

Spring 2010

“It’s a White People Thing”: The Experience of Negotiating Sexual and Cultural Identity for Young- Adults in Durban

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**“IT’S A WHITE PEOPLE THING”: THE EXPERIENCE OF NEGOTIATING SEXUAL AND
CULTURAL IDENTITY FOR YOUNG-ADULTS IN DURBAN**

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South Africa: Social and Political Transformation
Spring 2010

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my project advisor, Thembisa Waetjen, whose thoughtful understanding of what I was trying to convey I wanted to study led to my project structure. She led me to literature that I would not have found otherwise that greatly influenced my research. Her intelligence and kindness inspire me and made the whole process much less stressful.

I am also indebted to John Daniel for his constant support, advice, and wit. His intellect, experience, and generosity are what kept my project together and kept me in good spirits along the way. I cannot imagine a better or more caring AD.

Thanks to Langa Mchunu and Shola for giving me logistical and emotional support. My time in South Africa and this research would not have been half as rewarding or smooth without them.

Thank you to my fellow 14 SIT students. We have had quite the trip and I wouldn't have wanted to share it with anyone else. At the Happy Hippo, thank you to the 5 other students who lived here with me. I wouldn't have eaten as well or had as much fun without all of them. A special thanks to Alex Dalrymple for being my roommate and confidante, I can't imagine a better friend.

I am indebted to the Durban Lesbian and Gay Community and Health Centre for letting me use their library and for welcoming me into their NGO. Nomvuyo Dlamini at the centre was endlessly helpful and giving with her time and advice. I especially appreciate her inviting me to participate in and help organize a conference on the issue of homosexuality as unAfrican.

Most importantly, I extend my deepest gratitude to the lesbian, gay, and bisexual young-adults who shared their time, insight and stories with me throughout my interviews. I cannot express enough with words how far they exceeded my expectations in what they chose to share

with me. Their strength of character and unfailing confidence in their identities has empowered me to be more open with my own sexual identity. Their humour and ability to look towards a better future will stay with me for the rest of my life.

Abstract

The creation of the post-apartheid government founded itself on the principles of equality for all people as laid out in the Constitution. However, while discrimination against people based on sexual orientation is illegal, homosexuals still experience a lack of acceptance in mainstream South African society. The purpose of this study is to understand the experience of Zulu and other black and coloured¹ young-adult lesbian, gay, and bisexual (lgb²) peoples living in Durban, South Africa. I looked at how these people have developed their identities and what challenges and surprising joys they have found in their lives in relation to their sexuality. I spent time at the Durban Lesbian and Gay Community and Health Centre (DLGCHC) in their drop-in room getting to know as many visitors to the centre as possible. The DLGCHC is the only openly LGBT support organization in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. I conducted in-depth interviews with 7 individuals in the drop-in centre about their life stories to collect information and added to this through my own observations and experience at the centre.

My hypothesis in this study is that lgb young-adults in Durban who visit the DLGCHC feel as though they have to separate their sexual identity from their identity in their home culture to find acceptance.

¹ These are the only races I focused on because they were the only ones present at the centre.

² I use the initials lgb instead of lgbt because I did not encounter any transgender people in my study.

What I have found is that all of my participants faced at least some level of discrimination ranging from taxi drivers whispering as they walked past to one mother burning her daughters pants to get rid of the Satan in her.³ None of the people I talked to said that they would rather be heterosexual or indicated that they were unhappy with their sexuality. In fact, almost all of my participants expressed pride in being gay and love this part of their identity having found positive self-images for themselves. There is a disconnect between the identities of these young adults and the cultural conservatism and religious fundamentalism that surrounds them in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. This traditionalism has caused the development of a strong sub-culture in which all lgb or questioning individuals can find acceptance (according to my participants). In order for all lgb South Africans to feel empowered in their sexuality a unified political movement needs to develop in which lgb people can speak-out against the discrimination they face and educate their communities for liberalization and social acceptance.

Introduction

This paper is focused on lgb identity in South Africa, specifically life narratives gathered from young-adults who frequent the Durban Lesbian and Gay Community and Health Centre (DLGCHC). The lgb people who frequents the DLGCHC are mainly Zulu and face a variety of issues in negotiating their identities as homosexuals and Zulu/Xhosa/coloured/etc. people. I found that these young-adults have developed a sub-culture at the centre in which they date, hang-out, and spend most of their free time.

The context of South Africa for homosexuals is one of Constitutional acceptance yet social disapproval by the majority of South Africans expressed through discrimination and hate

³ Mercy, Interview (April 28, 2010).

crimes. There has been little research done on homosexual experiences in Durban, especially in regards to young-adults. The primary problem for my participants is that they have grown up in the new South Africa with the rhetoric that they are all equal and can express themselves as they wish but they come from cultural backgrounds that do not accept their sexual identities. Thus, if these young-adults decide to be open about their sexual identities they risk social stigma, rejection from friends/family/church, hate-crimes such as ‘corrective-rape’ and in worse case scenarios death.

The issue of homophobia in South Africa illuminates the issue of acceptance in post-apartheid society. This is a problem specific to South Africa because during apartheid South Africans were divided from each other along racial lines. While the apartheid regime is over, South Africans still do not know each other. The South African government calls South Africa the rainbow nation in which all different cultures have come together and can get along. This glosses over the social issues that South Africa is still facing such as racism, discrimination, crime and education. The government has not followed through with addressing issues of moral conservatism that the majority of the population holds. Liberal values of a country’s citizens correlates with the development and maintenance of a health democracy. A progressive constitution is not the only necessary step to reconciling South Africans with each other. By addressing South Africa as the rainbow nation and covering up divisions within the society especially in regard to the upcoming World Cup the government is actually stunting its citizens’ ability to truly change the way they regard and treat other types of people.

Objectives:

My objective in this project is to access a part of the sub-culture of South African lgb people, coherently identify the relationship between homosexuality and home culture for

participants and where these two identities converge. This includes understanding what this subset of people experience on a daily basis, what they think of their place in South African society as a whole, and what they think needs to change in order for all homosexual South African's to feel complete acceptance into society in the future.

The experience and identity development of homosexuals has been something I have been interested in for a long time. Getting to live with a Zulu homestay family in Cato Manor, a township of Durban, opened my eyes to homophobia in South Africa. My younger host-brother told me that he thought "gay people should be hung for committing a crime against Jesus." I found the vehemence with which he projected this statement to be very troubling because there seemed to be no question in his mind that his extreme statement was legitimate. We argued over homosexuality many times throughout my stay in Cato Manor and I have to thank my brother for pushing me to discover more about homophobia in South Africa. Because of him I did a week of community service at the Durban Lesbian and Gay Community and Health Centre (DLGCHC) and found the motivation for this research.

Paper Structure:

This paper will begin by giving a broad context of homosexuality in South Africa and more specifically in Durban. It will then lay down, within Durban, the relationships between tradition, religion, family, culture and identity for the individuals I interviewed. After explaining this it will delve into the sub-culture these individuals take part in, what makes it a subculture, and a description of the main spaces this sub-culture can be found. Next there is a discussion of whether these individuals have divided identities and the positive pride they have found in themselves. Finally, the paper will present the conflict between South Africa as 'the rainbow

nation' and the discrimination lgb people experience and what is needed for the future to reconcile South Africa's progressive constitution with its' conservative citizenry.

Methodology

Gathering Data.

I primarily used qualitative research through interviews involving the description of individuals' life stories and experiences of being homosexual in Durban. Interviewing was the most appropriate method due to the range of experiences individuals expressed having in addition to the possibility of misunderstanding language in a survey format due to the language barrier between myself and primarily Zulu speaking people. In addition, the sensitive nature of the topic and constant need for confidentially reassurance worked well with an informal interview atmosphere.

I met all the interviewees by spending time in the TV Room/ Drop-in room of the DLGCHC and getting to know people there. I conducted the interviews in the drop-in room and this sparked other individuals' interest to offer themselves for interviews. I initially planned on only interviewing Zulu people with an equal mix of male and female identifying participants. Due to the sensitive nature of my topic however I let most individuals approach me if they wanted to share their stories making my sample not random. This led to the addition of one Colored woman and one Xhosa woman and a larger number of female participants than male. One of their stories of barely escaping with Johannesburg with their life was so powerful that I felt that I should expand my sample to anyone present at the centre. This was an important change since many people were not interested in sharing their stories in a public manner.

The DLGCHC's drop-in room was very popular during the days that I spent there. It is the main social hangout spot for the people I met and they expressed that they spent a large portion of their time there, usually present everyday the centre was open. I engaged with the people there through friendly conversation that grew more comfortable the longer I had been at the centre.

I also volunteered at the centre helping to plan a conference focusing on the issue of homosexuality as unAfrican. This also informed my research paper because I gained an understanding of the way that the centre works, the struggles it has, and what the people who work there see as the primary issues facing lgb people.

I was not able to conduct a formal focus group but I did find that the conversations I had in the drop-in centre often ended up performing as informal focus groups as more people would start to want to share their experiences and beliefs. I did not find as Bauer did in the fall of 2008 with her ISP research at the centre that people were strongly unwilling to discuss their experiences.⁴ This could be an indication that the fear of disclosure is lessening over time or just a different group of individuals.

I was not able to conduct interviews at the centre until the third week of my independent study and one positive side of this was that I was able to do an extensive literature review and secondary research. The DLGCHC's library was very useful and accommodating as I was able to borrow pamphlets, books, and issues of Agenda that I could not gain access to elsewhere. The DLGCHC has an extensive group of pamphlets on safer sex and coming out in KwaZulu-Natal which provide a distinct view of some key issues for lgb people in the region. The centre also has

⁴ Halle Bauer, "(Tres)Passing in a Heteronormative World: Self-Silencing among Young Gay and Lesbian South Africans," *School for International Training ISP*, 2008. 12.

compiled a selection of newspaper clippings relating to homosexuality in South Africa over the past few years which give a timeline of recent struggles, victories, and culture.

