

*From Homo to Pomo: 'gay identity' amongst young white
men in contemporary South Africa*

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Plagiarism Statement

Recognising that plagiarism is a serious offence, I do hereby declare that the research, discussions, and analysis found within this project are my own. Where I have drawn on the ideas and work of other authors I have acknowledged these authors and sources correctly, both in-text and in my bibliography.

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Abstract

This project argues that there is a 'lacuna' in the representation of the demographic understood as 'young, white, urban, gay men' in contemporary South Africa. Whilst mediated popular representations of this demographic exist, these representations perpetuate a transnationalised, commercialised sense of identity – which in turn masks authentically local experiences. There are no literary representations of this demographic which speak to local experiences of support structures, community, identity, and ethics in a post-apartheid context. By deconstructing the label of 'gay' this project maps the problems of interpreting this demographic under a marker of 'gayness'. Using Alex Sanchez's American *Rainbow Boys*, *Rainbow High*, and *Rainbow Road* it traces the history and meaning of 'gay'. It relates this meaning to a South African context by using André Carl van der Merwe's *Moffie*, Malan and Johaardien's *Yes, I am!* and mediated representations of the popular *Mr Gay South Africa* competition. These cultural sources point toward the need for a new framework of understanding in South Africa – one which shifts away from an overreliance on Western discourses. This framework is provided in relation to five local narratives gathered through ethnographic research, where the experiences of these five men are interpreted under a paradigm of 'pomosexuality' rather than 'gayness'. The project argues that pomosexuality, as a perspective, appreciates liminality but does not rely on it for identity. Rather, it focuses on the unrepresented shift from a Western ethic of the politicisation of identity to a local ethic of the politicisation of values. It ultimately argues that the lacuna of representation can be filled by adopting this pomosexual framework and breaking free of assumptions of homogeneity and assimilation.

Chapter One: Gaily Laying the Groundwork

Can we solve the problem of suffocating identity politics by allowing anyone at all to define the identities being politicized? Or would a better solution be the abandonment of politicized identities in favour of the politics of values?"

Kate Bornstein (1997: 16)

The only thing that is the same about everyone in the gay community is that we're gay. [...] Why can't we talk about a human community?

Adam Lambert (Towle, 2009)

This project argues that the marker of 'gay' is fundamentally linked to Western discourses of ideological-spatial affirmation and historical identification, and is ultimately inapplicable to a South African context. Current representations of the demographic of 'young, white, urban, gay male', which is a demographic regarded by many to be over-represented and 'essentialised', do not extend beyond commercialised texts. This effectively masks the need for authentic local experiences to be understood. Consequently, there is a lacuna in representation of this demographic: interpreting members as 'gay' carries the assumption that ideological support structures and spaces exist in South Africa, resulting in the perception that representations beyond magazines, or films, or beauty pageants are not needed. This project addresses this lacuna by generating authentic local texts in the form of personal narratives, and by offering a perspective of pomosexuality – rather than gayness – to read and understand these texts. This perspective shifts understanding away from Western discourses of politicising sexual identity to instead focus on a discourse of individualistic navigation which seeks to achieve an ethic of human values. This ethic shapes the local understandings of this demographic, and this project argues the need for an adjusted pomosexual world-view to fully appreciate the anxieties and triumphs of lived cultural experiences. This initial chapter will contextualise this study, and outline the trajectory of analysis.

Introduction

The struggle for equal rights in South Africa is synonymous, for many, with a struggle for gay¹ rights (De Waal and Manion, 2006: 6). The long history of opposition to apartheid is filled with the work of prominent politicians and activists fighting to acknowledge gay rights as "an integral part of the broader remit of human rights" (7). The gay rights movement cannot be attributed to a single static body, but rather to groups and organisations from a variety of racial backgrounds and scattered across decades of resistance, united under the ever-contentious idea of a "gay community" by mere virtue of a difference to the heterosexual norm (9). The legalised persecution of homosexuals during the apartheid regime (Hoad, 2005: 16) led to the development of organisations such as the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand (GLOW) and the Organisation of Lesbian and Gay Activists (OLGA) which were focused on instilling a sense of pride and equality in South Africa, drawing inspiration from a worldwide gay rights movement that gained momentum after the Stonewall riots in 1969 (Cage, 2003: 4). The history of sexual politics in this country is recorded in detail by Neville Hoad, Karen Martin and Graeme Reid (2005); Mikki van Zyl and Melissa Steyn (2004; 2009); and Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron's iconic anthology *Defiant Desire* (1994), which celebrates the lives of people who claim a form of gay identity and who fought to express such identities in an exceptionally repressive environment. As a result of the gay rights movement's alignment with the anti-apartheid struggle the final South African Constitution includes an equality clause specifically geared toward sexual identity equality (Cock, 2005: 188). The current climate of opinion with regard to gay rights, whilst far from ideal, surpasses that of so-called first-world countries in this regard. Legal equality is also afforded to gay people through the Civil Unions Act of 2006, passed in the spirit of anti-apartheid activism by a parliamentary majority of 230 to 41 (Stobie, 2007: 15). As one of only ten countries in the world currently allowing same-sex marriage (the others being the Netherlands, Argentina, Iceland, Portugal, Belgium, Canada, Spain, Norway, and Sweden), and the only one in Africa, South Africa's current legal position toward gay rights is

¹ The use of the word "gay" is complex, as will be discussed at length below. In this instance it broadly refers to all those sexual identities that exist in opposition to heterosexuality. The use of gay in "gay rights movement", and similarly below in reference to "gay identities" and "gay community", is an umbrella term that various strands of Queer Theory aim to dissect and politicise. However, the demographic that this dissertation deals with specifically falls under an imposed label of "gay", in reference to the assumption of a non-defining and reductive same-sex-sexual-desire that underlies the identity. I use this term when referring to the members of the demographic with intended awareness of popular connotations, generalisations and histories linked to the term.

certainly progressive when one considers the current focus of the American queer² rights movement on the Defence of Marriage Act.

The combination of peoples, cultures and histories has placed South Africa in a unique space in relation to identity politics. Discourses of sexual identity are bound to discourses of race, economic background, cultural influence and geographic location. It has been the goal of the post-apartheid administrations to unite all citizens under the all-encompassing 'rainbow nation' South African identity, which theoretically encompasses those who claim a 'gay identity'. This notion of gay identity in South Africa is, however, problematic. It is well established that "there is no single, essential 'gay identity' in South Africa" (Gevisser and Cameron, 1994: 3), but rather a multitude of subjectivities across racial and gender continua. The fixed identities that the apartheid system sought to impose on those who defied the norm of white heterosexuality have been challenged in and redefined by Pride marches, gay publications such as *Exit*, and numerous anthologies of personal narratives. The quintessential 'gay experience' and 'gay identity' have often been understood as those of the white, middle-class urban man (3) – both in terms of a historical local, mainstream focus on a white demographic over other races, and in terms of a globalised interest in sexual commodification (Sender, 2003: 336). A challenge in South Africa has been to move towards an understanding of the existence of gay *identities* across all race and economic groups, and to offer a broader understanding of the "parallel gay histories" (Cage, 2003: 11) that exist. The last seventeen years of democracy have been filled with an ever-increasing mainstream exposure to various sexual identities, and a distinct move away from the legal isolation of gay identities as the *pienkgevaar* (12). There is a wealth of literature, anthologies and poetry currently available that explicitly explores the complexities of sexual identity politics. Such cultural artefacts critically examine tendencies that homogenise 'alternative' identities as simply the 'Other' to heteronormativity. Through such literary representations a broad understanding of 'homosexualities' has shifted away from an essentialised notion of gay identity to embrace a wider discourse of sexual identity which includes accounts of lesbian sangomas, "boy wives" (Epprecht, 2004: 3) and transnational gayness (Sullivan, 2005). The mainstream availability of this content is the result of a media system ranked 38th out of 173 countries for freedom of the press (Reporters Without Borders, 2010), which theoretically places the circulation of such content above first-world countries like Spain, France and Portugal.

² In this dissertation I recognise that 'queer', as a marker of sexual variance from the heterosexual norm, is encoded with a history of self-conscious resistance, which is discussed later in this chapter. I use the term when referring to a context where a recognised and socially mobile sexual-rights movement exists with the intention to bring about legal reform and social change. My intention in using this term is to draw attention to contextual differences through a contrast to the depoliticised identity label of 'gay' in South Africa.

Thus in theory one is able to express one's sexual identity with relative ease and freedom. However, despite this radical and rapid advancement of gay rights in general, mainstream exposure is far from ideal. Indeed, the chasm between rural and urban availability of material and support still remains a massive problem, with instances of so-called "corrective rape" and general intolerance constituting major concerns in a country that can boast legal protection. The notion of 'mainstream' is also problematic: the liberal nature of a city like Cape Town, with a reputation for being an international gay tourist destination, will offer different resources when compared to a more conservative city like my home town, Pietermaritzburg. I have been part of the generation that has grown up in a post-apartheid South Africa: I have no memory of legalised segregation or the first democratic elections. Growing up as a white male living in suburban Durban and Pietermaritzburg I questioned my sexual identity. Despite being part of a supposed essentialised demographic (white, urban, gay), resources were hard to come by in the so-called 'mainstream', that 'privileged' sector of society most influenced by and connected to the trends of globalisation. My exposure to notions of 'gay identity' and 'gay culture' was limited to information filtered through my family, school and church. These ideological apparatuses invariably pushed the negative stereotypes that, in retrospect, hark back to an age prior to democracy and legally-entrenched human rights discourse. Of all the things I was told to avoid in the world "queers", "fags", "sissies" and "moffies" were pushed as the most debauched and corrupted 'people' in society. Representations of white men in contemporary South Africa were, and are still, limited to gay magazines available in bookstores (which, in my experience, are placed on the top shelves, next to pornographic and fetish magazines, far out of reach for the average questioning teenager); novels about a South African context that seems foreign in a post-1994 era; novels discussing characters from foreign countries who turn to foreign organisations for support; and the occasional American or European gay-themed film that is imported into the "art-movies" section of a store (if one is so lucky: a recent visit to a local branch of *Musica* revealed that the company's sense of a "gay friendly" collection of DVDs need not extend beyond a choice between *Top Gear* and *My Fair Lady!*).

Thus, whilst it is possible to acquire an anthology on the history of gay Pride in South Africa (De Waal and Manion, 2006), or an account of life as a lesbian sangoma (Nkabinde, 2008), or a detailed, fictionalised exploration of life as a gay man during apartheid (Van der Merwe, 2006), insight into a combination of contemporary social discourses manifested as young/white/urban/gay/man, equivalent to the extent that these other local texts and international sources explore a combination of discourses, has been unavailable until very recently. Malan and Johardien's 2010 collection of "writing by South African gay men" has certainly helped

in taking a step towards greater visibility. However, this collection is still deeply problematic, for reasons which will be discussed in greater detail below. Ultimately this collection does not address the complexities of being a young/white/urban/male and living a non-heteronormative life in contemporary South Africa. Instead it perpetuates the problematic cultural adoption of an identity marker that has no ideological infrastructure in place to support it. Consequently, the most prominent texts of representation for this supposed essentialised demographic exist in the form of commercially-oriented popular texts such as the gay-oriented glossy magazines *Gay Pages* and *Wrapped*. This form of relative cultural visibility is highly problematic, as it is a visibility based on the continued Western commercialisation and commodification of sexuality (Sigusch, 1998), whereby the ideal international "non-normative" consumer has neatly coincided with this South Africa historical 'essentialised' gay identity (Sender, 2003: 335). The dual consequence of the commercialisation of this identity in these popular mainstream texts is the ingraining of the perception of the "homogeneous nature of the (white male) queer" (Rushbrook, 2002: 184), and the cultural identification with a label which has distinct Western roots that cannot simply be transposed to a South African context. Representation of this demographic post-1994 remains limited to popular 'mainstream' images of a commodified transnational gayness.

