the expense of queer and female subordination.  
Deriving from: heteronormative (see above) and sexism

**Intersectionality:** Is an approach to studying the ways in which different things are connected.

**Patriarchy:** Is a system, which recognizes the father as the head of the household; is a system, which privileges male power at the expense of female subordination.

**Queer (identity):** Is a way of identifying sexual orientation as non-normative and non-heterosexual; is, in this paper, used as an umbrella term for the LGBTQI community instead of, the typically used, gay. Queer is used instead of gay because gay is gendered male. In an effort to reject patriarchal systems, I choose to use queer as a way to signify all people who identify as LGBTQI. This decision is central to the argument of this paper.

**Queer (movement):** Is a movement to disrupt normativity; is the LGBTQI movement for equal rights and recognition.

From the Closet to Exclusion:  
What Comes After the Metaphorical Closet?

In 1990 South Africa held its first “Pride” march in Johannesburg. Organized by GLOW, the 1990 “Pride” march was, as Charity Mohlamme recalls, “part of our coming out – not only to ourselves, but also to the government. It was political, and it is important to remember that two black people – Simon Nkoli and Beverly Ditsie – were principally behind it” (de Waal et al., 2006: 36). As Mohlamme indicates “Pride” functioned initially and still does function today as a public and political “coming out.” However, at that first march many queer identified South Africans found it necessary to conceal their identity and wear paper bags over their heads. The *Sunday Times* on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1990 released a large image of queer identified participants marching with bags on their heads. The caption read: “When the gays go marching in: ‘We love you’ on the front and ‘I can’t be seen yet’ on the back. A heavily symbolic message of the closet existence of many SA gays” (17). The debates that ensued over the wearing of paper bags took every position. From GLOW’s suggestion, to those who are not “out,” to wear paper bags to Craig Mowatt’s statement that “the wearing of masks questions rather than asserts the legitimacy of the wearer’s existence,” people had something to say about the “closet” and its impact on the lives of LGBTQI South Africans. It is for this reason, and the many debates that have ensued since the initiation of “Pride” in 1990, that the “closet” becomes a central focus of this ISP: Who’s in it and who is “coming out?”

*Conceptualizing the Closet*

In order to address the overarching question of this study, whose gay town is Cape Town, one must begin by understanding the “closet,” why does it exist and

what does it work to contain or let out? As noted in the literature review, the “closet” is a metaphor for LGBTQI individuals and their choice, or ability, to share or not to share with others their sexual orientation. However, once an individual decides to open the metaphorical closet door and leave the “closet,” they are not necessarily welcomed into an environment more welcoming and inclusive than that which they had known previously.

In my first set of interviews, I asked my interviewees, after establishing that they all consider themselves “out,” about their personal experiences “coming out.” More specifically, I asked them where and to whom they “came out.” The room filled with laughter as they began making jokes amongst each other and then one after another shared their stories of “coming out.” The stories seemed, at first, not so different from my own; the younger man told me that he “came out” to his aunt in the kitchen and the younger woman shared with me that she first “came out” to her dad while he was driving the car. After they had all shared, I followed up by asking if they viewed the places in which they “came out” into, as being safe. To this they all responded no. Their response to this question in conjunction with the conversations that proceeded and followed it, brought to the table a lot of questions about how they are perceived because they are coloured, Muslim, and queer. The intersections of their identities, which are more fully addressed later in this paper, are factors that, sadly, hinder individuals from leaving the “closet” and allow for bodies, less stigmatized, to gain access to “out” identity.

The “closet,” therefore, must be understood as both a place of confinement and safety. While apparently stifling the true identities of the people who occupy it,

the “closet” is for many the only and safest place that they know. Fortunately, the four individuals with whom I had the privilege of talking, who work with the Muslim queer organization, all have found a community and space of safety through their work where they are able to perform their queer sexuality openly. However, for many their lives, as indicated by Michael Warner, are a continual process of re-entering the “closet” (Warner, 1999). This, sadly, is often a result of necessity or fear.

### *Conclusion*

In discussing the “closet” one can better understand the parameters by which LGBTQI individuals live their lives. While these parameters are not distinct to South Africa, South Africa’s history of nationally recognized racial inequity until 1994 positions conversations surrounding LGBTQI lives and recognition, in Cape Town, into a distinct context. My conversations with my interviewees on “coming out” demonstrated, as I had anticipated, that for them being Muslim, queer, and coloured all played a role in how people – family, friends, and the community – perceived them once they did, in fact, “come out.” The “closet” and the ability to “come out,” in a safe environment, is ultimately all about visibility and, for many, *invisibility*. The next section of this paper looks more specifically at the idea of visibility and invisibility and how not having access and marketing prohibit many from publicly and politically “coming out” and demanding full recognition and equal rights.