*“Insider/Outsider Perspective”*⁵

The first two days I was at the centre I was acutely aware of the fact that I was white and do not speak Zulu. On the one hand, my presence was accepted one it was confirmed through the question “you lez?” and “you one of us?” that I fit into the lgb realm. On the other hand, I had dropped myself into a room in which there were sometimes over 20 other people all speaking in rapid Zulu. This made me an outsider because I had no idea what anyone was talking about and I didn’t feel comfortable engaging in conversation. After two days, the more outspoken visitors to the centre began to talk to me and once I explained why I had been so quiet they embraced me into their conversations, always pulling up a chair for me and apologizing for not approaching me sooner.

The women at the centre accepted me as another woman who loves women. I was able to joke around with the visitors to the centre and relate about the woes of same-sex love and heartbreak. They invited me to a gay club with them and insisted that I go. They wanted to bring me into their lives and take me out of my comfort zone and succeeded. I ended up, once again, being the only white person at a club in a dodgy part of town but I was able to feel safe because these women picked me up from my backpackers and literally held my hand the entire night to the moment that they put me in my cab and made me phone to say that I had gotten home safe.

The other region in which I was an outsider is that while I can relate to the issues I interviewed my participants about, I have never experienced or expect to experience the levels/types of homophobia these non-white South Africans were explaining to me. My lack of

⁵ Halle Bauer, 11.

understanding of their cultural backgrounds and the reasoning for homophobia in South Africa turned out to be an advantage for me because I was able to continually prompt the participants to explain themselves more fully so that I, as an American, could understand fully what they were trying to convey to me instead of just accepting answers such as “Zulu women aren’t supposed to wear pants.” Well, why not? Who says this?

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of this study is that I was not able to begin interviews until the 9 days before the paper was due. This came about due to an unavoidable taxi-strike followed by the DLGCHC going on retreat and then a two-day holiday during which the centre was closed. Due to this unfortunate series of events, I only did interviews on 3 days and did not get to build as strong relationships with the visitors to the centre as well as I believe I could have with more time.

I was not able to include a representative sampling of the visitors to the centre because, as mentioned in my methodology, I generally let individuals approach me if they wanted to be interviewed due to the personal and sensitive nature of my topic. I did not want to make anyone feel pressured to share their experiences with me when they already experience so much pressure in other aspects of their lives. The centre is a place that my participants described as somewhere they can relax and be themselves comfortably and it was important to me that I did not potentially take this away from anyone.

I also was not able to include an equal sampling of male and female participants as I had originally hoped because the gay women at the centre tended to be more open with me than the

gay men. In addition, the interviews I did have with male participants tended to be less informative and shorter leaving me with more information about the female participants.

I only interviewed 7 participants. Not all of my participants were Zulu because I wanted to give anyone who wanted to share with me the opportunity to express themselves. In addition to not all being Zulu, it should be acknowledged that the people I did interview are a subset of the lesbian, gay, and bi-sexual population of Durban because I only interviewed people who go to the centre. Their willingness to go to the centre shows initiative on their part to find a welcoming sub-culture and an acceptance of some sort of the lgb part of their identity. They also have decided to take the risk of exposure of being seen going to the centre if they are not openly lgb.

Literature Review

Homosexuality has been used as an excuse for the endemic spread of aids, negative culture shifts, and westernization of African cultures. A common reasoning for homophobia in African countries is that homosexuality is unAfrican and an import from western culture through globalization. The assertion of homosexuality as unAfrican does not fit however with the history of African sexuality. Two examples of this are the history of lesbian sangomas in South Africa and indigenous homosexuality in Zimbabwe documented as early as cave paintings.

By using the excuse of culture that does not even fit, homophobia is not seen for what it is in African society – gendered discrimination that leads to hate speech and violence. Vasu Reddy presents a transformation of what is unAfrican in *Agenda* when he puts forth that

Homophobia is unAfrican as it undermines the rights of the sexual citizen in a way more reminiscent of colonial oppression than post-independent freedom... discrimination has

evoked special courts, states of emergency, terror and exclusion for homosexuals, allegedly in defense of 'African' patriarchies.⁶

Reddy's article, *Homophobia, Human Rights and Gay and Lesbian Equality in Africa*, gives a brief but thoughtful presentation and analysis of the perceptions of homosexuality in Africa. The article mentions Zambia, Namibia, Uganda, Kenya, Egypt, Swaziland and South Africa.

These African countries Reddy utilizes as examples present overwhelmingly harsh and angry responses to homosexuality as represented through their political leaders. In 1998, President Chiluba of Zambia described homosexuality as "the deepest level of depravity...homosexuality as a constitutional right would simply bring the whole republic crashing to its back, belly up..."⁷ In 1997, President Sam Nujoma of Namibia also reacted strongly against homosexuality as a destroyer of culture and state. He stated, "we are not going to allow individuals with alien practices such as homosexuality to destroy the social fabric of our society...[homosexuality is] a hideous deviation of decrepit and inhuman sordid behaviour."⁸ Political leaders in the other mentioned countries all spoke with the same rhetoric of homosexuality as unAfrican and dangerous to the state. When sexuality is brought into the public sphere through politics it becomes a greater marker of identity and peoples decision to display their sexual selves. Political protection and rights through a constitutional framework such as South Africa's are necessary for homosexuals to being to feel comfortable and safe expressing the sexual part of their identity.

⁶ Vasu Reddy, "Homophobia, Human Rights and Gay and Lesbian Equality in Africa" *Agenda* 50 (2001): 82.

⁷ Reddy, "Homophobia, Human Rights and Gay and Lesbian Equality in Africa," 84.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Rachel Holmse's piece in *Defiant Desire* argues strongly against the defense made by Winnie Mandela's lawyers in her 1991 trial for kidnapping and assault which they described as intervening in what was thought to be homosexuality between a white priest and a young black activist and the homophobia generated from this. Winnie Mandela's defense coded "homosexuality as a white exploitation of black culture and in itself, just another form of colonization."⁹ Defining homosexuality in this context has been a classic way of explaining homosexuality as unAfrican and provides an explanation, however unrealistic, for homophobic behavior.

Another argument about homosexuality being a European import is given in *Unsayings of Indigenous Homosexualities in Zimbabwe* which notes that male to male sex among African men was investigated by the Department of Native Affairs and the Chamber of Mines in 1906-1907 for being an 'unnatural vice'.¹⁰ If the apartheid government, which was run by people of European descent, was against homosexuality then it does not make sense that they were the people who brought homosexuality to Africa.

South Africa has used the philosophy of ubuntu in part to create greater unity in the post-1994 South Africa. Ubuntu, which comes from the Zulu saying "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu", means that a person is a person because of other people and that people affirm their humanity through recognizing their interconnectedness. Archbishop Tutu describes Ubuntu as

The essence of being human. It speaks of the fact that my humanity is caught up and is inextricably bound up in yours...[a person with ubuntu] know that they are diminished

⁹ Rachel Holmes, "White Rapists Make Coloureds (and Homosexuals): The winnie mandela trial and the politics of race and sexuality," In *Defiant Desire: gay and lesbian lives in south africa*, edited by Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, (Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1994), 285.

¹⁰ Marc Epprecht, "The Unsayings of Indigenous Homosexualities in Zimbabwe: mapping a blindspot in an african masculinity," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24 (1998).

when others are humiliated, diminished when others are oppressed, diminished when others are treated as if they were less than who they are.¹¹

In recognition of ubuntu as a South African philosophy, Archbishop Tutu has stated “anti-homosexual tendencies are unacceptable.”¹² This recognizes an instance in which homosexuality can be seen and celebrated as South African.

There is no one fixed gay identity because sexual orientation does not determine the entirety of peoples being. As Hamblin and Shackleton succinctly say, “[Identities] are fluid. You can inhabit different spaces at the same time.”¹³ This is especially true in South Africa due to the separateness imposed by apartheid’s classification of individuals into distinct groups. There was no unified LGB movement at the time of the creation of the constitution. This makes sense due to the fact that South African’s did not know each other and lived in a fragmented country with many separate cultures. Breaking out of the framework of divided cultures and groupings will help South Africa forward its reconciliation process post apartheid. *Defiant Desires* accurately notes the importance of gay identities,

Asserting a lesbian or gay identity in South Africa is thus more than a necessary act of self-expression. It’s a defiance of the fixed identities – of race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality—that the apartheid system attempted to impose upon all of us.¹⁴

¹¹ Desmond Tutu, *God Has a Dream: a vision of hope for our time* (South Africa: Doubleday Religion, 2003).

¹² Reddy, “Homophobia, Human Rights and Gay and Lesbian Equality in Africa.”

¹³ Robert Hamblin and Sally-Jean Shackleton, “Making the Box Bigger,” in *To Have and To Hold* edited by Melanie Judge, Anthony Manion and Shaun de Waal (Auckland Park: Fanele, 2008), 331.

¹⁴ Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, eds., *Defiant Desire: gay and lesbian lives in south Africa* (South Africa: Raven Press, 1994), 5.

South Africa is still in the early development of new identities in a new era and people can hopefully choose how they want to be seen and what spaces they want to inhabit. *Performing Queer* quotes Debbie Epstein's definition that identity "is something we have to work at, something which is never complete, but always in process".¹⁵ Part of the development of positive and healthy identities requires the reconciliation of private and public selves in order to live as a whole human being. The Triangle project is one example of organizations that provide counseling services for lesbian and gay individuals reconciling their identities.

A study on social attitudes in South Africa notes "Political intolerance has been shown to correlate with religion and strongly-held group identity."¹⁶ Zulu people, especially in KwaZulu-Natal, tend to be very religious and see themselves as separate from other groups of people. Through the guidance of Christianity most people in KwaZulu-Natal see homosexuality as a social construction that can be reversed.¹⁷ The separateness from other groups is enhanced by language barriers between Zulu and English speakers.

Durban is one of the most conservative provinces in the country. 81% of adult South Africans in KwaZulu-Natal agreed with the statement "It is always wrong for two adults of the same sex to have sexual relations."¹⁸ *South African Social Attitudes* is a good text to use for quantitative statistics about the moral views of South Africans. In relation to this study, it only gives a general view of how South Africans see homosexuality and a more comprehensive quantitative study would enhance the literature available on the topic.

¹⁵ Mikki van Zyl and Melissa Steyn eds., *Performing Queer* (South Africa: Kwela Books, 2005).