It is at this point that I hope to make this dissertation relevant. It is my aim to understand and explore this lacuna that is evident in contemporary representation. Seventeen years after the first democratic election gay rights and gay identities are still issues on an everyday level, but the manifestation of these issues in comparison to the past needs to be explored. In this context, and with the understanding that I aim to navigate a lacuna in representation, there are two main issues that need to be briefly focused on before the direction of this dissertation can be understood: gay community, and young 'white gays' today.

Gay Community and Young, White 'Gays' Today

The question of 'gay community' is an important one when trying to understand contemporary discourses and ideologies surrounding sexual identity. As the result of an increase in globalisation and cosmopolitanism largely made possible through the Internet, the increase in the commercialisation of sexuality and the availability of sexual "fragments" (Sigusch, 1998: 337) has made it increasingly difficult to define what constitutes 'community' amongst those who claim some form of gay identity. In discussing the importance of globalisation in relation to questions of sexuality, identity and culture, Annie Leatt and Graeme Hendricks illustrate that globalisation is marked by a flow "towards homogenisation" in "an emergent global culture and politics that is thoroughly Americanised" (2004: 311). This "includes an internationalisation of the lesbian and gay

movement" (311). Contemporary understandings of 'gay identity' and 'gay culture' are based on transnational hegemonic ideas (311), with the effect that "gay and lesbian culture, like Coca-Cola, Madonna and blue jeans, has become a potent North American cultural export to much of the world" (Hoad, 1998: 34). The "parallel gay histories" (Cage, 2003: 11) that exist in South Africa in terms of racial segregation make any notion of gay community across the racial spectrum unlikely. The idea of a 'gay community' is "notional and hopeful rather than concretely actual" (De Waal and Manion, 2006: 9), and promotes the ideology of sexual homogeneity whereby mere difference to the heterosexual manifests in a bonding commonality. The closest point to which it can be said that South Africa has or had a gay community lies in the pre-1994 gay Pride marches, whereby people from all races gathered to march for equal rights and "affirm [themselves] to each other and to present [themselves] openly and proudly to the gaze of society at large" (9). Whilst gay Pride is still an annual event, this vague construct of 'community' is problematic in the context of the increasing commercialisation of Pride to the point of it being perceived as "the domain of the richer (whiter)" participants (8).

The construct of a 'gay community' stems from the international gay rights movement, which Andrew Sullivan suggests was united in its "pain and tragedy" (2005). The complex combination of social stigmatisation during the 1970s; a unifying struggle against Aids during the 1980s which provided "emotional and psychic bonding" (Sullivan, 2005); a lack of resources to find and interact with other gay people; and physical spaces that were used as points to meet and engage with other gay people formed a distinctively different sense of what it 'meant' to be gay when compared to contemporary experiences. The rise of the Internet in particular has provided the ability to engage with other gay people as part of various "sexual fragments" (Sigusch, 1998: 337) without having to go to clubs or bars, or use "counter-language" (Cage, 2003: 25) to try and secretly establish an identity.

In South Africa there is still a strong connection to this notion of an international gay community through the mainstream presence of glossy magazines such as *Gay Pages* and *Wrapped*, the availability of popular Anglo-American gay-themed films, and the recent popularisation of the *Mr Gay South Africa Pageant* – the 2009-2010 winner of which won the international *Mr Gay* title. As I have mentioned, these texts largely cater for young, white, urban gay men. However politically incorrect this statement may come across, it still remains a fact that the image of the ideal gay consumer falls within this demographic (Sender, 2003: 335). Gay community and gay culture are constructed as parts of transnational cosmopolitan "queer spaces" (Rushbrook, 2002: 183). The commercialisation of this gay identity, coupled with privileged access

to the Internet, positions members of the white/urban/gay/male demographic in South Africa as "cosmopolitan tourists" (Rushbrook, 2002) who are constructed, by these media forms, as intrinsically connected to a universal gay community.

However, young gay people know little about the international gay rights movement of the 1970s onwards and the later unifying experience of a struggle against Aids (Sullivan, 2005). Similarly, on a level of personal cultural experience with young, white, gay South African men, despite numerous historical documentations, little appreciation and understanding is shown for the struggle against legalised persecution in South Africa and the synonymity of sexual politics with racial politics (Hoad, 2005: 17). Peers from this demographic, as well as participants in focus groups I have worked with in the past, fail to recognise the significance of Constitutional protection from discrimination and the battles fought to reach such a point. Similarly, the lived cultural experience of this supposed essentialised demographic sits in contrast to the image of gay community available in mainstream media representations. Young, white, urban, gay men are both connected to a commercialised sense of transnational gay identity by mere virtue of their demographic, and yet disconnected from experiencing this projected sense of connection due to a lack of education on gay rights in South Africa and a lack of resources to provide a viable network of spaces of interaction and support. Whilst the idea of 'gay community' is problematic for an understanding of identity politics, so too is the concept of 'gay' in relation to young gay men. The 'gay identity' that proceeds from an identification with a gay rights movement (Leatt and Hendricks, 2004: 310) is not applicable in the same capacity and to the same extent in contemporary South Africa.

What, then, does it 'mean' to this demographic to *be gay*? One can try and argue that 'gay' simply means that one is attracted to the same sex. This argument, however, is simply not viable. In exploring models of identity development Leatt and Hendricks highlight the rich (American) 'culture' of socio-political struggle connotations that underlie definitions of "gay" (2004: 308-11). The label "gay" is loaded with stereotypes, assumptions and generalisation. In a positive understanding it "incorporates a conscious control of identity and social interaction, including lifestyle and cohesiveness within a co-culture" (Cage, 2003: 5). "Gay" is enriched with a long history dating back to the 12th century (3), and so it is unfounded to assume that describing oneself as "gay" is a neutral phase which solely indicates one's sexual 'preferences'. Similarly, amongst youth and amidst cyber cultures "gay" is loaded with negative connotations. The most popular of these is

the use of "gay" as a synonym for stupid³, "uncool", unattractive or undesirable (UrbanDictionary2009; Facebook, 2009).

There is thus a tension between the presentation of a gay identity for young, white, South African men and the lived cultural experience of members of this demographic. International popular gay-press texts targeted at gay men construct a universal identity in which difference is elided, so on the surface it appears that young, white, South African men, by mere virtue of their demographic, fit seamlessly into the idealised image constructed. However, contemporary definitions and understandings of what "gay" itself means, and what it 'means' to be gay in South Africa sit in stark contrast to this projected transnational connection. Auto-ethnographic experience and local online social-network discussions (see, for example, Durban Pride Group, 2009) suggest that there is a growing uncertainty amongst my generation – namely 18 to 30 year olds. It is this generation that has grown up in a democratic South Africa free from conscription and legalised persecution, with Constitutional protection largely taken for granted. I have found that the content of international magazines and films has placed my peers and me, as members of this demographic, in a liminal space of non-identity: exposure to this content has allowed us to explore and develop aspects of ourselves in a lived cultural environment which otherwise often discourages and punishes such exploration. In this space one is aware of the idealised constructs marketed as 'international lifestyles', which are compared to local experiences and local understandings of a label shunned by society at large. This transnational awareness is in tension with the generalised lack of knowledge of local struggle history, as well as lacunae in localised representations. Certainly magazines such as *Wrapped* and *Gay Pages* deal explicitly with gay-based issues and concerns. However, this demographic has no easily available textual representation in the form of literary information and discursive support for young readers – such as the information provided in Alex Sanchez's American *Rainbow* trilogy (2001; 2003; 2005). Drawing on the complexities mentioned above, if men from this group are wary of the term "gay" through a combination of linguistic evolution, a lack of education, and a sense of taking the achievements of the past for granted, what are the implications for understanding identity politics in South Africa? More importantly, how are we to understand this demographic if there is no literary representation of the tensions of lived experiences? In an extension of this one must begin to question whether it is 'appropriate' to use the marker of *gay* in a South African context: the transnational associations with this term do not necessarily 'match' the everyday experiences of this demographic. The assumed position of

³ In response to the offensive quality of using gay as a synonym for stupid, a cyber trend developed around promoting the use of the word "ghey" instead, which is defined by UrbanDictionary as "Usurping the traditional term GAY to take the homosexual meaning out and leaving in the lame" (Bud E Love, 2003: Online)

understanding men within this demographic as 'simply' gay and in no need of further attention becomes problematic in this light.

Positioning of the Dissertation

I have thus chosen to focus on issues of mediated representation of young, white, urban gay men in contemporary South Africa. My reason for choosing this particular demographic stems from a personal interest and not a desire to essentialise any aspect of identity, including race and age, nor a desire to organise homosexuality in South Africa into any homogenous hierarchy. The personal anxieties of identity have been my main motivation behind this research. Criticism has been levelled at "the racism of urban white gay communities" (Leatt and Hendricks, 2004: 317) for what is perceived to be an elitist approach to sexual identities, whereby the experiences of those who exist beyond the social-groupings of mutual class/location/race are ignored and rejected in discussions of inclusion and visibility. By no means does this dissertation seek to suggest that this demographic is the most important or the one most lacking in representation. Neither does this dissertation suggest that texts representing other demographics are more readily available in all areas of the country. Indeed, I concur that "there needs to be a public development of other visible gay and lesbian presence" (317). What I rather seek to do is to piece together the pre-existing international and transnational focus on this demographic with an authentic South African perspective, where a lacuna currently exists in terms of textual representation equivalent to that of a transnational presence and availability. The dissertation seeks to destabilise assumptions about this identity, including the connotations behind the label of 'gay' currently reflected in mainstream popular culture (Sender, 2003: 334). If we are to truly understand the "landscape of belonging" in relation to "the complexity of difference" (Leatt and Hendricks, 2004: 311) that exists in South Africa, then we need to question deep-rooted assumptions about the experiences of South Africans who are grouped and culturally 'interpreted' under a transnational label and marker of sexual identity.