### (In)Visibility and the Question of Who is Seen?

While the four individuals I talked to at the Muslim queer organization all consider themselves “out,” it was not until founding, in the case of the founder, or coming to this organization, in the case of the three others, that they found a clear space of safety and inclusion. The younger man talked with me about a song he recently put out and the younger woman interjected to tell me that it is not being played within any of the communities which they are a part of because it is seen as not Muslim enough and not gay enough. These themes came up continually in my interview with them and said a lot about their ability, both personally and as a community, “to be noticed, to be marketed” (young Muslim man, 16 April 2012). This section examines the ways in which visibility is reserved for those who fit within a normative idea of gayness – white, male, middle to upper class. Once again (in)visibility of certain communities indicates the ways in which “coming out,” as Butler articulated, fails to provide all queer individuals, regardless of gender identity, race, class, and faith, recognition and affirmation of their queer sexuality (Butler, 1990).

#### *Pride and (In)Visibility: Rethinking the Protest*

In 2004 an entrance fee was charged to “Pride.” Critics rightfully claimed that in doing this the organizers had led to both the commodification and whitening of an event that was meant to be inclusive rather than exclusive. Fortunately, in 2005 greater efforts were made to reach out to black participants and create an event that invites, rather than discourages and excludes, all people (de Waal et al. 8). However, “Pride,” in Cape Town, is still the site of invisibility for LGBTQI communities that do

not fit within normative conceptions of gayness. I discussed “Pride” with my interviewees at the Muslim queer organization after reading a piece in the April 2012 publication of the “Pink Tongue,” a monthly gay newspaper, about exclusion and the lack of an actual protest at “Pride” this past year in Cape Town. I, unfortunately, was not able to attend “Pride,” but my interviewees had a lot to say about for whom “Pride” is created and to whom it is marketed.

Like most LGBTQI organizations in Cape Town and the surrounding areas, the Muslim queer organization had a float at the “Pride” parade. Their statement was in response to Muslim intolerance and read, “certified halal.” I had, when looking up information on “Pride,” never come across anything about their float or their organization, but rather saw many images of scandalously clad men (white men) on floats or drag queens extravagantly made up. They told me when I was at the interview that their float was, in fact, the largest, but that there were no pictures of them in any publication except the “Pink Tongue.” They discussed the ways in which “Pride” is marketed and noted that it is presented as an all male, all white party. Questions arise when discussing the organization’s ex/inclusion at “Pride” because even though they were there, they were still left out of the mainstream reporting of the event. It is noteworthy that if someone researches Cape Town “Pride,” that person is more likely to come across pictures of *Beef Cakes’* float than the float of this Muslim queer organization. *Beef Cakes* is, as Jennifer from the Muslim queer organization described, a “hectic gay white male” restaurant. The marketing of “Pride” says quite a bit about the nature of “Pride” and, more importantly, its political message, or, clearly, the lack thereof.

*“Out” in the Gay Town: Who’s Occupying Queer Spaces?*

The superficial inclusion of the Muslim queer organization at “Pride” is, I would argue, more than can be said about Cape Town’s gay village.

In October 2003 a ‘coloured’ man, Marcus Pillay, together with his ‘white’ partner Pierre de Vos were enjoying a night out in De Waterkant gay village in Cape Town. During the evening the pair decided to visit the then very popular *Sliver* nightclub. While the security staff at the entrance allowed de Vos into the club, Pillay was turned away. The security claimed at the time that this was because Pillay was inappropriately dressed (Tucker, 2009: 186).

Following this an argument ensued in which both men – de Vos and Pillay – were physically assaulted (186).

Pillay and de Vos (who was a highly regard[ed] constitutional law professor) lodged a complaint with the city’s newly formed Equality Court [...] *Sliver* admitted to having in place a racially discriminatory door policy. It also paid R10 000 [...] to a charity of Pillay and de Vos’ choice (186).

After this one incident was brought to public attention many others came out, no pun intended, with similar stories of exclusion on the basis of race in the gay village (186). These cases of blatant exclusion occurred nine years ago, but for many coloured and black queer South Africans the gay village remains a place of further marginalization.