¹⁶ Udesh Pillay, Benjamin Roberts and Stephen Rule eds., *South African Social Attitudes: changing times, diverse voices*, (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2006), 253.

¹⁷ Udesh Pillay, Benjamin Roberts and Stephen Rule eds.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 256.

The development of an ownership of Gay men's own masculinities, or how they see themselves as being men, has become a larger part of their identity development post-1994 because of increased visibility and legalized public presence. Masculinity and femininity are socialized understandings that are not inherently part of people. Martin's essay *Gender as Social Institution* describes that there is a static understanding of gender structures based on socialization through interaction and when people do not conform to these structures they are ostracized and outcast.¹⁹ Gay men experience this 'othering' in South Africa. The book *Guyland*, which analyzes masculinity in the United States, emphasizes masculinity as a homosocial institution. Men gender police each other to ensure that masculinity is being upheld. A key part of masculinity is rejecting what is feminine and gay men are included in this idea of femininity. Men gain social currency with each other through hooking up with women and showing their heterosexual prowess.²⁰ *Guyland* applies to masculinity in South Africa as well, as men can be seen to reject the feminine or gay in order to reaffirm their heterosexuality and gain social status through hooking up.

Zulu culture places a high importance on masculinity and the strength of men. Kimmel states, in regard to the United States that "homophobia is a central organizing principle of our cultural definition of manhood"²¹ and I believe that this applies to many versions of African manhood. Homophobia in this context has also been seen in research done in Zimbabwe by Margarete Aarmo. She saw that

¹⁹ Patricia Yancey Martin, "Gender as Social Institution," *Social Forces* 82:4 (2004).

²⁰ Michael Kimmel, *Guyland: the perilous world where boys become men* (United States: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008).

²¹ Michael S. Kimmel, "Masculinity as Homophobia," In *Reconstructing Gender: a multicultural anthology* (United States: McGraw Hill, 2008).

homosexuality came to work as a symbol, I believe, because it was posed as a simple binary opposition to the extended family, the heterosexual, patrilineal institution that constitutes the ‘cultural backbone’ of the cultural tradition in Zimbabwe.²²

Masculinity is not static and the dominant form of masculinity alters based on social change. Gay men are reconstructing what the definition of masculinity can include when they are open with their sexual identity. There is a line of fault between what is expected of men in society and the reality of their experience. There is an expectation that sexuality will be performed but it is assumed that this performance will be strictly heterosexual.

Reddy divides the expression of gay masculinities into two levels in *Negotiating Gay Masculinities*. The first level is the private and personalized identity that comes through sexual self-acceptance and ‘coming out’. The second is “a politicized and **public** gay masculinity”²³ (emphasis by author) expressed through outlets such as gay pride parades, television, media, LGBT organizations, and activism. This second, public masculine identity raises public awareness and challenges the dominant heteronormative masculinity—not by rejecting it but by providing a broader definition of what masculinity can encompass. Black South Africans are under-represented in the expression of gay masculinity, in part due to the pressure of township life for them to stay ‘in the closet’. On a positive note Reddy impresses that “all over the country, gay sub-cultural spaces are emerging.”²⁴

The article pluralizes masculine in the title possibly in order to include the representation of all different forms of what is masculine. This is a broad category however and Reddy

²² Ruth Morgan and Graeme Reid, “ ‘I’ve Got Two Men and One Woman’: ancestors, sexuality and identity among same-sex identified woman traditional healers in south Africa,” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 5:5 (2003): 377.

²³ Vasu Reddy, “Negotiating Gay Masculinities,” *Agenda* 37 (1998): 66.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

addresses this when he states “the public image of gay masculinity, as is the case elsewhere in the world, presents a false impression of inclusiveness and a false notion of solidarity.”²⁵ As discussed earlier, there is no unified gay leadership or community. In addition to lack of cohesion, Reddy notes that “The majority of gay people are not concerned with gender equality and social justice.”²⁶ A drive for social justice and equality is not a requirement for gay people but should be if they want to increase social acceptance. Reddy suggests looking to the gay youth for mobilization and future leadership. The DLGCHC empowers gay youth politically by providing them with support groups in the townships, access to research facilities, legal advice, and HIV/AIDS education and support.²⁷

The limitation of *Negotiating Gay Masculinities* is that it is a brief article and labeled as such. A definition of masculinity and what separates gay masculinity supposedly from heterosexual masculinity would improve the overall cohesion of the article.

A key compilation of essays for reflecting on the developments same-sex relationships have gone through in South Africa in opposition to the homophobia of the majority of South Africans is *To Have and To Hold*. It was published in 2008 and as such is one of the most up-to-date publications on homosexuality in the context of South Africa. Key essays for the study of identity, homosexuality and African cultures are *‘This thing’ and ‘that idea’: traditionalist responses to homosexuality and same-sex marriage* by Graeme Reid, *(Not) in my Culture: thoughts on same-sex marriage and African practices* by Nonhlanhla Mkhize, *Blissful Complexities: black lesbians reflect on same-sex marriage and the civil union act* by Zethu

²⁵ Ibid., 67.

²⁶ Ibid., 66.

²⁷ The Durban Lesbian and Gay Community and Health Centre, “About the Centre,” Published online at <http://www.gaycentre.org.za/about.asp>, (accessed April 27, 2010).

Matebeni, and *'Are Our Lives OK' Reflections on 13 years of Gay Liberation in South Africa* by Gerald Kraak.

Reid reviews hearings that preceded the Civil Unions Act in 2005 by the National House of Traditional Leaders (NHTL) and comes to the conclusion that “gays embody many of the fears and anxieties—as well as some of the hopes and aspirations – associated with rapid social and political change, especially as these effect gender roles and norms.”²⁸ Gay people represent westernization to the NHTL and the expansion of non-traditional views that threaten the patriarchal way they are used to their society being run.

The idea of marriage being strictly between a man and a woman seemed to come straight from the bible and idea that people must have children. One organizer interviewed stated, “My understanding is that our belief all along is that a woman and a man they are kind of made for each other. They need each other so that they can procreate”.²⁹ Seeing as there are many orphans and street children in South Africa the argument of procreation is not thought out.

The NHTL also brought up the argument of marriage as a tool that brings two families together and same-sex marriage would not lead to a union through descendents linked to both families and thus break the ties of the society. The head speaker in Limpopo stated

Marriage amongst us black people is not the same as amongst the white people... In our system of marriage we are actually bringing two families together. That is what marriage means to us... So with whites it is just the two concerned people getting married... So that is not how we do things amongst us blacks.³⁰

²⁸ Graeme Reid, “ ‘This Thing’ and ‘That Idea’: traditionalist responses to homosexuality and same-sex marriage,” in *To Have to Hold: the making of same-sex marriage in south Africa*, edited by Melanie Judge, Anthony Manion and Shaun De Waal (South Africa: Fanele, 2008)

²⁹ Ibid., 79.

³⁰ Ibid., 80.

This argument excludes the option that gay couples could still have children or adopt but does include the important point that marriage can mean different things in different cultures.

Talking about gay marriage opened up the floor to the discussion of other problems that the participants felt had arisen from the decreasing importance of patriarchy and shifting gender scripts. A male participant at the KZN hearing brought up the loss of classic male identity from these changing identities, “and you girls as you say have rights, fine, go ahead and destroy us because you want to do what you want. Children make their own laws. Women make their own laws.”³¹ The view that changing female roles and homosexuality could ‘destroy’ men reflects the extreme extent to which patriarchy is seen as the only social structure available.³² A Chief from KZN stated it as “if you want to destroy the male and female categories, just marry each other”.³³

The understanding of homosexuality as a behavior and not as part of a person’s personality underscores all the anti-gay discussions. If homosexuality is something that can be learned and comes from the influence of western society then it can be gotten rid of. One speaker stated that “this thing has been spread amongst the young people”³⁴ as though it were an infectious disease. Another speaker from KZN expressed “gays were not in existence amongst the Zulus”.³⁵ So what does this make the visitors to the DLGCHC, not Zulu or not actually gay?

There is a clear conflict in the two sides of the argument about homosexuality and it lies along the two main theories of homosexuality; the one that it is a behavior and the other an intrinsic part of identity. Without the understanding of homosexuality as ‘unfixable’ people will

³¹ Ibid., 81.

³² It is important to note that my impression of patriarchy in South African society comes from my education in western society. While I do my best to stay unbiased, the way that I have been raised does effect my conclusions.

³³ Graeme Reid, 80.

³⁴ Ibid., 82.

³⁵ Ibid., 80.

continue to try and ‘treat’ homosexuality and perform hate crimes such as “corrective” rape of lesbians.

Mhkize, a Zulu lesbian activist and head of the DLGCHC, brings up the discussion of culture in her essay *(Not) In My Culture: Thoughts on Same-Sex Marriages and African Practices*. As documented by Reid, culture is a base on which people proclaim validity for their anti-gay views. Mhkize’s definition of what culture means to her reflects the strong base upon which Zulu culture has been built. She states “culture is the glue that holds both customs and traditions together—and protects and promotes these within families and ethnicities.”³⁶ The protection of culture from external influence has become increasingly important with the ever-increasing expansion of globalization. By regulating homosexuality as external to African culture, leaders within African communities can denounce it. It is clear however that homosexual behavior has been present throughout African history and as such is part of the history of African cultures. Throughout interviews with chiefs and further research Mhkize found that “culture and identity are constructed and nurtured; that because these are not set in stone, they have changed with time, and continue to change.”³⁷ As part of culture is its development over time (in a manner similar to individuals’ identity) African cultures can be adapted to include homosexuality without losing their customs and traditions. Mhkize has reconciled herself with her sexuality and Zulu culture and serves as an example of a possible future of unified identities. In response to anti-gay comments made by the Zulu King Zwelithini in 2005 Mhkize described herself as “a

³⁶ Nonhlanhla Mkhize, “(Not) in My Culture: thoughts on same-sex marriage and African practices,” In *To Have and to Hold: the making of same-sex marriage in south africa*, edited by Melanie Judge, Anthony Manion, and Shaun De Waal, (South Africa: Fanele 2008), 97.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

proud black, lesbian Zulu woman. I am fundamentally in tune with my culture. I do not need prayer or an Inyanga to heal me.”³⁸

Matebeni recalls that same-sex marriages between women has been a part of South African history. Traditionally, sangomas have taken female ancestral wives and paid lobola for the woman they are marrying.³⁹ This provides an example of integration of lobola, a classic part of Zulu culture, and homosexuality. In the case of the sangomas however, the explanation for their same-sex relationships is typically that there is a male ancestral spirit inside of them that is stronger than the female gender of the sangomas.⁴⁰ Thus, the relationship can still be seen as being between a man and a woman.