The premise of this is that the relatively essentialised demographic of homosexuality has all but vanished from the focus of local literature, studies, and understandings. Outside the realm of the popular gay press, which in context largely exists to produce forms of representations focused on developing "consumers and commodities" (Rushbrook, 2002: 184), my generation of white, middle-class gay youths raised in a post-apartheid South Africa remain grossly under-represented on matters of identity, belonging and sexual politics. Texts exist that deal with pre-democracy identity politics and ideological pressure, such as André Carl van der Merwe's *Moffie* (2006), and these texts draw attention to the gauntlet of obstacles designed to suppress difference and thwart

the development of a healthy sense of Self (Creet, 1995). Similarly, contemporary international texts such as Alex Sanchez's American *Rainbow* trilogy (2001; 2003; 2005) highlight the socialising roles that schools and families play in creating social, cultural, historical and economic "anxieties" about identity (Creet, 1995). International texts such as these similarly draw attention to the political links bound to the marker of gay. Lacunae are evident if one attempts to find equivalents to this trilogy in a South African context with the intention of understanding local ideologies and offering support, or if one tries to find similarities in the ideological foundation of local gay identity. The young, white, urban 'gay' man is transnationally perceived to be the "ideal gay consumer" (Sender, 2003: 335) or to possess the identity that best represents a Western notion of gay culture. Certainly, a representation of this demographic can be found in cosmopolitan popular texts. However, it is unsettling that this group's exposure to these and other international texts has not led to the development of local texts equivalent to cultural artefacts such as the *Rainbow* trilogy in order to explore similar issues in a South African context; that representation continues to take the form of that of the consumer. It is similarly unsettling that this exposure has not led to the mainstream questioning of problems surrounding grouping South African formative experiences under the marker of 'gay'. An inclusive and just society can only be achieved if there is an understanding of local experiences and realities.

My overarching concern in this project is the inherent assumption in existing popular representations, and in the apparent lack of desire to engage with this demographic: that these men can be called gay based on same-sex desire, resulting in them being positioned *as* gay, and thus intrinsically connected to a universal gay community. This assumption is profoundly and profanely depoliticising: this assumption and its resultant positioning reduces local cultural and social experiences to a framework of transnational understanding based on vague concepts like 'gay lifestyle' and 'typical gay experiences', with the effect of leaving everyday anxieties and struggles unrepresented, and largely unacknowledged, by local discourse. This potentially has implications for connections to social responsibility and societal democracy, in that inadequate understanding begets inadequate support structures. This concern leaves me with several pressing questions: in relation to a 'mainstream', Westernised, popular understanding of 'gay culture', how does this demographic function in South Africa? Based on texts currently available, what are the possible emic perceptions of a 'gay identity'? Similarly, in a context where magazines function as links to a transnationalised identity how can we move away from a representation based on regulated, superficial cosmopolitanism (Sender, 2003: 332) towards a localised literary exploration of ideologies that mould and shape identity, such as those of heteronormativity, patriarchy and sexual stability?

Queer Theory

These questions and concerns are rooted in a perspective guided by queer theory. A brief overarching exploration of this approach of constant questioning and interrogation of structural assumptions (Giffney, 2009: 1) is necessary for appreciating my perspective in this project. Originally used as a marker of "oddness" and then later adopted as a pejorative term for gay men, queer has been "reclaimed in recent decades with anger and pride to signal an activist insurgency against homophobia and other forms of oppression, especially those relating to gender and sexuality" (2). Queer has been reclaimed to reaffirm the self-worth of those 'belonging' to any identity outside the realm of ideological heteronormativity. 'Queerness' often functions as an umbrella term for non-heteronormative sexual identities, but has also become intrinsically linked to a fundamental questioning and challenging of normative assumptions around desire, actions, feelings, subjectivities, norms, identities and ethics (2). Queerness is embedded in a struggle to move away from "gay" or "lesbian" identities, which have been found to be "inadequate or restrictive" (Spargo, 1999: 38), and the resulting approaches of queer theory derive a different understanding of the relationship between identity and power to those inherent in labels of "gay" and "lesbian", whereby it "unsettles assumptions about sexed and sexual being and doing" (40). A study of identity politics from a gay and lesbian studies perspective encompasses and shares, in Foucauldian terms, a set of discourses and fields of knowledge and power that overlap with a study of queer theory (42). 'Queer', in reaction to the discourses of power loaded in 'gay', is seen primarily as "the basis for a new identity politics" (39), whereby the notion of "choice" connoted by various discourses attached to 'gay' is avoided. The concept of "choice" is seen by Jacklyn Cock as "politically dangerous" (2005: 202) when considered to be at the centre of a gay identity. Sexual 'preference' may "self-evidently [be] the marker of gay and lesbian identity" (Spargo, 1999: 33), but this politicised understanding is "not inevitably the crucial factor in everyone's perception of their sexuality" (34). Tamsin Spargo argues that in this discourse of gay identity "bisexuals seem to have a less secure or developed identity" and those groups that define "their sexuality through activities and pleasures rather than gender preferences" are completely excluded (1999: 34). Queer and queer studies re-politicise this fractured nature of identity politics by being "perpetually at odds with the normal, the norm" (40). Indeed, Lee Edelman reflects that "queerness can never define an identity, it can only ever disturb one" (2004: 17). Queerness "demands self-reflexivity and personal engagement" in that it "refers beyond and outside itself" (Giffney, 2009: 2). An identification with queerness (insofar as one can identify with a concept that seeks to destabilise conventional tenets of identification) signifies a "disidentification from the rigidity with which [conventional] identity

categories continue to be enforced and from beliefs that such categories are immovable" (2-3), and that identities "remain static" for the duration of one's life (2).

Judith Butler, whose work monumentally influenced the development of queer studies, philosophises in *Gender Trouble* (1990) that the norm of heterosexuality is the result of various social hegemonies that support binaries that enforce notions of the "naturalness of gender" (Bloodsworth, 2000: 487). Sex, gender and desire are bound to subjective discourses that serve to regulate identity in the interests of dominant ideologies – in particular an ideology of patriarchal heteronormativity (Morrison, 2000: 491). The liberation of 'the Other' in this line of queer theory thought can only be achieved by destabilising gender and identity in itself: the pursuit of an 'essence' of gayness or lesbianism or bisexuality merely "replicates the regulatory, exclusionary norms of the existing power structures" (491). Butler asserts that the actions of people socially construct understandings of gender and sexuality. A recognition of this "performative" nature of identity can aid subverting "oppressive norms and definitions" (491). An identification with 'queer' here is thus one that seeks to subvert dominant discourses of essential and absolute labelling by self-consciously undermining gender and sexual stereotypes, with a connection to a greater political consciousness. Queer identification should therefore, according to Michael Warner (1993), be understood within a distinct discipline of queer theory and queer studies, as the performing of 'queer' is in itself a form of social reflection, which in turn can only be understood by a body of theory separate from heteronormative models (Bloodsworth, 2000: 487).

Queer theory and queer studies encapsulates various trains of thought, all built on the disruption of a "heterosexual-homosexual dichotomy by being ambiguously situated outside of such frameworks" (Bloodsworth, 2000: 487). Exploring such an "anti-identity identity" (487) differs from notions of "static gay and lesbian categories of identification" (487) in terms of fluidity and a self-reflective connection to the politics of identity. The discourses of power that queer studies and gay and lesbian studies respectively encompass explore the politicisation of identity, which presents a challenge in understanding identity in contemporary South Africa. The label of "gay" serves as an umbrella term for those 'queer identities' that fall outside the realm of the normal and the norm – such as "gay rights". However, "gay" also refers to those who are sexually attracted to the same sex. This basic definition is in itself problematic, as it ignores the discursive histories bound to the term. Historically, "being gay or lesbian was a matter of pride, [...] of resistance" (Spargo, 1999: 28). This "assertion of a new and positive or self-affirming identity" (Dunphy, 2000: 57) was a "blatant assertion of positive self-evaluation over the medical, pathologised label of homosexual" (Edwards, 1993: 26) in much the same way that 'queer' today has become a blatant

assertion of positive self-evaluation over the commercialised and exclusionary gay identity. "Gay" today has gender connotations of men only, reserving "lesbian" for 'gay women', and has become a problematic "static" term in relation to overturning a dichotomy of heterosexual-homosexual (Bloodsworth, 2000: 487). David M. Halperin suggests that a contemporary understanding of "gay" is the amalgamation of four "prehomosexual" discourses of "male sex and gender deviance" (2000: 92) with a post-1869 category for same-sex sexual act of "homosexual" (89). He suggests that how we understand sexuality today is the result of a "cumulative process" (91) that has ultimately seen a shift from a system that holds gender as central to social understanding to a system that "privileges sexuality over gender" (91). Tim Edwards suggests that modern male 'homosexualities', of which a contemporary understanding of "gay" is a part, have progressed through five stages of construction: damnation, criminalisation, medicalisation, regulation and reform (1993: 14-30). In the current climate of a "post-Aids phase" (Dunphy, 2000: 51), attempts to label "homosexualities" as various gay identities or queer legitimises the dominant discourses of heteronormativity by taking part in it (50). To question what it *means* to be gay, as opposed to homosexual or queer, presents a paradox that has resulted from the politicisation of identity. On one hand, the creation of a viable form of identification (such as queer) in opposition to the norm inadvertently increases the dominant ideology and its apparatus's ability to control and regulate (50). On the other hand, to refuse an identity results in defeat and invisibility (Edwards, 1993: 15). Invisibility is an important issue when considering identity politics, queer theory and gay identity. The hegemonic power distribution in society dictates that in order to challenge dominant discourses and ideologies the politicisation of identity is inevitable, and thus a tangible identity with which one can oppose is necessary. The positive affirmation of both 'gay' and 'queer' have sought to do this.

In this climate of confusion, queer studies has sought to explore the lived cultural experiences of identity and its politicisation. In a "move toward the inclusion of all nonheterosexualities" (Pigg, 2000: 724) 'queer' is an identity that challenges boundaries. David J. Thomas emphasises that queer studies and queer identity is "less personal, more political" and "politicizes sexuality in a new way" (1995: 90). Indeed, in relation to the South African context Cheryl Stobie posits that

instead of the fixities of identity politics, queer theory posits fluid spaces of possibility. Queer strategy attempts to disrupt dominant discourses by means of performativity, the performance of self-conscious, stylised acts which expose the social structuring of gender and sexuality, and hold out the possibility of change and diversity. (2007: 16)

However, in relation to the underlying concerns of this project, the emphasis of queer studies on the social construction of sexuality and gender has added to the "blurriness" surrounding labels for sexuality and sexual identity (Pigg, 2000: 724), which has resulted in the "continual preoccupation with definitions" (724). Similarly the first epigraph at the start of this chapter highlights a struggle within queer studies: how can we break away from the ideologically loaded labelling of sexual identity? Particularly within the current South African climate, how do we understand the subject positions of those whom we would conventionally label "gay" when they themselves may not necessarily identify with such a label, nor with the label "queer"? I argue throughout this dissertation that if the project of social responsibility and equality is ever to be achieved in relation to sexual politics a reworking of understanding is necessary. If the goal is to fill the lacuna of representation and to address the "anxieties of identity" (Creed, 1995: 179) that can be attributed to a sense of discontent with what it socially 'means' to be gay, then it is necessary to restructure how we interpret subject positions.