As the young woman at the Muslim queer organization indicated, there is a form of othering constantly going on whether it is because you are gay, coloured, or Muslim. She explained that there is a belief held by many in the gay village that Muslims should not be visiting clubs. She stated that there is a “stigma attached to it.” The young man added that ostracism and marginalization also “comes in the form of Islamaphobia” and that many Muslim homosexuals experience intense internalized homophobia. His point was to highlight how in all communities – the Muslim community, the queer community, and even in the Muslim queer community – they, as people who are both proud to be Muslim and to be queer, are discriminated against.

Moreover, in my conversation with Jennifer she discussed with me her previous work in the townships and the difficulties faced by individuals living outside the city center to even be able to get to the gay village. She discussed that even if someone finally makes it to the gay village, they then are faced with cover charges at the door, dress codes, and steep prices for drinks. These practices, on the part of clubs, continue to exclude, possibly in less obvious ways, those who are not white and middle class.

#### *Where's the Rest of the Crew? Normalizing Gayness in the Pink Village*

In the two times I visited the gay village I was overwhelmed by the fact that what I had read and learned in my interviews was such an accurate description of that space. The price of getting in was nothing in comparison to the price of drinks and the people that occupied that space were far from representative of Cape Town's racial demographic. Although on both occasions I chose to go to *Crew*, a club

well known for being occupied by all white men, that particular club, one can argue, is far from distinct from the rest of the “Pink Village.” While the whiteness of the club was startling, the exclusion of other LGBTQI communities was even more so. Both nights that I went to the club the space was packed with primarily white, gay men who were performing their sexuality openly and freely. However, I wondered where all the lesbians and queer identified women were. On both occasions I observed a handful of queer identified women dancing on the outskirts to, what appeared, the disdain of the on looking gay men. I finally decided to ask some of these men where, in fact, all the lesbians were? The most noteworthy response came from the heterosexual bartender; his sexuality is discussed more fully in the next section. He told me that the lesbians go to *Beaulah Bar* (the lesbian club), but that it is not very nice (another statement that I heard echoed quite a lot). I asked him if lesbians come to *Crew*. To this he responded by giving me a break down of the people occupying the club. He stated that 30% are straight women and the rest are gay men. After I prompted him once again he stated that maybe 1% are lesbian and that “lesbians are kind of dodgy.” It was not the response I expected to get from a bartender at a gay bar, but it once again raised questions surrounding who is welcome to occupy Cape Town’s queer spaces. As I looked around the club the *visible* queer population became incredibly apparent, white middle class men.

#### *Informal Settlements: Queering Space Outside the City Center*

When interviewing Jennifer, at the gender advocacy organization, she noted that it is not that queer individuals living outside the city center do not have their own spaces, but that their spaces are informal. I found her comment particularly

interesting given the nature of many of the townships. I thought about how in some townships, such as Khayelitsha, people live primarily in informal settlements. Like these informal settlements, by nature, these informal queer spaces in the townships are less substantial, less sustainable, and less safe. While these spaces do exist they also work to remain hidden or invisible. This is unlike the clubs in De Waterkant where every night is a new performance and where being flamboyant or extravagant is applauded rather than frowned upon. Of course it is important to note that LGBTQI individuals living in the Cape Flats are not passive in their situation or marginalization. Organizations such as *Free Gender* work openly in Khayelitsha on LGBTQI rights and recognition. *Free Gender* is a NGO consisting of lesbians living in Khayelitsha who by being *visible* are able to fight for their equal rights.

#### *The Emergence of a Queer White Patriarchy*

Ultimately, as Jennifer said, there is a “serious issue around power and privilege that is not being talked about.” The acceptance of normative gay performance in the gay village, and one could argue, in Cape Town at large, has allowed for a façade of inclusion. White gay men are able to benefit from their white male privilege in ways that still exclude black and coloured LGBTQI individuals, especially women. Nast argues, “that today a different regime of patriarchies is gaining legitimacy, one grounded only partially in what might be called ‘normative’ gay white male masculinities” (Nast, 2002: 878). Her point is that queer white patriarchies are able to “coexist with, and in some cases displace, heteronormative patriarchies” (878). Her argument, which is central to my ISP, works to demonstrate

how privilege is transferable. In my conversations with LGBTQI individuals informally at *Crew*, through my more formal interviews, and my observations made from visiting queer spaces, I was able to utilize Nast's theorizing on privilege and the ways in which one can access privilege.