South Africa post-1994 has not practiced the politics of exclusion the United States has utilized in regard to homosexual rights. The majority of the people of South Africa have however, practiced what I would refer to as social exclusion akin to racism in regards to homosexual people. Nonhlanhla Mkhize succinctly sums up this problem “the contemporary cultural context of same-sex marriage in South Africa is that of legal regulation and protection – and cultural uncertainty.”⁴¹ Gay people have had their identity affirmed through the law and denied through culture.

In addition to facing controversy within their home cultures, Kraak notes that gay people remain divided from each other through race, gender, class, and religion. The common

³⁸ Latoya Newman, “King Zwelithini’s Reed Dance Comments Slammed By Gay and Lesbian Groups,” *Cape Times Online* (September 13, 2005) <http://www.capetimes.co.za/index.php?fSectionId=271&fArticleId=2874045> (accessed April 14, 2010).

³⁹ Zethu Matebeni, “Blissful Complexities: Black lesbians reflect on same-sex marriage and the civil union act,” In *To Have and to Hold: the making of same-sex marriage in south africa*, edited by Melanie Judge, Anthony Manion, and Shaun De Waal, (South Africa: Fanele 2008), 254.

⁴⁰ Ruth Morgan and Graeme Reid, 378.

⁴¹ Nonhlanhla Mkhize, 105.

experience of homosexuality does not surpass other barriers. There is no one homosexual culture and Vasu Reddy points out that “The gay movement continues to grapple with racism, classism, and sexism in its own ranks.”⁴² Even in the DLGCHC I only encountered colored and black Africans, granted KwaZulu-Natal is mostly made up of black Africans, but the lack of diversity was apparent. While homophobia is something that all gay South Africans experience it has not lead to cross-cultural cohesion for gay South Africans.

When the LGBT movement decides to rises up around the fact that no matter what their racial, class, gender, or religious differences, homosexuals all experience homophobia the social norms can begin to change. Kimmel quotes Hannah Arendt’s explanation of power dynamics and how they can change,

Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together...The moment the group, from which the power originated to begin with...disappears, his “power” also vanishes.⁴³

The creation of a unified LGBT and allied movement for social equality will draw power away from the heteronormative and homophobic majority in South Africa in addition to empowering LGBT people.

Findings

South Africans are notoriously conservative in relation to the values of their 1996 Constitution. The Constitution was developed using international standards of human rights and western views of democracy in contrast to the apartheid system. As such, the Constitution is one

⁴² Reddy, “Negotiating Gay Masculinities,” 67.

⁴³ Michael S. Kimmel, 107.

of the most liberal in the world, going so far as to be the only Constitution that specifically outlaws discrimination on the basis of sexual-orientation. Its aim, Koelbe believes, is to “provide for both equality and difference”⁴⁴ for all South Africans. The government’s position on homosexuality, as protecting gay and lesbian rights in the constitution, does not agree with the majority of South African’s—only 7% of which believe that “gay sex is not wrong at all”⁴⁵ according to the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) administered in 2003.

Acceptance of the protection of liberal values coincides with having a healthy democracy. While South Africa has gained democracy, Daniel and de Vos point out that

Democracy cannot and should not be taken for granted...for democracy to thrive and grow, the citizenry needs to develop a genuine sense of support for and faith in the new democratic regime and its institutions. Equally, popular perspectives that give support to authoritarian or illiberal sentiments can serve to undermine attempts to let the new democratic order take root.⁴⁶

The provisions of the Constitution have not changed the country’s values and do not protect people on the level of individual interactions.

Outside of the fact that homophobia is destructive and hurtful to lgb people it is also associated with other intolerant belief systems and in opposition to liberal democratic values. By creating a liberal democratic government and constitution that has been shown to be in conflict with the values of the majority, the South African government has a responsibility to protect lgb people and engage South Africans in the development of more liberal ideals through reformation of the education system to reflect the values of the Constitution, outreach in the township and rural areas, and public support by political leaders for the rights that homosexuals have already

⁴⁴ TA Koelbe, “Building a New Nation: solidarity, democracy and nationhood in the age of circulatory capitalism,” In *What Holds us Together?*, edited by D Chidester, P Dexter & W James (Cape Town: HSRC Press 2003). 169.

⁴⁵ Udesch Pillay, Benjamin Roberts and Stephen Rule eds., 36.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

been guaranteed. For how can a country call itself a rainbow nation when “South Africans still come across as deeply conservative—racist, homophobic, sexist, xenophobic and hypocritical in terms of sexual beliefs and practices.”⁴⁷ I do not intend to suggest that all people must be liberalized, everyone has a right to their opinion, rather that those people who are intolerant of homosexuality should keep their opinions from turning into hate speech or leading to physical violence in contrast to the foundations on which the government of South Africa rests.

Constitutional Court

The first generation of the Constitutional Court was as liberal as the Constitution it was founded from but it will become more conservative as judges are elected who are more representational of the values the majority of South Africans hold. A judge can only be on the Constitutional Court for 15 years or until they are 75 years old. The next ten years will contest the progressive rights the Constitutional Court has guaranteed including homosexual civil unions.

Durban

Durban resides in KwaZulu-Natal, one of the most morally conservative regions of South Africa.⁴⁸ The townships surrounding Durban are known for being the least tolerant of homosexuality in the area. Townships are outside of the city centre and made up of low-income families that tend to have low levels of education and be very religious. The townships were created under apartheid as places to move non-whites who were evicted under the Group Areas Act and have stayed almost completely non-white. These characteristics agree with *South African Social Attitudes* which states “groups with stronger religious or ethnic identities and low

⁴⁷ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 263.

levels of education are more likely to be intolerant of other groups.”⁴⁹ Interestingly enough, Cato Manor, one of the townships outside Durban, used to be a place in the 1950’s “where men are wives”⁵⁰ according to an article in *Drum Magazine*. When I lived in Cato Manor for a month my friends and I only experienced negative responses when the topic of homosexuality came up with our families. The individuals I met at the centre always referred to the townships as places where lgb people would be silent about their sexuality so as to avoid discrimination or hate crimes. Wealthier suburbs, such as Umshlanga (which is known for being white), are known for being more tolerant. Mercy stated that Zulu people “Have the mentality that you should go to Umshlanga and be gay in front of the white people but not in front of the black people because we were not brought up this way.” The rural areas outside of the city and surrounding suburbs are referred to as ‘the farm’. ‘The farm’ is seen as the most traditional area and the people I interviewed always referred to ‘the farm’ when talking about people who do not accept homosexuals or see homosexuality as unAfrican. The official government website of Durban even admitted that homosexuals are less accepted in the rural areas.⁵¹

Municipality

The website for the Durban municipality has a page for gay and lesbian tourists stating that Durban is

Gay friendly and although the rainbow flag doesn’t exactly fly over the doors of shops and venues like in Amsterdam it doesn’t mean that gay and lesbian tourists and visitors are made to feel any less welcome.⁵²

⁴⁹ Ibid., 253.

⁵⁰ Busangokwakhe Dlamini, “Homosexuality in the African Context,” *Agenda* 67 (2006): 130.

⁵¹ Ethekewini Municipality, “Gay and Lesbian Durban- Home Page,” Published online at <http://www.durban.gov.za/durban/discover/history/communities/gld> (accessed April 27, 2010).

⁵² Ethekewini Municipality.

What about lesbian and gay people who live in Durban? In SASAS (2003) 81% of adult South Africans living in KwaZulu-Natal agreed with the statement “It is always wrong for two adults of the same sex to have sexual relations.”⁵³ In 2001, while talking about tourism and competition between South African cities, the Mayor of Durban Obed Mlaba said “We should stop comparing ourselves to cities like Cape Town. In fact, Cape Town can stay with its moffies and its gays.”⁵⁴ The fact that the chief representative of the city would feel comfortable making such a discriminatory and hateful statement confirms the extent to which his constituents are homophobic.

Narratives of Cultural Context

Zulu

The Majority of people living in Durban are Zulu. The Zulu people are the largest cultural group in South Africa and the current President of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, is Zulu as well. Zulu culture, as described to me by the Zulu participants, is highly entrenched in tradition, respect for ancestors/ancestral spirits and elders, and religion. As religion and strongly held group identity have been shown to correlate with political intolerance, it is not surprising that Zulu people tend to be homophobic.⁵⁵ Jh, an 18 year old female stated, about expressing homosexuality in Zulu culture, “you will NEVER get accepted and you will have to be forced to do rituals for ancestors because they [your parents] will believe that you are disrespecting them.”⁵⁶

⁵³ Udesch Pillay, Benjamin Roberts and Stephen Rule eds., 260.

⁵⁴ Tolsi, Niren. “Being Gay and Zulu.” *Mail & Guardian Online* Oct 16, 2006.

⁵⁵ Udesch Pillay, Benjamin Roberts and Stephen Rule eds.

⁵⁶ Jh, Interview (April 30, 2010).

Elders and Ancestors

The 5 Zulu participants expressed concerns for showing respect towards their elders and ancestors. Jh doesn't believe that her ancestors judge her for being gay, she thinks it is just something that her parents inaccurately believe because they are older. Annalisse, as a Xhosa woman, on the other hand thinks that Zulu people "believe in the spirits too much, they are too comfortable in that zone."⁵⁷ There is no way to know what the spirits or ancestors are truly thinking and they then become an easy excuse for why homosexuality is unacceptable. Andile explained that in Zulu culture ancestors are also prayed to as a way to try and get homosexuality out of a child.