It is from this necessity that I seek to move away from "politicized identities" and towards a critique of the "politics of values" (Bornstein, 1997: 16). The interpretative framework of "gay identity" is problematic for reasons discussed above, as is the interpretative framework of "queer". A criticism levelled at queer is that it "actually elides differences and becomes a meaningless melange of competing aims and beliefs in the process" (Giffney, 2009: 5). As an identity marker itself 'queer' "necessarily exclude[s] and restricts" (Spargo, 1999: 39), reflected by a general unwillingness to label oneself as 'queer' (39). Indeed, the basing of politics on identity lies at the root of "the fracturing of the myth of a unified and unifying gay and/or lesbian identity" (33), and so too is it the cause of a reaction against the labelling of 'queer'. Similarly, a primary discourse of queer identification is the self-conscious politicisation of identity and the social mobility that surrounds the quest for heteronormative legal reform. I argue, in the chapters below, that these elements do not exist as unifying forces amongst this South African demographic, and so these existing frameworks of interpretation can never hope to achieve a context of equality and mutual respect, where adequate understanding and empathy form part of the foundation of social responsibility and reconciliation. I argue that by extending a broad conceptual tool of interpretation based on a framework of "pomosexuality" we may take a step towards better understanding the everyday challenges, experiences and anxieties that exist within a demographic that is assumed to be internationally homogenous with little need for representation in a local context.

"Pomosexuality" as an extension of Queer Theory

In this context, postmodernism, whilst contested, is an implicit theoretical understanding in this project. It is necessary for recognising and appreciating contemporary South African existence as part of a period of "multiple subjectivities" where reality is determined by a plethora of subjective identities in place constantly, contributing to a flux of multiple existences and unstable structures (Queen and Schimel, 1997: 21). Postmodernism questions the validity of "grand narratives" and unity, instead drawing attention to a pluralistic state of existence (Morland and Willox, 2005: 8). In such a context and in relation to identity, PoMoSexuality, or 'Post-Modern Sexuality' was first introduced as a term by Carol Queen and Lawrence Schimel in the collection sub-titled *Challenging Assumptions About Gender and Sexuality* (1997). Queen and Schimel offer the term as a tongue-in-cheek alternative to the identity labels of the 20th century, and to challenge dominant discourses about sexual labels and ideologies surrounding notions of community and homosexuality. In their collection Queen and Schimel draw attention to the state of confusion surrounding categories of sexual orientation, and offer an alternative sexuality: the sexuality that "lives in the space in which all other non-binary forms of sexual and gender identity reside" (23) and which caters for those who "will not stay in the boxes marked 'gay' and 'lesbian' without causing a fuss" (25). 'Pomosexuality' is thus the core concept in this project: I will attempt to adapt it and stretch its original boundaries in ways that will contribute to understanding the 'nature' of a contemporary South African existence.

In Queen and Schimel's original concept the term is offered as a light-hearted approach to serious concerns about identity politics, with the primary intention of drawing attention to identity instability. Queen and Schimel refer to the term originally as "PoMoSexuality", but for purposes of readability the term will be regularised to simply 'pomosexuality'. Pomosexuality addresses the exclusion inherent in the construction and deconstruction of labels by queer theory (20). It exists simultaneously as an exemplification of queer studies whilst ironically addressing the "sanctioned queer worlds" (Bornstein, 1997: 14) and "suffocating identity politics" (Bornstein, 1997: 16) that this discipline can construct. Pomosexuality draws on a frustration with queer theory labels, and exists as a de-politicised "backlash toward [...] certain assumptions widely held within and/or about [the lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered (LGBT) community], essentialist assumptions about what it means to be queer" (Queen and Schimel, 1997: 20). Whilst the identities (or lack thereof) that pomosexuality explores are rooted in queer studies, the 'pomosexual' is not necessarily "tied to a single identity" through politics or a deep-rooted sense of connection (23). Pomosexuality thus seeks to extend the limitations of queer theory and challenges categorisation in favour of

"unmapped possibility" (23) for those who are outside the bounds of contemporary queer understanding; for the "queer's queers" (24).

I have selected several key texts, which I introduce below, and will implicitly draw on a perspective of pomosexuality in analysing them. I ultimately use the concept to offer a new direction for interpreting and understanding the chosen demographic. I seek to break away from understandings that draw on existing notions of absolute identities and homogenous global homosexuality. Drawing on a history of queer theory, pomosexuality is a performative identity that subverts heteronormative notions of sexuality and gender. However, it cannot be labelled a queer identity due to its shift away from a self-conscious politicisation of identity toward a favouring of a broader scope of ethics.

Pomosexuality has curiously been re-appropriated in the fourteen years after its initial introduction. As a reaction to the continued restrictive labelling of sexuality, the idea of one being a "pomosexual" has developed a near-cult following on cyberspace. Online discussions of the term retain the original self-reflexivity and tongue-in-cheek nature of Queen and Schimmel's formulation, but combine it with a serious frustration or "anxiety" with current labels, stereotypes and associations. One particular definition by a group called "How to be a pomosexual" on the social networking site *Facebook* describes pomosexuality as

More foucaultian than homo, more judith butler than hetero, way more sexy than metro and come on LBGQTQ is just too hard to remember! when we're not stealing ice cream from soco, we are hanging around being pomo. that's right bitches, post modern just got its own double abbreviation. and it's sexy. in a getting past power kind of way. yeah we're the reaction to the reaction to the reaction and we don't believe that we need any of them. so if you find yourself vehemently avoiding this realm ofdiscou[rse]....there's good reason to. it's hella scary. (Cao, 2009)

This amusing description and posts on the group itself capture what this dissertation seeks to achieve: to combine notions of identity instability with more serious emotions of frustration and discontent at the societal misunderstandings presented in representations and interpretations of lived cultural experiences. I seek to reflect on represented and discussed experiences, draw attention to the identity instability in my texts, and to begin to offer a new perspective of interpretation and understanding. As an important note, the use of 'pomo' in the title of this dissertation refers specifically to pomosexuality and its place in postmodern theory, and does not draw on the negative connotations that stem from a multi-perspective critique of postmodernism.

The dissertation thus reconfigures a notion of pomosexuality to encompass a model of identity development suited to an age of greater concerns than sexual identity and belonging. Pomosexuality, in this dissertation, is a lens through which identity and belonging will be understood. The paradoxical nature of identity politics is reflected in the nature of a postmodern sexuality: that due to the hegemony of heteronormativity a labelled sexual identity is necessary.

Where pomosexuality differs from 'queer', however, is in the 'nature' of such politicisation. Whilst queer is a reaction (in part) to the limits of 'gay identity', pomosexuality here will encompass the politicised understanding of gay as both limited and exclusionary, and yet shift away from the politics of labelling to focus instead on the politics of values. Queer theory tends to "confuse personal action with structural power" (Kirsch, 2000: 42), which can result in a focus on the politicisation of the individual identity removed from larger social structures (43). Pomosexuality manifests itself at the intersection of the individual and society, and where queer theory becomes "a novel digestion of difference" (43), it takes into consideration all ideologies and discourses and yet does not emphasise the politicisation of identity. Pomosexuality as a lens acts as a deliberate attempt to move away from the cycle of exclusion inherent in this politicisation of identity: it is an identity that cannot exclude, neither structure nor individual, by virtue of its link to postmodernity. The close relationship between consumerism, globalisation, sexual identity (or non-identity) and social structures is acknowledged in a manner that recognises the struggles faced by a minority yet does not politicise their social positioning. At this point the second epigraph at the start of this chapter sheds some light on the trend I am trying to extend to a South African context. This quotation from the openly gay performer Adam Lambert expresses a desire for a focus on a "human community" rather than on static identity politics, and speaks to a cultural experience of globalised concerns that reach beyond the scope of locally imposed ideological structures.

This desire can be linked to Gayle S. Rubin's reconfiguration of an understanding of sexual politics. The difficulty, she claims, in developing a "pluralistic sexual ethics" (1984: 153) is the lack of variation inherent in dominant discourses of sexuality. Contemporary understandings of sexuality and sexual identity are characterised by the "notion of a single ideal sexuality" (154). Dominant discourses politicise sexuality to maintain the status quo: the reassertion of 'gay' and 'queer' both give merit to the norm of heterosexuality by virtue of their reaction to such politicisation (Dunphy, 2000: 50). The degrees of regulation of sexuality, including, for example, the ban on same-sex marriage in South Africa until 2006, reflects the hegemony of heteronormativity even in a presence of a liberal constitution. The realisation behind an application of pomosexuality is that "sexuality is political" (Rubin, 1984: 171). Sexuality is "organized into systems of power"

(171) to serve the dominant ideology. However, as opposed to engaging in a power struggle over definition, pomosexuality, in the context of this dissertation, recognises the "systematic mistreatment of individuals and communities on the basis of erotic taste or behaviour" (171), as well as the "sexual hierarchies" (172) that are present in other reactionary discourses, and offers an inclusionary approach to understanding the shift in values and interaction that Rubin identifies (171). The disconnected nature of the contemporary white, urban, 'gay' experience encompasses a discontent with contemporary "sexual stratification" (157) and sexual categorisation. Pomosexuality offers the pluralistic approach to sexual ethics that Rubin views as ideal by apolitically rejecting sexual definition in favour of a broader concern for human existence.

Key Texts and Methodology

To explore the concerns and questions raised above, and to offer a new mode of interpretation, I have selected five key cultural texts. It must be noted that this dissertation takes a cultural studies approach to these texts: I do not seek to conclude with reflections on the literary merit of certain sources. Rather, through the combination of textual and discursive analyses, I seek to begin to form an academic gauze of interweaving inter-disciplinary interpretations. This will ideally form a framework around the lacuna and offer a way to create future cultural and social responses to crises of identity and representation. The key texts I have selected are Alex Sanchez's American *Rainbow* trilogy, consisting of *Rainbow Boys* (2001), *Rainbow High* (2003), and *Rainbow Road* (2005); André Carl van der Merwe's South African *Moffie* (2006); Malan and Johaardien's *Yes, I am!* (2010); the *Mr Gay South Africa Pageant*, specifically in relation to the original 2009-2010 competition; and a collection of personal narratives discussed below. I have selected these key texts for the base structure they offer in navigating the lacuna in representation that I have identified. The *Rainbow* trilogy offers an insight into contemporary assumptions about and challenges facing a demographic of young, white, gay men, and similarly provides a structured overview of what "gay identity" encapsulates from an American perspective. The trilogy is explicitly written for the demographic that this dissertation focuses on, and explores the lived cultural experiences of 'gay' men progressing from high school into a university/'real world' environment. *Rainbow Boys* was selected by the American Library Association as one of several "Best Books for Young Adults" in 2002⁴, and is structured in a way that offers support to those readers living in similar conditions, evident in the numerous helpline numbers and websites included at the back of each novel. This trilogy forms the basis of an understanding of the transnationalised 'gay

⁴ For the complete list see <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/yalsa/booklistsawards/bestbooksya/2002bestbooks.cfm>

experience' offered in local magazines, as well as an understanding of the ideological forces that direct and shape identity development.