Jennifer, who is a coloured woman, stated, honestly, "[that] white people still don't think about the privilege that they carry." Highlighting Nast's point, she further argued that queer identity, for both men and women, is formed within patriarchy. She understood this formation of identity within patriarchy as a "survival mechanism." Jennifer rightfully noted how accessing historically rooted privileges functions as an avenue toward which some (i.e. white gay men) can reach inclusion. However, the disdain with which lesbianism is viewed and the whiteness, which overwhelms the gay village, are negative outcomes of white gay men utilizing, "like the white oedipal heterosexuality of old, [...] structural opportunities others do not have" (880). At last, as Nast notes, the danger is that,

images circulated of queer white male elites are unreal in that they represent a small fraction of gay men; yet they are also real in that they are produced for profit and pleasure, embodying material interests geared toward creating a hegemonic queer identities and norms (881).

However, this hegemonic queer identity, which is discussed more fully in the next section, is not representative of the desires, needs, or racial and gender make-up of Cape Town's LGBTQI communities.

## *Conclusion*

The issue of (in)visibility is central to this ISP. In asking questions of who occupies space and how they occupy it, one must take note of which communities are being seen and which are remaining concealed. This section has worked to discuss queer spaces in Cape Town and to problematize the notion that the gay village is, in fact, inclusive. Through closely observing interactions and the peoples within the gay village along with the interviews I conducted with five LGBTQI individuals, I have discussed the many factors that continue to exclude people in Cape Town's queer spaces. Further, I bring in Nast's conception of a queer white patriarchy which is played out, clearly, in Cape Town's gay village as the *men* who occupy those spaces are able to utilize pre-existing structures based in white male privilege. The next section discusses the heterosexual framework in which Cape Town's queer spaces operate and further sets up a way of thinking through queer white patriarchy as allowing the marginalization and exclusion of those outside of "gay white male [...] aesthetics" (Nast, 2002: 883). Moreover, the next section problematizes the very framework in which these spaces operate and brings to question for whom these spaces are maintained and how homosexual desire is produced through the commodified heterosexual body?



Policing Gayness:  
The Production of Queer (Hetero) Desire

On my first visit to the Pink Village and the very popular club, *Crew*, I started up a conversation with a very handsome underwear clad bartender, James<sup>4</sup>. The fact that I am an American and doing research quickly came up and we began talking about inclusion in the gay village. He quickly mentioned, to my surprise, that all the bartenders are straight and asked my female friend and me if we were gay. We responded by saying yes, not wanting to get into the intricacies of how we both actually identify. After finishing our conversation, I left the bar and only returned later to ask a different bartender where the nearest FNB is located. This bartender – another shirtless man who was, by all conventional standards, good looking – responded to my question by saying he would buy me a shooter. Unfortunately, my need for money was not for the consumption of more alcohol, but rather, for a taxi to get home.

On my second visit to the Pink Village I hoped to find the first bartender, James, I had talked to, again. After looking around for a bit I became fairly convinced that he was not working that night. With a friend I went to the bar and ordered drinks and asked the (new) bartender if James was working. He responded that James was not, in fact, working and inquired about the reasons that I was looking for him. I explained that I was doing research and I had talked to James about my research last weekend. To this he responded, “well all the bartenders are straight.” No prompting, no indication that his *heterosexuality* was what I was studying, or of any interest to me, and there he was proclaiming it as if I cared or as if it had any

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<sup>4</sup> Name changed

real significance on my research. I felt myself filling with annoyance and so I paid for my drink and walked away.

After these encounters I was left considering the significance of the bartenders being heterosexual on my research. Unfortunately and undeniably, the significance is great. While follow-up questions with the bartenders about their sexual orientation had indicated that the hiring of all heterosexual bartenders was a business move to avoid mixing business with pleasure, not that their apparent heterosexuality could promise who they go home with at the end of the night, I was left with the larger implications of their heterosexuality. This section examines how heterosexual bartenders at *Crew* and the outer heterosexual circle at Mzoli's Place work to police both the performance of queer identity and the production of queer desire in these queer spaces.