All of the female participants who brought up respect for elders very clearly stated that they respected these members of their family, especially male elders. Even Mercy who hates pants said,

I do have skirts ...for when Daddy is here because I respect my father and my uncles, and men in general. I wear skirts for them. They know that Mercy respects the elders you know?⁵⁸

Respect for elders was more important to these women than expressing themselves as they would in more comfortable circumstances. This is not strictly a Zulu custom or only specific to South African. While in the United States, we do not refer to our relatives as our elders the same situation occurs.

Religion

Zulu people tend to be very religious and practice various forms of Christianity according to the interviewees. Worldwide, the Bible is used as a text to propagate the belief that

⁵⁷ Annalisse, Interview (April 29, 2010).

⁵⁸ Mercy, Interview (April 28, 2010).

homosexuality is a sin that is “tearing apart the moral fabric of society.”⁵⁹ Christianity tends to see homosexuality as a social construction someone adopts due to external influence or interaction. Because homosexuality is not seen as something that is inherently part of an individual it furthers the belief that it can be removed from them.

Only 2 of my participants were not religious and Mercy was the only one who vehemently dislikes church and is forced to go by her mother. Mercy’s explanation for her dislike was “heterosexuals always refer to the Bible and God when they are trying to make a point about being homosexual as a sin...they always find reasons in the bible, reasons why being homosexual is wrong.”⁶⁰ Mercy does not accept Christianity because the rhetoric that she has been taught does not accept her.

Annalisse, who is Xhosa, described having problems in the past with her religious beliefs and her sexuality. She said she felt she had to fight against her sexuality but now she stated “I believe that he is the one who created me and I have a purpose in life and he created me lez and I have a purpose in being lez.”⁶¹ Annalisse has thus kept her family’s religious traditions while choosing not to believe that God would not want her to be a lesbian. Her family has prayed for her and brought in her Auntie who is a priest to pray for her but she has found a way to reconcile herself with her religion by focusing on the belief that God has a purpose for everyone and that her purpose must include being a lesbian. While she has reconciled herself with her religious and sexual identities, her family has not. She explained, “They are still joking around with it. They don’t take it seriously. As though one day I will change [to heterosexual].”⁶²

⁵⁹ Udesh Pillay, Benjamin Roberts and Stephen Rule eds., 255.

⁶⁰ Mercy.

⁶¹ Annalisse.

⁶² Annalisse

Family

Parental acceptance of their children's sexuality is important for identity development and confidence.⁶³ 5 of my participants' immediate families know that they are gay and their families responded in varying ways. The 2 male participants feel fully accepted by their parents, Sphe's even described that his parents "came out for me, because they like sat me down and were like its fine you don't have to hide or be in the closet anymore, we know that you are gay."⁶⁴ Sphe never feels as though he can't fully be himself and Andile agreed. They were insistent that they were themselves all the time in their lives. I believe that a key part of their comfort has come from their families' acceptance of their sexuality. They were both extremely positive about their sexuality and this seemed to protect them from the prejudices they did subtly admit facing. At the end of my interview with Andile he finally said

Okay the worst thing [is that] you can here people are whispering, you can here them whispering at the taxi ranks. And in the townships they hit you. They killed two lesbians last year for being gay. They don't like you in the farms either.⁶⁵

In Andile's suburb he does not experience the negativity he get from taxi drivers in town. While the taxi drivers in town are his least favorite thing about being gay, the taxi drivers in his suburb are his favorite thing because they do not hit him or treat him differently from anyone else. He described the taxi drivers in the suburbs treatment as "I am still Andile,"⁶⁶ indicating that he can still be himself around them and is seen as he wants to be seen.

Mercy experienced the worst response of my participants from a family member. For Mercy, the issue of pants has become a defining issue in her life. Mercy described herself as always having been boyish growing up and one expression of this has been wearing pants. She

⁶³ Gordon Isaacs and Brian McKendrick

⁶⁴ Sphe, Interview (April 30, 2010).

⁶⁵ Andile, Interview (April 28, 2010).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

could not bring herself to take a girl to her matric dance but found a compromise in herself of deciding to wear pants instead of a dress. A few months later, after Mercy admitted under pressure to her mother that she was a lesbian, her mother stole all her pants and made Mercy watch as her aunt, grandmother, and mother destroyed what they described as “the Satan that is in you.” Instead of finding that Satan had left her, Mercy stated “I started going crazy, like am I really going to leave this house in a skirt, cuz it is not who I am you know?”⁶⁷ She found one pair of pants her mother had not seen in her room. Since the ritual burning, Mercy has been wearing skirts when she leaves home everyday and changing into her one pair of pants when she gets to town.

Mercy described what a Zulu woman was supposed to be,
Being Zulu is like basically, as a girl child, you are growing up to not become independent. But I am outspoken. This is one of the things my mother doesn't like...It is a burden because I am Zulu and lesbian. My mother thinks this is a huge embarrassment. Unfortunately there is only one girl and so all my mother's expectations are on me.⁶⁸

Clearly Mercy does not fit the expectations she has been raised to believe a Zulu woman is supposed to fulfill. Mercy expressed the issue coming up “because I have grown up in the democratic South Africa, I used to ask myself why my mother doing this.”⁶⁹ Her conflict with her mother has gotten to the point that Mercy feels she must transfer to a different university campus to escape her. “Basically what my mother has done is take away my happiness and fulfilled hers. She is happy at the moment that she sees me with a skirt but she has never ever asked me how I feel.”⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Mercy.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

It is important to link that Mercy feels the need to disconnect from her home and her mother in order to be herself. The fact that her mother's beliefs come from traditional Zulu culture infers that Mercy is separating herself from aspects of traditional Zulu culture as well. Rather than cutting herself off entirely from Zulu culture I believe that she is redefining what being Zulu means to her as she described still wearing skirts in cases when she needed to respect her elders. It is surprising that an 18 year old Zulu female, who has grown up in the conservative province of KwaZulu-Natal has been able to develop and realize her identity so clearly when her family has tried to change her all her life. I believe an important part of the way that Mercy was able to articulate the issues she is facing to me came from counseling sessions she has received at the centre.

Pants

The other 3 lesbians who self-identified as butch all also expressed having issues with being told not to wear pants. Through spending time with the butch lesbians I grew to understand that the way they dress is very important to them. They all talked about their clothing as a way of identifying them as butch lesbians. When they walk down the street people know that they are lesbians because of their masculine dress while feminine lesbians pass as heterosexual. The importance they identified with their way of dress conflicts strongly with the traditional Zulu 'rules' they described. Sma explained it as "it's not accepted in Zulu culture...they don't accept us because a woman is not supposed to wear pants, only men can wear pants and stuff."

Traditional Culture

Culture, like identity, is always changing and developing over time but Mercy did not see this in Zulu culture. She described Zulu culture as, "Have you ever heard that there is a contract with no loopholes? Zulu culture, it is like, once you are in it and you want to change it is hard to

get out.” Traditional Zulu and other African leaders seem to fear change in their cultures and are reacting against liberalization that is coming from globalization by attacking homosexuality as a western intrusion instead of adapting their belief systems.

“It’s a white people thing”

Jh, an 18 year old gay Zulu adolescent explained the belief of homosexuality as being something that has come from the West and white people. She stated,

Well the thing is white people are the only ones who came in the open like us [openly gay]. They are free. They just do it. That is why we see it as something that came from the white people. Because they can walk in public, they don’t care.⁷¹

The conclusion that white people have been openly expressing homosexuality longer and more publicly was agreed upon by other participants as well. In addition, 3 out of the 7 participants specifically stated that the issue had to do with white people having had freedom that black people had not before 1994. There is a divide between the younger generation that has grown up in the democratic South Africa and their parents. The public expression of homosexuality in South African cultures is growing in the new democracy. This can be seen on SABC TV shows such as Generations, a soap opera spoken half in English and half in Zulu that features a gay couple as two of its main characters.

Mercy, an 18 year old lesbian expressed the disconnect between elders and young adults,

They say that if you are a black person and you are homosexual you are copying what white people are...In South Africa being a democratic country they shouldn’t be saying

⁷¹ Jh.

that because we are all equal. If we were still in the apartheid era and they were saying it was a white thing I would understand but I don't understand.⁷²

There has been a history of silence around black sexuality in South Africa and the discourse around sexuality has been increasingly publicized since democratization.⁷³ This is most likely one reason why the older generation of Zulu people has expressed that homosexuality is a new threat and something that Zulu people did not have before. The discourse surrounding homosexuality as unAfrican is apparently old news to intellectuals in South Africa as one prominent academic at the University of KwaZulu-Natal expressed that it was only something that the uneducated and poor people still professed. The fact that all the participants expressed hearing or being told that homosexuality is unAfrican or unZulu shows that the issue is still current for many people.

None of the participants believed that homosexuality was unAfrican or a western import. They all expressed frustration in their explanations of why some people believe it came from white people. Mercy made the issue seem quite simple,

I didn't choose to be who I am, it just happened. They are making it as if I went to live with a white person and lived with them for a few years and then came up with these feelings of being attracted to someone of the same sex.⁷⁴

Andile added, "It can come to any region. Can come anywhere. Doesn't choose. I'm African it has come with me. It can come to a green man or a white man."⁷⁵ Homosexuality has been documented in African and specifically South African history for generations. The incidences of

⁷² Mercy.

⁷³ Rob Pattman and Sultan Khan, "Undressing Durban," (Durban: Madiba Publishers, 2007).

⁷⁴ Mercy.

⁷⁵ Andile.

female sangomas (traditional healers) taking wives and the culture of male-to-male sex in the mines have become well known in recent years. How is homosexuality therefore unAfrican?

The Rise of the West

Rather than being a fear of homosexuality as an act, I believe that the fear of western culture overtaking indigenous culture is where the belief of homosexuality as being unAfrican has arisen. In addition, homophobic comments from South African politicians such as President Zuma's statement in 2006, "When I was growing up ungqingili (gay men) would not have stood in front of me. I would knock him out"⁷⁶ leads citizens to feel validated in their anti-gay views. With rapid change it is common for people to panic and grasp onto what they know and are comfortable with while excluding what they feel is foreign.