The various experiences and expressions of 'homosexual identity' presented are linked to a South African context through the use of *Moffie* (Van der Merwe, 2006) and *Yes, I am!* (Malan and Johardien, 2010). *Moffie*, though drastically different from *Rainbow Boys* in tone, structure, characterisation and intended readership, offers an insight into local ideological forces that shaped (and continue to shape) attitudes and perceptions of homosexuality. Set in the 1980s *Moffie* explores the roles of the family and the state (through experiences in the South African Defence Force) in implementing conceptions of 'proper' masculinity and acceptable behaviour – often through brute force and abuse. The novel marks a close, localised form of representation available to the demographic with which I am concerned. Although the reader may not relate directly to the specific instances of South African life during apartheid, one can easily relate to the ideological forms of oppression the novel explores, which are similar in their consequences to those presented in *Rainbow Boys*. To expand on the impact that these ideologically oppressive and defining forces have on identity, several personal narratives in *Yes, I am!* will be used to problematise assumptions of transnational connection, and question existing modes of interpretation and understanding. Similarly, I use the popular and internationally successful *Mr Gay South Africa* competition as a text to give a contextual overview of the current challenges and issues faced in South Africa. Focusing on the original 2009-2010 competition, this text shows that a consequence of inadequate representation is the damaging and exclusionary trajectory of assimilation. I use this text to suggest what the implications of this trajectory are, and how the transnational identity to which the pageant subscribes, and through which current forms of interpretation take place, does not truly capture the everyday experiences of my chosen demographic.

One of the primary conceptual assumptions in this dissertation is that the chosen demographic – namely young, white, urban, 'gay' men – is the transnational "ideal" homosexual identity (Sender, 2003: 335). The link between my key texts is based on a transposed sense of self derived from a cosmopolitan cultural identity. In terms of what it 'means' to be gay, and what it 'means' to have a 'gay identity', the availability of magazines, films, novels and Internet networks and sites have contributed to those men in the chosen demographic experiencing both the local and the international (Rantanen, 2005: 119). "Cosmopolitan", in the context of this dissertation, refers to the "reality of (re)attachment, multiple attachment, or attachment at a distance" (Rantanen, 2005: 120): an attachment to local discourses surrounding masculinity and sexual identity, as well as to international discourses surrounding idealised progressions of gay identity.

Cosmopolitanism is in itself problematised: links to homosexual identity and, by virtue of assumed homogeneity, a 'gay culture' are called into question within the texts. This term is used in full awareness of the frivolity and superficiality sometimes associated with it. Such connotations tie directly to hegemonic notions of gay identity. Cosmopolitanism thus serves to contrast sharply with the very real and problematic issues that the characters face in an attempt to survive, flourish and be accepted.

This concept is important to acknowledge on two levels. Primarily it serves as the link between the texts. However, it also serves as the causal link to a new model for analysis and social relevance: the void of representation that this dissertation seeks to explore is filled by the transposition of the experiences of the characters to a South African setting, which in turn sheds light on the necessity for further texts and resources. This dissertation is grounded in textual and discursive analysis. However, considering that the dissertation seeks to explore the ideologies and discourses surrounding a largely unrepresented demographic in South Africa it was necessary to generate texts that begin to offer a realistic attachment to contemporary South African cultural experiences. I will thus use auto-ethnographic examples throughout this dissertation to shed some insight on what it 'means' to be a member of this demographic. I feel that it is necessary to include such sociological examples due to the very gap in representation that this dissertation seeks to fill. The value in auto-ethnographic method lies both in the link it provides between text and reality (Wall 2008: 39), and in the insight that it may offer to the reader unfamiliar with the demographic at hand.

Yet I realise that my subjective position alone cannot serve as a representation of the entire demographic. I thus selected a focus group of five men from this demographic, between the ages of 20 and 30. Each subject was exposed to at least one of the key texts, and was given a set of questions, based on Connell's work (2005) on researching masculinity, which I will discuss in Chapter Two. The questions dealt with personal issues of masculinity and identity, as well as moments of identity recognition and institutional responses to education and expression. The participants were also asked to comment on the key texts they have been exposed to in relation to their own personal experiences. Their answers have now formed a set of personal narratives, which form the primary understanding of local experiences, and the final texts for analysis, in this dissertation. These narratives have been collected and are subjected to a discourse analysis in this dissertation with the intention of relating them to the textual and discursive analyses of the other texts. The narratives will further a sense of representation beyond my own subjective experiences and serve as separate texts on South African life. The discourse analysis will provide a link between

Sanchez's explorations of ideology; Van der Merwe's representation of pre-1994 South African life; and Malan and Johaardien's, and the pageant's, assumptions about the local application of a transnational identity label. The reader can find a copy of the questionnaire used, as well as the collection of the narratives, in the Appendices of this dissertation. My limited group of subjects can by no means speak for this entire demographic. Certainly, the definition of "youth" is not just limited to the age range of 18 to 30. However, the personal narratives serve as a substantial start to understanding local ideological challenges, and in the context of the current lacuna this combination of literary and discourse analysis will ideally create a starting point of representation.

I believe that the value in pursuing this research topic lies in the twin goals of reconciliation and education. Whilst contemporary studies have focused on the diversification of sexual identity politics in post-apartheid South Africa, little exists in the realm of understanding and offering 'support' for this demographic. My exploration of representations of sexuality and the relation of these representations to a viable pomosexual model for analysis, understanding and engagement will ideally serve as a platform for increased awareness of the difficulties that this demographic faces, and the direction that a movement of education and human rights should take. I seek to combine an understanding of the misunderstandings and misconceptions about those who claim this identity with a practical approach to what cultural resources need to be provided in a step toward realistic equality.

My intent for the dissertation is thus summarised as follows. This dissertation hypothesises that as a result of identity instability, ideological pressure and cosmopolitan influence (evident in transnational texts) contemporary internal attitudes about 'gay identity' in South Africa have moved away from an ideologically reactive all-encompassing view of community and unity, and away from a model based on a struggle for gay rights. Contemporary local understandings of sexual identity labels, within a project being ethically concerned with human rights at large, are inadequate in describing the experiences of the chosen demographic. If equality and reconciliation, as well as a sense of solidarity, are to be achieved then a new structure of understanding is necessary. This structure is similarly necessary to explore what I view as a state of existence in a liminal realm of dominant non-identity. Within this realm transnational labels give a surface view of how life experiences "should" take place, and yet local infrastructure (physical, social and ideological) does not exist to support or sustain these projected modes of interaction and experience. The result of this is the perpetuation of an assimilationist perspective. A new structure of understanding is needed to move away from this, and this structure needs to be based on pomosexuality. By doing this we can, in future representations, draw attention to tensions of

culture, identity, sexuality, gender, race and belonging. This structure of pomosexuality speaks to authentic local experiences that stretch beyond the transnationalised politicisation of sexual identity. We need to shift our view of understanding this demographic from a "homo" lens to a "pomo" lens if the goal of representation, and through it the goal of sexual democracy, is to be achieved.

Structure of Dissertation

The body of this study begins in Chapter Two, entitled "Exploring Gayness". This chapter begins my primary analysis. In relation to transnational understandings of 'gayness' I engage with ideas presented about ideology, sexual identity and belonging, the *Rainbow* trilogy (Sanchez, 2001; 2003; 2005) as textual examples. This chapter begins examining the pressures that mould and construct identity, and begins to analyse the 'nature' of the label 'gay'. It, in part, analyses the discourses surrounding the characters and scenarios created by Sanchez, and places them in a context of patriarchy and day-to-day experiences, with the intention of highlighting the broad infrastructural elements that form the foundation of a gay identity and sense of gay culture.

Chapter Three, "South African Experience(s)", is dedicated to a local contextualisation. This is broken into two parts: historical and contemporary. In the first part I examine and explore the history of my chosen demographic, using *Moffie* (Van der Merwe, 2006) as an artefact of cultural representation for the intersection of multiple discourses and ideologies. The identity characteristics explored in Chapter Two are extended to this section. I use Malan and Johaardien's collection of narratives (2010) to connect the historical and contemporary contexts, and to problematise the use of gay as a marker in a contemporary South Africa. In the second part of this chapter I turn to current forms of popular representation by analysing the *Mr Gay South Africa* competition and surrounding 'gay mainstream media' texts. I use this text as a reflection of cultural responses to the lack of understanding and support for the selected demographic. In my analysis I draw attention to the implications of using 'gay' as a framework of analysis – namely that it promotes continued exclusion in response to various anxieties surrounding identity (or lack thereof).

Chapter Four, "Gauzing the Lacuna", extends the analyses of a contemporary South African setting, based heavily on the collected personal narratives. By using a lens of interpretation based on pomosexuality, not gayness, I reflect on the flawed assumptions about this demographic and offer steps for moving ethically forward.

Chapter Five includes a summation of my thesis, and concluding thoughts on the potential direction for my framework and this project.

Throughout all of these chapters I build my model for analysis by constantly reflecting on my hypothesis. I seek to highlight the assumed qualities of gayness, draw attention to their inadequacy in speaking for the selected demographic, and then use narratives to begin to offer new forms of representation and understanding.

Chapter Two: Exploring Gayness

Gay men and lesbians exist on social terrain beyond the boundaries of the heterosexual nuclear family. Our communities have formed in that social space. Our survival and liberation depend on our ability to defend and expand that terrain, not just for ourselves but for everyone.

John D'Emilio (1993: 474)

[W]e as gay people see life through a different window. That's why the mainstream is scared of us.

Sonny Bone-Nose, a Radical Faerie, quoted in Alex Sanchez (2005: 73)

This chapter takes the form of a core contextualisation, whereby I explore the argument that 'gay identity' as a category is an intrinsically (Anglo-American) Western construct, rooted in discourses of political, social, and economic struggle. In order to acknowledge the lacuna in the representation of the demographic of 'young, white, urban, gay men' in South Africa, and to subsequently begin to offer a new approach to understanding this chosen demographic, it is necessary to dismantle the popular (and often mediated) opinion that gay is 'just' a term to describe same-sex sexual attraction. I encounter this perspective on an almost daily basis, and it similarly festers in both academic and political discussions (Barnard, 2001: 134). The assumption that 'gay' is a neutral term that can be suitably applied to any context, on a transnational level, as a mere indicator of asexual attraction, is detrimental to understanding and appreciating local experiences (Barnard, 2001: 137; Hoad, 1998: 34; Leatt and Hendricks, 2004). This in turn hinders processes of reconciliation and any attempts to bring about positive social change. As discussed in chapter 1, this contextualisation will take place in relation to Alex Sanchez's *Rainbow* trilogy: *Rainbow Boys* (2001), *Rainbow High* (2003) and *Rainbow Road* (2005a).

It is important to recognise, however, that this project seeks to understand 'gayness' from a perspective of analytical and social interpretation. In contextualising 'gay identity', whilst I argue that gay is not neutral, I do not seek to argue that all those who personally label themselves as gay

identify with all of the connotations and histories associated with the marker. Just as many people may adopt the label precisely because they identify with the connotations and histories, many may freely reject aspects of the label whilst still calling themselves gay. Different contexts will most certainly give rise to different interpretations and popular understandings. Indeed, this fluidity of personal appropriations and understandings is reflected in the personal narratives collected for this project. Rather, what is key to this chapter is the recognition that from a perspective of broader social understanding, aimed at the provision of beneficial resources of support on a level of local representation, utilising gay as an assumed neutral term for a lens of analysis is deeply problematic, for reasons which will be discussed below.