#### *Mzoli's Place: Circles of Acceptance*

The young woman at the Muslim queer organization told me that she was excited when she heard about Mzoli's Place, but when she actually visited the space she was incredibly disappointed. She mentioned that she was expecting an inclusive and diverse place where people were welcoming and accepting. Her discussion of the space, which included her saying that she felt policed and unsafe (she mentioned the rates of corrective rape in the townships), brought up questions, for my research, concerning for whom Mzoli's Place is inclusive and how an outer circle (read heterosexist) polices and controls the inner circle (read queer).

I visited Mzoli's Place on two occasions, once prior to the start of my research and once for the purpose of my research. On both occasions I was aware of the

presence of LGBTQI individuals even though I did not interact with anyone that identifies as LGBTQI directly. Mzoli's Place, which is located in Gugulethu, is primarily a Xhosa space although it is often frequented by tourists, in which people eat meat, drink, and dance underneath the large tent. As an American researcher, the scene at Mzoli's Place, unlike at the Pink Village, is completely unfamiliar. The second time I visited Mzoli's Place, I walked into the crowd and located a group of individuals performing, openly, their queer sexuality. I watched as they danced with each other, held hands, and smoked hookah. What became instantly apparent, during my time at Mzoli's Place, was that although the inner circle (read queer) was allowed to occupy space they did so within a larger circle, which works within a heterosexist framework. As I attempted to talk with people and move about the crowd, I realized fairly quickly that as a young white woman the only people that would easily talk to me were heterosexual men. I wondered about what this indicated about the marginalization of the queer identified people at Mzoli's Place, simply, why were they less outgoing or willing to talk to tourists and visitors?

In my conversation with the young woman at the Muslim queer organization she noted that the space is run by and for tourists and by the very nature of tourism, which always runs the risk of being voyeuristic, the space becomes less inclusive and inviting. She discussed further, how the outer circle at Mzoli's Place polices the behavior of the inner circle and fails to allow queer individuals a space that is truly their own. Her way of discussing Mzoli's Place in combination with my time spent at that space brought to mind Gayle Rubin's idea of a "charmed circle" (Rubin, 1984). I saw and heard about circles of acceptance at Mzoli's Place. These circles accept

people with alternative sexualities (i.e. queer), while policing how their queer sexuality is performed and the amount of space they are allowed to occupy. This type of acceptance, while allowing the inclusion of some LGBTQI peoples, perpetuates the exclusion of others who are *outside* of that which the outer circle condones.

*The Pink Village: The Producing and Making of Homosexual Identity and Desire*

Similarly, at *Crew* manifestations of heterosexual bodies as the site of homosexual desire also shore-up Rubin's notion of a "charmed circle" (Rubin, 1984). While the populations that occupy the Pink Village and more specifically, *Crew* are drastically different from those that occupy Mzoli's Place, the framework in which they both operate is, sadly, not that different. The choice to hire, exclusively, heterosexual male bartenders at *Crew* is, very possibly, no more than a business tactic. However, the choice to employ straight male bartenders at a gay bar, brings to question, as Jennifer noted, the issues of power and privilege at play in these spaces. Moreover, these heterosexual bartenders are used as symbols of ideal masculinity and desire. The space, therefore, produces gay male identity and desire that is based on heterosexual conditions and conventional ideas of masculine attraction and desirability. As Andrew Tucker says,

what becomes of interest is an exploration as to why and how in South Africa a variant of Nast's subject can develop and be articulated by groups and how this subject is in part defined by and able to define other subjects (Tucker, 2009:189).

The answer to his queries can be found at a place like *Crew*. As Nast works to illuminate, the normalizing of gayness is “dependent on previous exploitations, racisms, and misogyny” (Nast, 2002: 887). Clubs, like *Crew*, are able to police the presentation of gayness in their club and further, manufacture homosexual desire in the form of the heterosexual body, through the hiring of heterosexual bartenders. The significance of this is “that gay-white-male-oriented commodity forms are rescuing a previously biologized patriarchy” and through this allowing for the creation of gay identity within and as a product of white patriarchy (883).