Subculture

By claiming that homosexuality is unAfrican, cultural leaders such as the Zulu King are pushing lgb people away from the culture they have grown up in without giving them an option of expressing their sexuality. This had led to the development of homosexual sub-cultures for lgb people in Durban. *Male Homosexuality in South Africa* defines a sub-culture as

"Any group excluded from the dominant culture, either by self-definition or ostracism. The outsider status allows the development of a distinct culture, based, however, on the mainstream...no counterculture [sic] can define itself independently of the dominant culture. By definition it is distinct, yet there is always the urge, if only for survival's sake, to seek acceptance."⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Alex Altman and M.J. Stephey, "Profile: Jacob Zuma, South Africa's New President," *Time Online* (April 24, 2009) <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1893561,00.html> (accessed May 5, 2010).

⁷⁷ Gordon Isaacs and Brian McKendrick, XIV.

The DLGCHC and Angelo's (a club) were the two spaces that every participant cited as places they could be comfortable and openly gay. The DLGCHC is in the center of the city and only a block away from where all mini-bus taxis stop. This makes it easy to access for people from all over Durban and the surrounding areas with ease. The centre's lounge space is where everyone hangs out every weekday when they are free. On any afternoon there are at least 30 young adults sprawled out on the beanbag chairs and couches, watching TV or laughing at each other and speaking rapid Zulu. The centre has weekly discussions about current politics, movie showings, and other events in the lounge space. It also provides counseling and support groups, HIV education, legal advice, and advisory pamphlets. Mercy said she goes to the centre because "It helps in a way, just to be in a room of people who have the same problems as you, even if you are not talking to them."⁷⁸ Jh stated, "it is my second home."⁷⁹ All my participants love the centre and spend most of their time there.

Lissa and Annalisse took me to Angelo's so that I could experience their favorite place to go out and understand the experience of gay nightlife in Durban. Angelo's is a big nightclub in a lower-income area of Durban Central. I was the only white person at the club and it would not have been safe for me to be in that area at night without Lissa and Annalisse. I did not want to go to Angelo's at first since I did not know many people but Lissa convinced me by describing Angelo's as a place where

Everyone gets to be extra free and at Angelo's everyone is okay... You become automatically everyone else's friend, there is no time to seclude yourself, everyone is themselves. Some people 'come out' there and it is like home to them. Every race, it's mixed... We become a big family, everyone gets to come out and be okay, even if your

⁷⁸ Mercy.

⁷⁹ Jh.

parents don't know we understand it, we don't pressure you to do anything. We understand it.⁸⁰

It was true, when I went to Angelo's I felt like I had stepped into a different world, it was suddenly okay to be gay and I felt a freedom that I had been missing in the way I express myself in South Africa. I suddenly understood the importance of sub-cultural spaces in a way in which I never had before because I hadn't needed reassurance that my identity was okay in the past.

Divided identities

One issue of sub-cultural spaces is that they can further divide participants from the mainstream culture by emphasizing "'difference' and 'separateness', contributing to further identity crisis."⁸¹ Mercy described that she feels as though she is "living double"⁸² since she cannot be herself at home and has to hide her pants there as they represent her identity as a butch lesbian. This conflict has led her to try and commit suicide but she has reconciled herself to "living double"⁸³ until she can get away from her homophobic mother. Annalisse has also experienced conflicts in her identity when she is with her father's family. She explained it as,

I like talking too much and having people know who I am. I feel like I have to reveal what I do, like I'm being ripped out of my skin, it's personal and sensitive...I really don't talk about it [being gay] because I hate their [my family's] expressions.⁸⁴

These were the most extreme statements that my participants made in regards to identity conflict.

The women who identified as femme at the centre did not have these issues because they did not

⁸⁰ Lissa, Interview (April 29, 2010).

⁸¹ Gordon Isaacs and Brian McKendrick, XI.

⁸² Mercy.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Annalisse.

look gay to their families and therefore did not have to deal with questions surrounding their sexuality.

In contrast to feeling divided, the two gay men I interviewed said that they were themselves in every part of their life and never had to put their sexual identities to the side. Rather than feeling conflicted, they expressed pride in their homosexuality. Because Andile expresses himself he stated that

you feel happy, you experience yourself and you don't have to worry about anyone else who says bad things about you. You are showing your emotions to other people. You can wear what you want to.⁸⁵

Andile's comfort in his life has led to him feeling pride in his sexuality. He described it as, "I am comfortable and happy and excited for who I am. Everyday I think, I am so happy and proud of being gay!"⁸⁶

Pride

Pride was a common feeling all of my participants except Mercy expressed. Lissa expressed that the best thing about being a lesbian was "woman. To see her smile makes me know that I am proud to be gay."⁸⁷ Annalisse talked endlessly about how much she loves women and how relationships are easier when they are between people of the same sex. She explained it as,

Oh my goodness. See since we are the same sex finding that you both know what you both want. You know what you want and she can give you that... You understand each other. You don't have to think since he is a man how am I going to love him. You know. You are woman...It's wonderful because I enjoy the sex believe me, I feel no pain just

⁸⁵ Andile.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Lissa.

pleasure. The sex is just so damn good. I just love it. I'm a proud pervert. You can write that.⁸⁸

Jh agreed with Annalisse, saying, "You are able to love someone that you love. Because they understand you better"⁸⁹ and Sphe said that

you have the best of both worlds. It sort of helps...like straight people have all these questions about the opposite [sex]...and you as a gay person, I'm a guy and you know things [about other men]. And girls share things with you that they would never share with a straight guy...I actually love being gay."⁹⁰

My participants have constructed positive self-images they were able to express to me and that I could see in their demeanors by reconciling themselves with their sexual identity. In the context of cultural conservatism and religion I was not expecting to find the wealth of pride and self-love that I uncovered. This points to the strength of these individuals for not seeing themselves as victims and instead conceptualizing homosexuality as a benefit to their relationships.

Where to From Here?

The pride and strength these young lgb people expressed needs to be used to create a national movement for gay activism. At present, there is no unity for lgb people in South Africa across the divides of class, religion, and race. While lgb people are guaranteed the same rights and protections as any other South African this constitutional protection does not translate into social acceptance. South Africa calls itself a rainbow nation but it is a highly conservative and traditional society. Without unifying around the fact that all gay South Africans experience homophobia the social structures will not begin to change. Lgb South Africans need to engage

⁸⁸ Annalisse.

⁸⁹ Jh.

⁹⁰ Sphe, Interview (April 30, 2010).

politically to tell their society that they are OK just the way they are and that they deserve to be treated with the respect. *Introducing Liberation Theology* ironically gives a good summary of what lgb South Africans need to do,

In Liberation, the oppressed come together, come to understand their situation through the process of conscientization, discover the causes of their oppression, organize themselves into movements, and act in a coordinated fashion.⁹¹

If individuals do not feel oppressed themselves then they should rise-up for those who are too afraid to come out from silence and express themselves. For the people like Mercy, who are living double and for the oppressed lgb peoples in other African countries who are looking to South Africa as a model for liberation.

Conclusions

In following with the objectives stated in the intro, I was able to access a part of the sub-culture of lgb young-adults in Durban. I became friends with visitors to the centre and they took me to Angelo's (a gay club) because they *wanted* to bring me into their lives and help me understand things that I could not grasp just by sitting with them for an hour in an interview. Through this experience I saw that the relationship between culture and sexuality varies for individuals but that all did experience some forms of social discrimination such as whispering when they passed by taxi ranks in town everyday. This homophobia is perfectly in tune with the conservative mentality of the majority of South Africans.

I entered this study expecting to find that my participants would feel victimized but instead I found that almost all of them were proud of their sexuality and comfortable with their identity. Out of the 7 participants, only Mercy expressed feeling as though she was "living

⁹¹ Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, United States: Orbis Books: 1987.

double.” While this is promising the individuals who frequent the centre are not representative of the entire lgb young-adult population in Durban because they feel comfortable enough with their sexuality to present themselves at the centre. I believe that young-adults who risk losing more from being seen at the centre would not go and most likely experience more identity conflict. In addition, all of my participants found the centre through friends who knew they were gay therefore people who are completely closeted would also be less likely to hear about the centre.

Within their families the participants expressed that respect for their elders was very important, to the extent that they would subdue performative aspects of their sexuality in order to not upset conservative, traditional, or highly religious relatives. Religion played an important role in 6 of the participants’ lives and had been a source of conflict for 3 in regards to homosexuality being against the word of the Bible.

There appears to be a conservative reactionary backlash to the progressive liberalization of the South African government. It is possible that lgb freedoms could be taken away in the future as the makeup of the Constitutional Court changes to represent the more traditional opinions of the majority. In order to resist this backlash lgb people need to mobilize nationally to pressure the government to advocate for social equality for lgb people instead of just resting on the word of the constitution. There is no unified lgb community in South Africa and one needs to develop to change public opinion. By staying quiet and out of politics lgb people are letting the belief that homosexuality is unAfrican continue. I believe that taking power politically would also empower the youth that I interacted with by giving them an outlet to express their frustrations in a fruitful manner.

Recommendations

For research in the future, I would recommend further studies into the identities of butch and femme women. All of my female participants identified as either butch or femme and the butch women showed a clear performance of their butch identity in their dress, speech, mannerisms, and their treatment of me (who they defined as femme). In addition, there seemed to be a rule that butch women would never date each other but femme women could. Lastly, one of my participants told me that as a butch women she is always on top during sex and never lets her partner touch her sexually. She thought that this was common for butch women but was not sure if it was the case in most situations.

I would also recommend further studies into the identities of lgb young-adults in the townships. The DLGCHC has outreach programs that do workshops in the townships and shadowing these would be very informative.