Introducing the *Rainbow* Trilogy

The complex discourses which form the foundation of an understanding of certain identities in our contemporary world, and the 'culture' that arises from this crucible of social and historical perspectives, are popularly lived and interpreted in a manner akin to that represented in Alex Sanchez's *Rainbow* trilogy. On a level of critical reception the first book, *Rainbow Boys* (2001), was selected by the International Reading Association as a "Young Adults' Choice" and by the American Library Association as a "Best Book for Young Adults", and the second book, *Rainbow High* (2003), was selected as a Lambda Literary Award Finalist in 2003. The phenomenal success of the trilogy coupled with the numerous affirmative reader responses that Sanchez has received point towards the trilogy being a deeply identifiable cultural artefact and an 'accurate' reflection of forces at play in the lives of gay people in America (Sanchez, 2005b; Sipe, 2008; McCafferty, 2006). Indeed, "readers across a range of sexual identities and ages and from a variety of professional backgrounds [...] have affirmed [... the novels] as both realistic in their portrayals and positive in their content" (Crisp, 2008: 238), with one reader succinctly commenting that the novels "helped me understand and accept myself" (Sanchez, 2005c). The novels are rooted in the author's personal experiences (McCafferty, 2006: 10), and Sanchez's background in professional counselling has informed their 'purpose' beyond that of being literary entertainment: to be a tool against oppression by creating a common sense of connection and "give young people and adults a way to make sense of gay-straight struggles" (Sanchez, 2005b: 48). In short, Sanchez has written the novels to intentionally be both a (critically acclaimed and accurate) reflection of 'gay culture' (in contrast to straight culture) and a cultural roadmap for being gay (and to a much smaller degree, bisexual) in an overwhelming heterosexual world. *Rainbow Boys* is arguably one of the most successful books in the genre of LGBT-themed young adult literature, having become a top-seller on online-

shopping site *Amazon* as of November 2011.⁵ The success of the series, and its function as a collection of work intended to aid in the development of identity, are the primary reasons for choosing the trilogy as a source for this project.

It is important at this point to recognise that it is not my intention to critique the genre of "young adult literature", nor to offer a conventional literary analysis of the trilogy. Rather, considering the overarching nature of this project, I seek to discursively link this popular cultural artefact to the structures, institutions, and emic interpretations of these to a mediated understanding of 'gayness' and 'gay culture'. The purpose of this approach is not to disregard the importance of literary critique, or dismiss the need for a continuing evaluation of this genre, but to assist in recognising that which is fundamental to my argument: that 'gay' and 'gayness' are politicised, and linked specifically to a very Americanised understanding of the binaries of gay/straight and homosexual/heterosexual. I have made the decision to discuss discourses which span all three novels, due to the fact that as the narrative progresses so it becomes more evident that represented definitions of gayness are specifically bound to certain structures and spaces. However, as Thomas Crisp identifies (2008), these discourses are firmly embedded in the first novel. It is similarly important to note that by no means do I seek to homogenise gay identity, gayness, or gay experiences. I recognise, from a cultural studies perspective, that cultural experiences are fundamental in the shaping of identities. Yet at the same time the argument of this project is that 'gay', broadly and categorically speaking, *is* politicised and thus shaped by certain overarching socio-cultural constructs. This is not to suggest that all people who identify as gay have identical life experiences, but rather that the (un)comfortable self-identification with this label is possible due to the ideological link between gay and gayness and the socio-cultural constructs discussed below. These constructs afford individuals the agency to explore sexual identification, within ideological bounds, and it is this common agency that drives my understanding of gayness within the *Rainbow* trilogy.

On a narrative level the trilogy explores the development of three protagonists, all in their final year of high school. Jason, a basketball hero and school 'jock', reconciles his repressed gay desires by befriending and ultimately falling in love with well-rounded student (top swimmer and academic) Kyle, who struggles to 'come out' to his parents and align his ambitions with his four-year-long infatuation with Jason. The flamboyant and openly queer Nelson is Kyle's best friend, who overcomes his personal hurdles of abandonment anxieties, an eating disorder, and an HIV

⁵ <http://www.alexsanchez.com/AmazonNo1.htm>

scare. The novels trace Kyle, Jason and Nelson becoming friends with each other and slowly coming to terms with their respective feelings (*Rainbow Boys*), to realising the pressures of responsible gay life (*Rainbow High*), and ultimately to reconciling their various anxieties about their identities with varying degrees of self-acceptance and senses of belonging (*Rainbow Road*). The distinct characterisation of Jason, Kyle, and Nelson is arguably a contributing reason for the series' success, because within a "history of assuming homogeneity among homosexuals, the *Rainbow Boys* series [...] presents for readers different "types" of gay men" (Crisp, 2008: 244). This positive affirmation of a multitude of expressive possibilities under the construct of gayness exists in a contemporary context of gendered confusion: David M Halperin argues (2000) that modern anxieties around identity and societal panics that surround the need to group and classify people are the result of a shift to a society that emphasises (and enables) individual sexual development over gender relationships (91), and yet simultaneously genders the nature of these sexual developments. Halperin argues that the cultural significance we attach to sexual identity labels is distinct from a "premodern system that privileges gender over sexuality" (91), in that whilst contemporary understandings of gender and gender roles are fundamental to societal growth they exist parallel to the 'recent' importance of self-identified sexual recognition/orientation. In order to understand how the *Rainbow* trilogy reflects (and constructs) what it "means" to be gay it is necessary to contextualise the thematic development of the characters in relation to Halperin's argument and the general murkiness surrounding the use of terms such as 'gay identity' and 'homosexual identity'.

A History of 'Gay'

Within a contemporary context of extreme globalisation the idea of a 'gay identity' and the associated concept of 'gay rights' is embedded in a mythology of transcultural and transnational temporal ubiquity (D'Emilio, 1993: 468). Popular understandings of gayness are often rooted in the supposition that "gay men and lesbians always were and always will be" (468), drawing on the inherent essentialist assumption of a universal definite quality to one's innate gayness. Indeed, the current discourse of being "born this way", championed by pop sensation and 'gay icon' Lady Gaga, through her similarly-titled 2011 album and single release, links directly to this cultural myth of the "eternal homosexual" (468): the notion that "gays [...] deserve rights, because their difference is innocent of choice" (Schilt, 2011) and because their sexual orientations are unaffected and undefined by time, culture, or place. In this discourse one is born gay, and therefore gayness is an instinctive element to oneself. The shift in popular social awareness towards this essentialist position of being "born this way" is problematic as it conflates the theoretical separation of same-

sex sexual behaviour and the "self-description or labelling of a sexual identity" (Leatt and Hendricks, 2004: 304-5). This in turn contributes to the problematic assumption that gay is a label that can be applied across all cultural, political, social, economic, and historical contexts. It is not my intention to flesh out the vigorous constructionist-essentialist debate of the 1980s (Halperin, 2000: 88), nor to critique the various political discourses surrounding both of these points on the academic and sexuality continua. Whilst a neo-essentialist discourse is popular in the mediated Western mainstream, I seek to dismantle the loaded 'nature' of the idea of a 'gay identity' and the label 'gay' itself, which requires a distinctly constructionist approach. Indeed, there is a great deal of academic ambiguity surrounding the 'proper' or 'correct' terms to use when referring to sexuality, sex, and identity. In discussing the development of a gay identity several authors use 'homosexual' as a term with attempted neutrality for an emotional identity based on same-sex sexual attraction (Herdt, 1989; Troiden, 1989; Isaacs and McKendrick, 1992; Dorenkamp and Henke, 1995; Spargo, 1999). This is seemingly done to avoid the popular and academic associations with the construct of a 'gay identity', giving the impression that 'homosexual identity' is perceived to be more universal, genderless, and less influenced by popular trends. However, many authors also distinguish between gay and homosexual – homosexual being used as an allegedly neutral term to signify same-sex sexual activities, and gay being used to refer to an aspect of formed identity linked to sexual activity (D'Emilio, 1993; Creet, 1995; Leatt and Hendricks, 2004).

Consequently, 'homosexual' is used both as a signifier of sex-acts separate from definitions of identity, *and* as a potential marker of identities based (at least partially) on sex-acts. In more recent discussions the use of homosexual has declined, due in part to the recognition of the medicalised connotations of the term, which is rooted in the nineteenth and early twentieth century interpretation of the psychiatric perversion of the homosexual condition (Halperin, 2000: 95; Leatt and Hendricks, 2004: 310; Sigusch, 1998). Similarly, in my personal experiences the popular use of homosexual as a marker of one's identity is only done tongue-in-cheek, where one is feigning outrage at the friendly 'accusation' of being 'a homosexual' (usually said with an exaggerated sneer and the poor imitation of an upper-class English accent).

This ambiguity surrounding the uses of 'gay' and 'homosexual' is problematic, and relevant to this project, for two primary reasons. Firstly, in relation to self-identified men and masculinity, if one uses 'homosexual identity' as opposed to 'gay identity', one necessarily sidelines and ignores the interweaving social discourses which form and shape the experiences of gay self-identification. The seamless substitution is an indirect acknowledgement that 'gay' is politically loaded, and yet a direct abandonment of these formative political and social qualities. Secondly, an attempt to

differentiate between homosexuality on one hand as "sexual behaviour between people of the same sex" and, on the other hand, the realisation that "when we talk about gay, we talk about an identity" (Leatt and Hendricks, 2004: 304-5) ignores the converging discourses which form a social understanding of male homosexuality itself (and through it, gayness). In the discussion of the social construction of identity (including 'gay'), attempts to isolate a distinct transcultural and transtemporal thread of 'homosexual behaviour' fail to recognise the socially constructed 'nature' of homosexuality itself. Contemporary understandings of gay, gayness, and gay culture are products of historical change and societal development, and rooted in this is an understanding of homosexuality (Halperin, 2000). Central to this understanding, however, is the need to acknowledge that 'homosexuality' itself is a recent social construct, appearing in print for the first time only in 1869 (Halperin, 2000: 89), and that, more importantly, it is a term that encompasses a multitude of "same-sex sexual behaviours, desires, psychologies, and socialities, as well as forms of gender deviance" within its "capacious definitional boundaries" (89). In exploring contemporary complexities of identity formation, social anxieties and questions of belonging it is therefore inadequate to 'simply' separate a label of gay from a behavioural marker of homosexuality and assume that the social construction of one's identity is ideologically loaded whilst the implied interactions that underpin such an identity remain ideologically neutral. If one is to truly appreciate the complexity of identity formation and development then it is necessary to remain aware of the fragility and fluidity of all aspects of that identity as a social construction. If it is desirable to form some definition of what *gay* encapsulates today then one needs to trace and outline the discourses which understatedly shape the notion of 'male homosexuality'. It is these discourses which directly form the foundation of popular and academic understandings of gayness.