### *Conclusion*

The role of heterosexual actors in these queer spaces is central to the formation of a queer white patriarchy. As Nast notes, “queer white male elites are unreal,” but they are real in the sense that they are produced out of white heteropatriarchy “for profit and pleasure” (Nast, 2002: 881). The production of a queer white patriarchy out of white heteropatriarchy can easily be seen in Cape Town’s gay district. In the case of Mzoli’s Place, the heterosexual policing of queer performance once again places the power in the hands of the heterosexual man, allowing him to decide the conditions under which queer identity is and will be accepted. The next section focuses on the intersectionality of identities. More specifically, it focuses on the intersections of race, class, gender identity, and gayness<sup>5</sup>. Moving from looking specifically at the role of heterosexual peoples in these queer communities, the next section asks the reader to consider how race, class, gender identity, and sexual orientation all work alongside one another in the

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<sup>5</sup> Gayness, in this section, is used to discuss all people that identify as LGBTQI not just men.

formation of identity. The intersections of identities, I argue, are ultimately what have allowed for the greater inclusion and acceptance of certain LGBTQI populations and, at the same time, the further marginalization of other groups. By discussing intersectionality, I work to illuminate the issues surrounding inclusion and exclusion in Cape Town's queer spaces. These issues are largely a result of queer white patriarchies and the process of normalizing queerness.

Intersecting Identities:  
Race, Class, Gender Identity, and Gayness

Second wave feminist ideologies, in the United States, are central to conversations about identity and intersectionality in Cape Town's queer spaces. I, like Swarr and Nagar, hope to

build on the growing body of feminist scholarship that recognizes the imperative of positioning identity categories such as race, class, gender, sex, and sexuality as essentially interrelated and simultaneously experienced (Swarr et al., 2003: 495).

I argue that it is a failure to recognize the intersections of identities that allows for the formation of a white queer patriarchy and, consequently, queer spaces in Cape Town, which reinforce white male privilege and undermine the illusion of inclusion. By addressing the multitude of identities, which work to form privilege and oppression, one is better able to address the reasons for queer (in)visibility and ex/inclusion in Cape Town's gay village.

*Historicizing Privilege and Oppression: The Making of Queer (In)Visibility*

South Africa's distinct history of racial inequality is, unfortunately, a central actor in the continuation of exclusion in Cape Town's gay village. As Jennifer said, it is incredibly important to think about the links between getting in, getting access, and getting to the gay village and apartheid's geographic exclusion of black and coloured South Africans. During apartheid black and coloured individuals were required to carry passes; today black and coloured queer South Africans need the money, transportation, and clothing necessary to get into the clubs, which make up the Pink Village. Jennifer argues that today the real difference is that it went from

being about race to being about class. Obviously, the two – class and race – have been and continue to be intricately interwoven so that it is nearly impossible to talk about one without the inclusion of the other. This, though, is my point; identities are complex and multiple. To privilege gayness at the expense of race or class is to deny the factors, which perpetuate oppression, exclusion, and invisibility, and to allow for the continuation of exclusionary practices in places such as the Pink Village.

The young man at the Muslim queer organization noted that it can be hard to find a community within a community. He continued by saying there are “lots of clusters” and cross-cultural interaction without the necessary education. Further, he linked his statements to South Africa’s history by stating, “all the isms are part of our heritage.” He did, as I am also attempting to do, argue that “all the isms,” be it racism, sexism, classism, formed, to some extent, South Africa as a country prior to 1994. For this reason it is difficult to dismantle privilege and oppression and undo one site of oppression without addressing how they are all connected.

#### *Moving Forward: Addressing Exclusion Intersectionally*

Having the privilege of meeting with three staff and the founder of the Muslim queer organization, I was able to learn about efforts being made to talk and think about the intersectionality of identities. As the founder noted, to deny any part of your identity – in this case he was directly referencing faith and queerness – is to deny who you are as a person. The older woman stated that when she felt as if she had to choose between her faith and sexuality then Islam would have been the identity to go. However, as the younger women noted, the Muslim queer organization gave her away to turn the oppression of her religious identity into



spirituality. Moreover, the younger man and the founder noted that with the internet came a greater understanding that no one has to follow religious practices or doctrines blindly. More specifically, the founder stated that with the internet came the ability to personalize faith.

In both sets of interviews a particular club was mentioned. This club, *Bubbles*, is, like *Crew*, located in the gay village. However, it differs from clubs like *Crew*, *Bronx*, and *Bar Code* because it is a drag bar. The people at the Muslim queer organization adamantly stated that *Bubbles* is, unlike the rest of the gay village, incredibly inclusive and diverse. The young man, who happens to do drag, discussed the space as a place where no one questions why he is there on the basis of his race, sexuality, gender identity, or faith. Tucker notes that to be a “non-white” drag queen is to signal weakness, emotionality, femininity – and, at an extreme, a re-racialized form of difference. [...] Femininity therefore may remain the purveyance of the ‘non-white,’ in part precisely because of white and coloured nationalist histories of categorisation based on skin colour that help create contemporary and distinct subjects (Tucker, 2009: 194).