Lastly, further study into the lack of transgender people at the centre and the DLGCHC's inability to access transgender people in Durban to find out their needs and therefore provide useful services.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocols for lgb Visitors to the Centre

General:

Name:

Age:

Where do you live:

Occupation: (job, unemployed, student)

Gender:

Life Story:

1. Can you tell me your life story and how your sexuality has influenced your experiences?
2. How would you define your sexuality?
3. When did you have an awakening to your understanding of your sexuality?
4. Are there Zulu⁹² words to describe sexual attraction to a person of the same sex?
5. Do you find that you can share/celebrate this part of your life with various family members? (Why/why not)?
6. What makes you think of yourself as 'Zulu' (prompt: Language? Culture? What specifically about culture? What makes this different from Xhosa or Sotho culture?)
7. Do you ever feel difficulties being open about your gay identity at home/at school/at church?
 - a. Which of these difficulties comes from 'Traditional' Zulu culture?
 - b. Which comes from Christianity + Christian morality?
 - c. Who/where do you get your understanding of what is and is not Zulu
8. What are the specific challenges experienced by being a homosexual in Zulu culture?
9. Do your friends and family know that you come to the centre?
10. How did you find the centre + how often do you come here?

Directed Questions:

1. Who says that homosexuality is a western import?
 - a. What do you think of this?
2. When in your life can you be most yourself (as Zulu and a gay person)?
3. In what context do you have to put one of these identities to the side to feel comfortable?

⁹² Inserted different cultural background if the participant was not Zulu.

4. Do you accept the definition given to you of what it means to be Zulu?
5. What do you think needs to change in Zulu culture and South Africa as a whole for homosexuals to feel accepted into main-stream society?
6. Are there specific hangout spots for gay people in Durban?

On Sexuality

1. What is the best thing about being gay?
2. What is the worst thing about being gay?
3. What do you think of your sexuality (are you comfortable with it)? Why/why not

Appendix B: Interview with Mercy

Name: Mercy

Age: 18

Occupation: (job, unemployed, student) first year student

Gender: Female

Life Story

11. Can you tell me your life story and how your sexuality has influenced your experiences?

So far it is in a bad way. From when I was young they was trying to change the person that I am. There was a time that they forbid me from wearing pants; I think I was about 7 years old. That's when my father was there, when he was away and as I got older they thought that they had changed me.

I was boyish, I never liked dolls and always played with action figures. They saw the signs when I was young. They tried to buy me dolls but I didn't like them. They sold my tricycles, they thought that if they sold all my boyish stuff I would change. But I didn't. As I grew older they saw, I like hip-hop, at school I like poetry, I rap, basically I'm not a feminine type of person. My best friend was a boy and I shouldn't hang out with girls. In primary when boys don't hang out with girls I was with the boys. My mother thought that if I went to an all girl's school I would change but it got worse because I like girls!

I realized when I was 12 that I like girls but I never went into denial. I was like okay, you know. In high school I flirted with a girl in 11 grade when I was in grade 8 and as I progressed into high school it became worse and I couldn't hide it from my mother. She started asking me questions and I told her to just drop it. I figured she was starting to develop a mind that I could be lesbian. I came out to my friends when I was in grade 10. They knew already and just needed me to tell them. I told my best friend first, they were more understanding, they are like my family. At home they were not understanding. I was in grade 12 when I told my mother. We had a matric dance in grade 12 and I actually wanted to go with a girl but I changed my mind and went with my brother and didn't wear a dress. My mother asked me why and I told her that they told me I could wear whatever I wanted. The principal actually liked it and told me that I had a swagger. They knew at school but they couldn't go out and say that (I was gay) to tell me to publish it. My Afrikaans teacher knew, they knew.

After the matric dance, came the exams when I was writing my final exams my mother was really putting the pressure on me, asking me questions and I remember in grade 12 I was really into the rapping thing, I even wanted to go places (To rap) but I couldn't because my mother wouldn't let me. I think I was going to write my final English paper and then there was going to be the matric farewell and obviously I bought the stuff I liked and my mother was like you are going to send that stuff back. And I am trying to study for the English final and then over here she is keep on asking me questions. I didn't sleep that night. I wanted to sleep. She was telling me to return the stuff and when I told her it was like, I just snapped, I wanted to sleep and here she is crowding my space. I said okay mom, you know what, I am lesbian and then she said there is no such thing as being gay, lesbian that is all satanic and then she cried, I cried, and from that time I thought she understood cuz she let me wear those things to my matric farewell.

Andile (input) : it is easier for friends, its harder for your family (to know you are gay).

Then I went to sleep and did the matric farewell. From the farewell through January she wasn't saying anything. I think she blocked out that event of telling her I am lesbian. It came to time for tertiary and I had to buy more stuff for tertiary. And then I bought more pants, what I liked, and she had a problem with it. My father does not have a problem with it because he realizes I am old and can buy whatever I want. Cuz I passed matric he is just happy, but he doesn't know that I am lesbian

And then came March, March was like, my mother was fuming. She started with the insults everyday, uhhh M why don't you wear skirts. I told her I do have skirts mom for church and when daddy is here because I respect my father and my uncles, and men in general, I wear skirts for them. They know that Mercy respects the elders you know? And then my father came down for Easter and so it was fine but while I was in the kitchen my mother said that after your father goes you must start wearing skirts. And I thought she was joking because I have already told her I am lesbian and I wear pants. The next morning she wakes up and tells me I don't listen and I go to campus (and to LGBT centre for personal counseling). I realized when I got home that some of my pants were gone from my wardrobe, and so I was like okay my mother is trying to play a joke on me. And that weekend when I was bathing she took the rest of my clothes. And same weekend on Sunday she makes me go to church and I wear a skirt, after church I ask her to please return my pants back because I am going to school. Then she keeps quiet, that morning I tell her I need my pants to go to campus. She wakes up and scolds me, told me that she told me to start wearing skirts. I said ma I thought we went through this I told you I'm butch, I'm not comfortable in skirts and then she says okay fine you are not going to school. You are not going to campus at all. If you think that you are going to keep waiting for your pants de-register from the campus because I am not sending an embarrassment to campus. Then she calls my aunt and my grandmother. They were in it together to destroy my pants. So my aunt comes and she scolds me and she holds me and shakes me and says this demon must come out of you. Like a church service and sermon. I am wondering why, it was so scary iesel, my mother really scared me that day. My aunt takes the matches, my mom goes to where she hid my pants, my grandfather is out for the weekdays and he comes home late. They said M come and watch we are destroying the Satan that is in you. So I watched them burn my pants and I didn't go to campus that day. That day we were going to learn Microsoft XL, the same thing we were going to be tested on. They wanted to call my uncle and brother to come beat me up, the whip was there already, so it means that they didn't want everyone in the family to know so they said okay, we are not going to beat you up today. That means they can still beat me up! On the very same day my mother said tomorrow you will be leaving this house wearing a skirt. She gave me 300 rand to buy a pairs of skirts when I went to town. I started going crazy like am I really going to leave this house in a skirt, cuz it is not who I am you know? So I search through my wardrobe and find these pair of pants that I am wearing and when I find these pair of pants I quickly put them in my bag and tell myself okay whenever you leave this house you are going to wear a skirt and when you reach town you are going to find a public toilet and change and go to campus and when you try to go home, find a public toilet change and act as if everything is okay.

I remember I have to buy a pair of skirts so I had to lie, take 110 rand from the 300 rand and I bought another pair of pants with this 100 rand. This pair of pants is in my bag now because they need to go to the dry cleaners since I cant wash them at home. When I reach home, I lie and tell my mom that she gave me 200 and not 300 rand so from that day I've been going out of the house wearing a skirt, coming to town, changing to pants, and when it is time to go back home I put on a skirt again. Its come to a point that my friends suggested that I take a

transfer from the Durban city campus to one in Pietermaritzburg or Johannesburg. And I was wondering I didn't want my father to find out that I was gay so I thought what can I possibly tell him to make him take me out of this campus and put me in a Pietermaritzburg or Johannesburg campus and then so my friends suggested that I tell him that I feel the need to develop my independent qualities so I found myself calling my father and asking him to come down to Durban so we can discuss something important. So he said okay he is going to come down and discuss it. I hope, it is the only way I can get away from my homophobic mother. If it works I will be relieved, I will be going away from all of this. Because my father is the type of person that understands, but I don't think he will understand if I tell him I am lesbian. But I will make up this lie that I feel the need to be independent, so either he helps me find my feet and get a job and a flat and in college and actually pay my own way in life. So it's been like that. Yeah. So today I am sending this other pair of pants to the dry cleaners and I'm just hoping that I don't bump into someone I know from home that is what I pray for everyday. Please don't let my mother be at west street when I am in pants and please don't let my mother come to campus. The people who have been supportive are my friends, they live far away. Right now I am just hoping that my father agrees. He is coming back early may and he sounded very concerned so its an indication that he cares. So I hope that all goes well.

I said to my mom how will it be if I move out. She said that won't happen, I need to learn how to be a real girl and develop feminine qualities. My mother wants to have this hold on me, I mustn't be anything, she wants to control me. I had to give my dad a call yesterday and I was talking last week to see if is possible for me to be transferred at this point in the year. I am just praying for a positive feedback. Otherwise it means that I have to start saving up to buy another pair of pants and live this way until I get a job to be independent. There was this time last week where I got angry and just went to campus in a skirt, I didn't want to go to campus, it was uncomfortable. I was angry, why must I wear pants, let me see how it feels to go in a skirt. Didn't feel right. Something doesn't feel right. It's not who I am. That's just it. Today, everyday I don't know what to expect at home. There are these programs at home, generations and society, my mother likes generations so when it comes to senzo and jason's part (a gay male couple on generations) she sometimes changes the channel and society yesterday she changed the channel completely, I haven't watched that program in weeks, she is always changing it. Any program on TV that speaks about homosexuals she just switches it off saying that this thing about homosexuals is just a bunch of people who join a cult who drink blood and kill other people. Who have no structure at all in their lives, who are out of hand. I said mom I don't drink blood, smoke, do drugs, go to clubs, so why do you think being lesbian makes me part of a cult group. She says I don't know. She blames the school I have been to, she blames my friends. I ask her why she is blaming my friends, they are not all lesbian. She says that they had a hand in changing who I am and she raises the past where I was still young and the qualities I used to show when I was still young. She says that children are supposed to act the way they do because they are confused. So my aunt , mother, and granny say that if my father finds out he will have another stroke (had one last year) we will blame you. Granny said like if you keep saying you are lesbian you are starting to kill me. They were saying things that could happen. If my father, mother, granny die it will be all my fault because of who I am. So I have this heavy load, I am being blamed for stuff that hasn't even happened. So whenever something happens they are like – "its you! Its your fault." So when I go home today I don't know what to expect. I will probably be punished

Erin: WHY?