Halperin (2000) argues that our contemporary use⁶ of 'homosexual' in relation to males is a signification of the "cumulative process of historical overlay and accretion" of "four different but

⁶ Halperin situates his genealogy within a distinctly Western context: he argues that the notion of homosexuality, framed within his thesis that our contemporary understanding of the term is the culmination of several discourses, is fundamentally European (2000: 91). His focus on "figures immanent in the social and cultural traditions of Europe" (91) signifies an important recognition that there is room for understanding same-sex sexual orientation within non-European contexts. Whilst he uses several minor examples from non-European sources, including examples of Australian examples of stereotypes (93), and classical debates around whether men or women are superior "vehicles of male sexual gratification" (97) in Arabic poetry and Chinese writings (98), his overall project does not seek to locate the histories of the discourses of homosexuality within these contexts. The application of his argument, therefore, is distinctly culture-bound to those contexts which are fundamentally linked to, and based upon, aspects of his identified histories. Whilst Halperin leaves room for an investigation into different histories, a non-European focus on the history of non-European same-sex sexual interaction would require a shift away from his model and understanding of homosexuality as a distinctly European construction.

simultaneous categories or traditions of discourse" (91) merged with the original modern conceptualisation of a minimalistic, simplistic term to describe sexual drive (109). This latter category is a convenient starting point for understanding Sanchez's trilogy as a form of representation of gayness in lived reality. Going into great detail, Halperin highlights that "'homosexuality' was not coined to interpret the phenomenon it described or to attach a particular psychological or medical theory to" but instead to "simply" refer to a "sexual drive directed toward persons of the same sex as the sex of the person who was driven by it" (109). As mentioned above, many authors use 'homosexual' in this sense. However, Halperin importantly illustrates that the simplicity of this term made it easily adaptable for a "variety of ideological purposes" (109). The sense of same-sex sexual attraction is a fundamental aspect of Jason, Kyle, and Nelson's lives and identities – and obviously it forms an integral part of a popular understanding of what it 'means' to be gay today. A contemporary understanding of homosexuality, however, is historically shaped by a modern discourse of combining "three distinct and previously uncorrelated concepts" (110): "a psychiatric notion of orientation", "a psychoanalytic notion of same-sex *sexual object choice* or desire", and "a sociological notion of sexually *deviant behaviour*" (110, emphases in original). The very term 'homosexuality' conflates the ideas that one may 'be homosexual', 'desire homosexually', and 'behave homosexually', which culminates in the binary assumption that it is a category and concept fundamentally and completely different from heterosexuality (110).

The implications of this are that despite the drastic differences in personalities, interests, and forms of expression, Jason, Kyle and Nelson are perceived – by virtue of all having 'homosexual desires' and thus within this discourse an automatic connection to orientation and behaviour – to have a degree of subjective "sameness and mutuality" (112). In the academic sense this is, of course, a ridiculous conflation of a spectrum of widely acknowledged sexual identities and expressions. However, in the popular sense and within the popular construction of what ultimately has come to be understood today as 'gay identity', "homosexuality is now set over against heterosexuality" (112): it is a part of "a new system of *sexuality*, which functions as a means of personal individuation" whereby each individual is assigned "a sexual orientation and sexual identity" (112). In the process of recognising their same-sex sexual feelings of attraction Jason, Kyle, and Nelson are therefore linked under a binary of being 'not heterosexual'. This process of differentiation and ideological separateness is deeply traumatic, a constant struggle of negotiation for the characters, and it is facilitated, of course, by certain structures. These structures will be discussed below, and it is not my intention to be reductive or dismissive of the various social forces and historical incongruities which foster different sexual identifications. However, in a context of Western male same-sex attraction it is important to acknowledge that our contemporary popular

understanding of what was originally understood as a 'simple' attraction to the same sex has mutated into a individualistic binary system, where one is popularly perceived to be either hetero- or homosexual, complete with a set of ideological assumptions.

Indeed, Sanchez has been criticised for maintaining heteronormativity within his trilogy by representing the predominantly positive experiences of the characters as occurring in spaces separate from heterosexuality and heterosexual-defined characters (Crisp, 2008). Nelson's poignant moment of self-acceptance and spiritual self-awareness, for example, take place at a "sanctuary" for people who do fall outside the boundaries of heterosexuality (Sanchez, 2005a: 68). Whilst this is a positive moment for Nelson, it sits in stark contrast to the various other negative experiences that take place in the presence of heterosexual characters throughout the series – including various degrees of physical assault and verbal abuse. Thomas Crisp argues that "it seems gay people can only find solace from intolerance by isolating themselves from heterosexuals" (2008: 256), reflected by the second epigraph at the start of this chapter. Sonny Bone-Nose, a minor character whom Nelson befriends at the sanctuary the friends travel to in *Rainbow Road*, suggests that there is something fundamentally different between those grouped as homosexual and those as heterosexual. This reflects, and maintains, the tendency that Halperin suggests shapes a modern understanding of homosexuality: that it is a form of existence (in relation to orientation, desire, behaviour, and world-view) separate from heterosexuality. The result of this is a reductive sameness found in the trilogy: that social connection and identification take place in a broad community based on Otherness of sexuality, grouped under a banner of homosexuality, which in turn feeds into a popular understanding of what it 'means' to be gay.

What is evident, then, in an understanding of what gayness signifies in our global mediated context, is that homosexuality is rooted in a process of sexual identification. Whilst this may seem almost too obvious to state it is fundamentally necessary to recognise due to its link to surrounding discourses which have shaped societal interpretation of orientation. These surrounding discourses, whilst less obvious than a discourse of orientation, are profoundly linked in the trilogy to a definition of gayness. Halperin's project goes beyond identifying what forms a modern definitional categorisation of homosexuality. In his deconstruction of a contemporary interpretation he argues that alongside a discourse of orientation and sexuality there exist four conflated discourses of gender: the premodern traditions of effeminacy, "active" sodomy or pederasty, male love, and passivity/inversion (2000). Within a binary system of heterosexual-homosexual there is still a fundamental link to gender expression and gender identification, and it is the conflated paradigm of a society based on sexuality with a premodern societal gender-based system that contributes to

a contemporary understanding of what is represented in the trilogy as gayness, gay identity, and gay culture.

It is well established that there exists a plurality of masculinities within society (Segal, 1990; Nixon, 1997; Whitehead and Barrett, 2001; Connell, 2005; Schippers, 2007). RW Connell, however, argues that popular culture assumes the existence of a "fixed, true masculinity beneath the ebb and flow of daily life" (2005: 45) which stems from a hegemonic ideology within dominant culture. Recognising this is essential for understanding the gender systems present in society, but so is recognising the relationship between the varying masculinities. The notion of a 'true' masculinity, Connell goes on to argue, is best understood as a hegemonic masculinity, that masculinity which is "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men" (2005: 77). Men are consequently pressured, by a variety of ideological apparatuses, to develop both a sense and performance of masculinity that presents itself as close as possible to the ideals of the hegemonic masculinity. The resulting masculinities take on a relationship of subordination, complicity or marginalization to this hegemonic project (76). In the patriarchal ideology men who fall into Halperin's understanding of modern homosexuality emulate a sexuality that is subordinate to 'true' masculinity. Masculine homosexuality (a contradiction in this ideology) has traditionally been oppressed to the status of absolute inferiority in the patriarchal gender system: homosexuality (and thus gayness), in this system, "is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity" (78). Halperin strongly emphasises the need to differentiate between the different premodern traditions surrounding what has become conflated as homosexuality. The first premodern tradition of effeminacy is often assumed to be a marker of homosexuality, but has traditionally been a marker of "excess in men" (2000: 94). What this points to is that the tradition that informs contemporary understandings of homosexuality is one which marks the symbolic expulsion of that which was undesirable to the hegemonic masculinity: within European cultural traditions the signification of a normative masculinity was a "mastery of the impulse to pleasure" (93). Understandings of what constitute hegemonic or ideal masculinity shift as patterns of socialisation change, but have traditionally included strength, virility, aggression, emotional detachment and ineptitude, coldness and a Cartesian emphasis on the mind dominating the body (Nixon, 1997; Richardson, 2003: 436). Nelson's sexual insatiability (Crisp, 2008: 250), therefore, is an indication of historical effeminacy within what we understand as gayness: the fact that he is "horny...pretty much 24/7" (Sanchez, 2001: 83) signifies an inability to use his mind to control his bodily urges, rendering him inferior to the hegemonic project.

Similarly, Halperin identifies a second tradition of "pederasty or "active" sodomy" (2000: 94), which, from a gender-relations perspective, similarly has come to serve as a marker of that which is undesirable in hegemonic masculinity. The "age-old practice of classifying sexual relations" (96) is a part of a system of gender classification, where, within the historical European historiography, the act of penetration is associated with various hegemonic masculinities and gendered male roles (96-7). Exploring various cultural examples Halperin illustrates that "active" sodomy historically does not necessarily "impugn" (98) a man's masculinity. Indeed, it signifies a conscious rendering of oneself as a subject (rather than an object) of desire (98). In more modern times, within the Victorian context, rather than the emphasis being on the sex-act itself, Halperin argues that this prehomosexual tradition came to emphasise a failure in gender conformity: the male sexual penetration of a subordinate male "reprehensible and abominable [within a context of Victorian morals] though it might be, could be reckoned a manifestation of his excessive but otherwise normal male sexual appetite" (96). Categorising this as "not perverted but merely perverse" (96), Halperin illustrates that a failure to control one's sexual appetite renders one as a merely having a vice, which "might be restrained by laws and punished as a crime", rather than having a pathological condition or mental disease (95). This distinction between the immoral and the pathological is "quaintly Victorian" (96), but is important in recognising a similar contemporary emphasis placed on penetration versus being penetrated. Our present context of what we call homosexuality, then, draws on this particular discourse of a Victorian-influenced gender system: homosexuality has come to include a failure to control one's urges, and thus a failure to conform to hegemonic masculinity.

Whilst the tradition of "'active" sodomy' or pederasty is a marker of a failure to conform to hegemonic masculinity due to an inability to control urges (and thus a signifier of hypermasculinity), Halperin argues that the discourse of passivity or inversion "has to do with deviant gender identity, sensibility, and personal style" (2000: 103). Where traditional representatives of those who classify as "active" pederasts are largely unidentifiable in their day-to-day demeanours, an invert "usually stands out, because his reversal of his gender identity affects his personal demeanor and shapes attitude, gestures, and manner of conducting himself" (104). Whilst the markers of inversion are culture-bound, its "legibility" is "one of its perennial features" (105). Nelson reflects this gender inversion, where in a contemporary cultural setting his 'unmasculine' mannerisms mark him out regularly as a "fag", "homo", or "sissy" within his school context. His frequent and dramatic changes to his hair colour and his mannerisms unsettle Jason, who is the most stringent throughout the series in the policing of his masculinity. In discussing with Kyle the possibility of going on a cross-continental road-trip with Nelson, Jason remarks:

"Kyle, I know he's your friend, and you know I like him okay, but sometimes when he starts bobbing his head and snapping his fingers . . . I mean, if it was just you and me..."

"Yeah, I know," Kyle sighed. "But I thought - "

"And why'd he dye his hair *pink*?" Jason's voice grew frantic. "Doesn't he realize how ridiculous he looks?"