Notions of normal gayness emerge through the feminizing of certain racial categories and ways of performing queer sexuality. The queer white patriarchy has “the power to exclude, both due to the way these concepts draw on, augment, or re-imagine pre-existing forms of inequality and exclusion, and due to the normalising effect that such terms can bring to different types of exclusion” (194). This is evident in the use of femininity as a way to dehumanize non-white queer communities.

Through utilizing structures rooted in white male privilege gay men re-interpret, as Nast argues, white heteropatriarchy and benefit from its exclusion of others.

### *Conclusion*

This research, simply put, argues for the recognition of bodies outside of normative conceptions of gayness. Like Butler and Warner I have argued that the LGBTQI movement has privileged sexuality at the expense of re-centering white normativity. Taking a second wave feminist standpoint, I have attempted through conversations with individuals who identify *openly* as LGBTQI, who are outside of the normative conception of gayness (i.e. white gay male), to think through how race, class, and gender identity are all factors which affect the ways in which LGBTQI individuals experience being queer in Cape Town. This last section has worked to draw together the themes discussed in the previous sections in order to demonstrate to the reader how “coming out,” queer (in)visibility, and queer (hetero) desire are shaped not only by queer sexuality, but also by race, class, gender identity, and, for some, faith.

Conclusion:  
Questioning Queer Unity and White Gay Entitlement

The question arises, at the end of this research: Who is at fault? The answer to that question is not in this paper, not because I have failed to complete my research, but because the idea of fault fails to recognize histories of oppression and privilege, which shape, entirely, the world as it is today. One should not read this paper as an onslaught of criticisms fired at white gay men. This paper is a study of LGBTQI (in)visibilities and the ways in which certain members of the queer community are able to benefit from a history of privilege. Instead of placing blame on white gay men, this paper hopes to demonstrate how the realities and lives of gay white men are not the realities of other, *more marginalized*, queer communities. Subsequently, I argue for an intersectional approach to dismantling homophobia. This process requires that gay white men reflect on the ways in which their bodies, which are inscribed white and male, give them access and the ability to utilize pre-existing structures, which continue to marginalize non-white queer communities, especially women. Through academic research, participant observation, and interviews with LGBTQI coloured individuals, I have worked to reveal the complexities of being LGBTQI in Cape Town due to race, class, gender identity, and faith. The queer white patriarchy, which is currently flourishing in Cape Town's queer spaces, in fact, re-centers white male supremacy and undermines the notion of a united LGBTQI community. The realities faced by LGBTQI individuals in South Africa are diverse and multiple, so that I am left to argue for the recognition of LGBTQI *communities*. These communities have the potential to become united, but "unity in the community," the slogan at South Africa's first ever "Pride" march,

requires greater attention to the needs and realities of all queer communities (de Waal, 2006: 22). This recognition will come when people begin to understand gayness as part and parcel of racial, class, and gender constructions, and subsequently, oppressions.

### Recommendations for Further Study

Given the short timeframe of this research I was not able to conduct as many interviews or site visits, as I would have liked. I hope I have set up for someone else a good starting place for future research on queer (in)visibilities and the formation of a queer white patriarchy. I also think that a lot could be learned through research specifically focused on the heterosexuality of the bartenders at a club like *Crew*. I think my interactions with those bartenders and the fact that they are all heterosexual says quite a bit about the efforts, in South Africa as elsewhere, to normalize gayness within a heterosexual framework. Of course these areas of study would fit nicely into SIT's multiculturalism and human rights program because queer rights are, in fact, human rights.

## Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What do you do with the organization that you are affiliated with?
2. When did you first realize that you were queer?
  - a. Do you consider yourself as being “out”?
  - b. Where and to whom did you “come out”?
3. In what communities do you feel safe?
4. How have these communities affirmed or not affirmed your queer sexuality?
5. How do you feel you are received within the mainstream queer spaces, like the gay village?
6. Do you feel included in these spaces?
7. How have these spaces made you feel more marginalized or oppressed?
8. What role have your many identities played in the way that you are received in these spaces?
9. For what reasons are you oppressed by the queer community?
10. How does your work operate as a place of safety or what work do you do to address homophobia intersectionally?

Copies of consent forms are included at the end of this ISP.

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