There are times that my mother doesn't clean the house or cook or wash the dishes. And then I get home and she says I have been waiting for you, you are a girl do the dishes. They punish me for being lesbian. So over the years the reason I don't like church is like heterosexuals always refer to the bible and god when they are trying to make a point about being homosexual as a sin. They always refer to god and the bible. I just got angry and then whenever people speak about church I am like I don't go to church and I don't believe because they are always associating, they always find reasons in the bible, reasons why being homosexual is wrong. Even if I go to church, even if my mother brings in pastors, it doesn't really have impact on me, you know?

I have tried suicide, you know, taking pills. But I was like no, I can get out, I can get through this, if it means *living double* as I am now then so be it. I wish I can live the lotto, you know, get some millions and go out and buy my own house and have my own place where they wouldn't come and distract me. Yeah.

12. How would you define your sexuality?

Butch lesbian.

Erin: What is butch?

Butch is like don't have the qualities that an ordinary girl would have I think it is something you are born with. You don't make yourself that way, from the time I was young I didn't have those feminine qualities in me. Doesn't mean that I will stop rapping, walking the way I do, listen to hip hop. There are feminine lesbians but I am not like that. I like male clothing, I don't like makeup, I've never put on makeup or heels. I used to destroy heels. They used to buy them for me when I was young for church. And dresses, hate them.

13. When did you have an awakening to your understanding of your sexuality?

11-12, even though puberty doesn't kick in that time. I've never drooled over a boy, I used to wonder why other chicks in the class drooled over guys and why am I want, and why do I prefer posters of destiny's child and Jessica Alba instead of bow wow and 50 cent. Puberty kicked in and I wasn't attracted to guys at all. Fortunately I went to a girls school.

14. Are there zulu words to describe sexual attraction to a person of the same sex?

Stabane – homosexual, and gender. They call you stabane
uSatan

15. Do you find that you can share/celebrate this part of your life with various family members? (why/why not)?

no

16. What makes you think of yourself as 'zulu' (prompt: Language? Culture? What specifically about culture? What makes this different from Xhosa or Sotho culture?)

My mother is zulu but my father isn't he is from Malawi. My father left when I was 9 but during that first period there was a time where I didn't actually know Zulu. Where I spoke English. As I got into high school the majority was black and so I learned Zulu easily, just like that. When anyone asks me what your culture is I say Zulu because my father never really taught

me his culture. Traditionally I am Malawian but I am born in south Africa and my mother is Zulu so technically I'm Zulu

17. Do you ever feel difficulties being open about your gay identity at home/at school/at church?

Church: my mother forces me to go

18. What are the specific challenges experienced by being a homosexual in zulu culture?

Because my mother, her side of the family, and my fathers as well but my father doesn't know. Their tradition is that a girl is supposed to get married with a man. If I was still living in the primitive days I would be married already. As you can see Jacob zuma is taking wives, they still have that mentality that a woman is supposed to get married, have children, and don't develop independent qualities. Even though my mother was a nurse and she also had that mentality that she has to ask my father for everything. When my father used to live with us she would ask my father if she could go to the store, and ask my father if hse could spend her own money

Because I have grown up in the democratic South Africa I used to ask myself why is my mother doing this. It is her money, it is her house, why do you have to tell my father that you are going to buy yourself a pair of shoes? Cuz it is not like my father needs to take her bank card and give you 115. My father just let my mother be who she is. But because my mother grew up that a woman must always report to her husband she does that to my father. At the end of the day my father took advantage of the situation. He wasn't earning a proper income and tell my mother that he needed to borrow a couple 1000 rand but wouldn't pay her back because he knew that my mother would not approach him.

So being zulu is like basically, as a girl child, you are growing up to not become independent. But I am out spoken, this is one of the things my mother doesn't like. But I respect my elders. It is a burden because I am Zulu, and lesbian. My mother thinks this is a huge embarrassment. Unfortunately, there is only 1 girl, and so all my mothers expectations are on me. She feels that she needs to control me and have me be what she wants me to be. My aunt is a perfect example, even though she has been hurt a few times by men she always, when she meets a new partner, she always falls for his tricks. Even though the previous one may have tricked her the same way.

19. Do your friends and family know that you come to the centre?

No. cuz if she knew she would have probably barged in her one day cursing every one that is around. But she does know, I did pass through when we were fighting that I come to counseling. She said that it was not counseling, just a cult group that I am following. If I gave her the address she would have probably came here and did something.

20. How did you find the centre + how often do you come here?

I went to an organization that helps homosexuals and then the person I was chatting to was like go to the LGBT centre at 320. I was reluctant at first because I needed counseling and I was reluctant that I would be speaking to someone that I barely even know. I was in campus and I went to the website and got the # and I called before I got here and they were like you are welcome to come here. So I came here, got counseling and it helped. I need to go to counseling again. Cuz the first time I went it was still about the problem of them hiding my pants. But now I have to tell them that they burnt my clothes.

It helps in a way, just to be in a room of people who have the same problems as you even if you are not talking to them.

Directed Questions:

7. Who says that homosexuality is a western import?

It is not. They say it came from Europe and America and that it is a white thing. They say that if you are a black person and you are homosexual you are copying what white people are. They'd be like, it is a white thing. In SA being a democratic country they shouldn't be saying that because we are all equal. If we were still in the apartheid era and they were saying it was a white thing I would understand but I don't understand

I didn't choose to be who I am, it just happened. They are making it as if I went to live with a white person and lived with them for a few years and then came up with these feelings of being attracted to someone of the same sex.

Erin: who are 'they':

It is the in general, because of the African people, especially black people and the cultural motives. In those rules (of zulu) there is no such thing as being homosexual so they always want someone to blame. In the end of the day, blame the white person because the white person is blamed for everything else that has been happening. For apartheid, for taking over land, for bringing homosexuality to SA or Africa as a whole.

Erin: what are the rules?

Person in the zulu culture it is, a woman has to be married to a man. If you get married to another woman it is taboo. In the primitive days I would have been killed. It is not, they feel that there is no such thing as homosexual. So if you are a black Zulu person and you say you are homosexual that means you have associated yourself with a person of western origin. A white person in general.

8. When in your life can you be most yourself (as Zulu and a gay person)?

I think I can be myself once I become independent. Or I if I move in with my father cuz my father wants the best for all this children. He doesn't want us to live by laws. Okay there are some laws you have to live by but not those that prevent you from being happy. Basically what my mother has done is take away my happiness and fulfilled hers. She is happy at the moment that she sees me with a skirt but she has never ever asked me how I feel. Respect your elders- Zulu culture

9. Do you accept the definition given to you of what it means to be Zulu?

Basically I think they need to be educated about homosexuals. Because if I had to take my mother and explain it to her she would still say that it is a white thing. So sometimes you think they really need a knock on their heads or get amnesia or something and then when they get this amnesia they must also understand that homosexual is part of life also but you mustn't think that because now she has created her own world. In the primitive days people used to hide their homosexuality. But what they are doing now is creating a world of their own that there aren't gays. If you are Zulu Xhosa or Sotho and living those primitive times then what you need is to be educated and have your head stuck in the 21st century

10. What do you think needs to change in Zulu culture and South Africa as a whole for homosexuals to feel accepted into main-stream society? (if they have indicated they do not feel accepted)

A whole lot of things. Have you ever heard that there is a contract that there is no loopholes? Zulu culture, it is like, once you are in it and you want to change it is hard to get out. They have this mentality. What needs to change is basically, our president needs to instead of getting involved in other stuff he needs to take his time and choose that he accepts the lifestyles of everyone else in SA and in the world. He needs to be seen in a gay centre or a gay NGO. Thabo Mbeki made the law that gay people can be married so why cant Zuma take the time to accept homosexuals publicly like how Mr. Thabo Mbeki did with accepting them and giving them the opportunity to get married. So there needs to be like, -so if Jacob Zuma accepts the he can change the mind of more Zulu men out there who make it their job to go around beating up gay people. Cuz if you live in a place like KwaMashu and probably in a section notorious for criminals and if you are gay you are not going to come out as the person you would like to be. You have to hide your feelings. You have to pray that one day you will get out of this township. Basically what I am saying in KZN you do not have freedom if you live in the townships, its more okay in Umshlanga, and even phoenix but I live in phoenix and it is not okay for me. They have the mentality that you should go to Umshlanga and be gay in front of the white people but not in front of the black people because we were not brought up this way.

11. Are there specific hangout spots for gay people in Durban?
Angelo's that's the one that I have been hearing about

On Sexuality

4. What is the best thing about being gay?

What can I say. The best thing, I haven't seen so far because society still discriminates against us. But probably the best things show when you are around other homosexuals then maybe you can get the best out of yourself. But when you are around town or at home you cant get the best out of being gay because what I have noticed is that most gay people are open that is the best thing about them and what I have really noticed is that gay people are good friends. They are really really good friends, especially to straight people. In high school I was the best friend to straight people. Even my teacher once said that the best thing about a lesbian or gay person is that you can trust them. Some straight people trust us at least.

E: Why do ppl trust gay people?

I think cuz, I don't know but if a straight person had to talk about their boyfriend they would offer everything, they know for once that I now they are straight os I wont hit on them, they know I am attracted to the same sex so if they talk about the opposite sex to me I wouldn't compare it to my own situation. That our advice would always be different from advice straight people would give.

5. What is the worst thing about being gay?

That you always have to watch your back. You never know if someone is following you around town. Waiting to beat you up just for being homosexual and trust. Trust is one because I trusted my mother that she would never go beyond speaking in words, not beyond that and actually burning my stuff. So basically if you are gay, there are bad things, trusting someone you think would understand.

6. What do you think of your sexuality (are you comfortable with it)? Why/why not

Yes I am comfortable but there are certain things like the problems I am going through that can prevent you from being comfortable. Right now because I am going through all these problems it is hard for me to get into a relationship. Right now if I get myself into a relationship I

have to offload all these things that are happening to my partner and that is not fair. So sometimes you have to make decisions. So after I get out of this problem that is the only time that I will find someone to be in a relationship with.