"That's just how he is." Kyle gave a shrug. (Sanchez, 2005a: 13-14)

Similarly, Jason is horrified when he first gets into Nelson's car:

Jason opened the passenger door to Nelson's car but found the seat already occupied by a mini Disney Aladdin doll.

"My first crush as a kid," Nelson explained. "Yep, I fell in love with a 'toon. Isn't he dreamy?"

Jason picked the figure off the seat, trying to figure out where to put it, and glanced around the car. Rainbow beads dangled from the rearview. A hula girl bobbed atop the dash. Below the radio a sticker read: I CAN'T EVEN DRIVE STRAIGHT. (Sanchez, 2005a: 28)

In this context, emphasis is placed on Nelson's all-encompassing deviation from the gender norm. This gender deviation – in relation to Nelson's behaviour, interests, sense of style, and preferred aesthetic – falls into a familiarly refreshing (though many argue familiarly stereotyped and self-repressive⁷) categorisation of "camp". "Camp", as Ken Cage (2003) explains, is a "contrived style of exaggeration, which exists in spite of the dominant culture, and is generally the preserve of people excluded from mainstream culture" (9). As a notoriously difficult term to define, it has been argued to be a sensibility (Gross, 1991: 43) aimed at the intentional subversion of mainstream expectations, and used as a gay male strategy of "defensive offensiveness" (Medhurst in Richardson, 2003: 276). Nelson's personal style and "highly cultivated and sharp wit" (Cage, 2003: 9) serve to reveal the social pressures he faces to conform to a certain form of masculinity: his 'campness' reveals the constructed nature of gender. This 'camp aesthetic', however, is rooted in another premodern discourse of homosexuality. Historically, "inversion was defined as a psychological orientation without a sexuality" (Halperin, 2000: 108), where mannerisms, interests,

⁷ See, for example, Richardson (2009)

and expressions signified a "condition of gender dysphoria that affected the inner life of the individual, an *orientation* not necessarily expressed in the performance or enjoyment of particular (homo)sexual acts" (108). Sexual inversion historically contributes to our contemporary understanding of homosexuality, but is rooted in a gender system and not a configuration of sexual understandings. Nelson is a representation of what is often a caricature or stereotype of contemporary gay culture, a character "embodying the supposedly visible and flagrant features of male sexual and gender deviance" (104). In a popular rendering this tradition is often associated with "passive or receptive homosexual sex" (104), which points towards the general characteristic of the invert as betraying masculinity. Indeed, Nelson's sexual self-discovery in *Rainbow Boys* leads him to have casual sex with an online acquaintance, whereby he embodies

the negative, stereotypically "feminine" stance of wishing for the use of protection during sexual activity and the subsequent abandonment of that protective instinct in order not to risk rejection and to satisfy the "masculine" male: in this case, the motorcycle riding, muscular "HotLove69" Brick. (Crisp, 2008: 252)

What is once again evident here is that gender relationships and a negotiation of gender roles in relation to a hegemonic masculinity are at the core of a modern definition of homosexuality and resulting gayness. Within this sex scene the character Brick represents the "active" pederast – the personification of a familiar trope, stirring images of Brian Kinney from the popular television show *Queer As Folk (USA)*. Brick is the image of a complicit masculinity, fulfilling all visible markers of hegemonic expectation. Nelson is overwhelmed by his handsome face, "smooth, magnetic" voice, "powerful handshake" and visible muscles (Sanchez, 2001: 146). His representative position of 'active pederast' is thus rendered as an unfortunate failure of his complicity, but nonetheless a signifier of his undeniable hypermasculinity. This sits in stark contrast to Nelson, who acts as the symbolic Other to Brick's masculinity: he remains the passive (emotionally and physically) recipient of Brick's desires and advances.

Halperin identifies the final discourse of friendship or male love (2000: 99), which forms a crucial part of a contemporary understanding of homosexuality. Also emphasising gender relations, the historical emphasis placed on the love between male companions is not necessarily homoerotic. He argues that *sexual* love "is all about penetration and therefore about position, superiority and inferiority, rank and status, gender and difference" (101). In contrast to this, historical (European) representations of friendship between males is "all about sameness: sameness of rank and status, sameness of sentiment, sameness of identity" (101). Whilst we may have the tendency to 'homosexualise' any mutual expressions of love between men, within a

historical context these sentiments actually serve to equalise comradeship, by "banishing any hint of subordination on the part of one friend to the other" (101). The acknowledged emotional equality removes the potential for hierarchies within friendships, and thus removes the potential for one friend to be superior to the other. This discourse, Halperin suggests, can be traced from ancient Greek representations to modern representations found in action films featuring a hero and his companion (100), and thus potentially in the popular modern genre of 'bromances'. In relation to our understanding of homosexuality and the *Rainbow* trilogy, this discourse is important because

the friendship tradition provided socially empowered men with an established discursive venue in which to express, without social reproach, sentiments of passionate and mutual love for one another, and such passionate, mutual love between persons of the same sex is an important component of what we now call homosexuality. (Halperin, 2000: 101)

This discourse is "consonant with masculine gender norms" as defined by many Western cultures (102). Within the *Rainbow* trilogy, a part of the gendered development of the characters is finding the means to express their sentiments of mutual love and affection. Whilst Kyle and Jason do enter into a romantic relationship, a prerequisite for this to take place is the establishment of an equal platonic connection. In *Rainbow Boys* Jason develops from having barely interacted with Kyle, to realising that he can confide in him about his anxieties and dreams. The friendship, founded on Kyle tutoring Jason on mathematics, culminates in Jason realising Kyle's value as both a confidante and teacher, acknowledging that "the more he thought about it, the more he realized that the only person in his life who really understood him was Kyle" (Sanchez, 2001: 128). Similarly, Nelson negotiates his feelings for Kyle: his unreciprocated sexual attraction to Kyle is initially a hindrance to the friends' relationship, but Nelson's HIV scare as a result of his unprotected sexual encounter with Brick helps him reassess his platonic emotional need for Kyle, and redirect his sexual thoughts to other men. What this outlines, then, is the constant need for a monitoring of this aspect of masculinity in order to foster positive and mutually beneficial relationships. Within a contemporary understanding of homosexuality, however, this gendered dynamic is problematised from the onset: the hegemonic demand to form an equal, non-sexual friendship as a part of a masculine discourse is constantly 'undermined' by the recognition that same-sex sexual desire exists within the same discursive venue. Whilst Kyle and Jason are friends, thus satisfying hegemonic demands, they are also lovers, which 'undermines' the very same hegemonic demands.

The historical discourses of effeminacy, active pederasty, inversion, and male love/friendship underpin a contemporary understanding of homosexuality. What this speaks to,

then, is a core process of gendered negotiation in relation to a hegemonic masculinity: homosexuality, as it is understood today, is marked by an inherent assumption of gendered deviance and ideological inferiority. Having briefly outlined Halperin's thesis, one can argue that in a context where masculinity is configured by structures of gender relations, homosexuality has come to epitomise that which is *not* masculine. In turn, a process of identifying as homosexual – which, Halperin argues, is the final discourse informing our notion of homosexuality – is primarily shaped by a personal struggle to negotiate an emotional venue of discursive belonging. This gendered aspect to homosexuality is reflected in the "types" of gays that Thomas Crisp (2008) identifies within the *Rainbow* trilogy. Indeed, in popular cultural representations there is often a distinction made between the "types" epitomised by Jason, the masculine "tragic closet jock" (Crisp, 2008: 245); Nelson, the opposing extreme of the 'femmy' or 'queeny' "queer and proud homosexual" (250); and Kyle, the midway point of the "sympathetic understanding doormat" (246). A part of the process of self-identification and self-realisation, which will be discussed below, is a personal negotiation of an existence within a system of hegemonic masculinity with, by virtue of 'being homosexual', an ideological sense of removal and inferiority. Each of the characters struggle in their respective ways to understand their gendered homosexuality. Crisp is quite critical of this aspect of the series: he argues that Sanchez reinforces a heteronormative perspective by "routinely privileg[ing]" Jason, the "tragic closet jock" (2008: 246). Jason's visible masculinity, signified by his star athlete status and lack of willingness to show emotions in public, ultimately 'triumphs' over the potential "failure" of homosexual masculinity (Taywaditep, 2002: 2), as "his status as 'jock' trumps his identity as gay and his popularity remains unquestioned: even the most homophobic students still embrace and accept him" (Crisp, 2008: 247). This sits in stark contrast to Kyle and Nelson, who also reveal their sexual orientations to their schoolmates: where Jason is applauded and nationally acknowledged for being a role model (he is invited to be the guest of honour at the opening ceremony of a new gay-friendly school on the other side of the North American continent in *Rainbow Road*), Nelson and Kyle suffer repeated verbal, emotional, and physical abuse. Nelson is acutely aware of this fact when he complains to Kyle that

"Whoa! Miss Teen Closet-Case *finally* comes out during his last days of senior year and for that he wins a free trip to Hollywood?"

The injustice of it galled him. "How unfair is that? I've been out since kindergarten. Where the heck's my expenses-paid trip?" (Sanchez, 2005a: 6)

Crisp's argument extends to suggest that a complicit ideology runs throughout the trilogy, offering the reader the problematic notion that the gendered struggles intrinsically linked to homosexuality

are lessened, and ultimately rendered non-existent, if one conforms to visible and (non-sexual) behavioural expectations of hegemonic masculinity. Jason's masculinity, therefore, "actually distances him from the other homosexuals" in the series (2008: 248). Crisp argues that the 'feminized' Kyle and Nelson embody various negative stereotypes about homosexuality, which serve to reinforce Jason's superiority.

Whilst I acknowledge that the series is far from an ideological champion for a strategy on how to ultimately overthrow the tyranny of hegemonic masculinity once and for all (hoorah!), it still remains a cultural artefact. Crisp calls for a "move beyond accepting any representation and begin looking for depictions that reflect for gay adolescent readers the possibilities of who they can become" (2008: 259), suggesting that the popularity of the series and its description by readers as "honest" and "true" (259) is merely a reflection of the lack of other literary representations. This argument strikes me as quite weak, speaking to the notion that readers will passively accept any represented experiences and automatically assume identification. Whilst the series arguably at times "parallels the cultural traditions of repression that have long stigmatized homosexuality" (Roberta Seelinger in Crisp, 2008: 258), the hailing of the series by critics and fans alike as an identifiable and helpful source of information points to an acknowledgement of broad social realities that underpin a contemporary lived experience of homosexuality. Crisp's desire for more positive representations is a fair and much needed one. However, he neglects another aspect to the value of the trilogy: that it functions as a resource for understanding the gendered and ideological dynamics that shape heterosexual-homosexual interactions today. Halperin's thesis is evident in the depicted experiences of the characters depicted in the books, and reader responses have indicated identifiable qualities with each of the characters. For this project, then, the *Rainbow* trilogy is highly useful for mapping what, for better or worse, underlies a contemporary understanding of homosexuality and gayness.

A Question of Spaces

I have already discussed above that a primary aspect of what is represented in the series as 'gayness' relates to Halperin's identification of the complex definition of homosexuality. What is of more important interest for this project, however, is the question of *how* the characters go about negotiating the gendered foundations of their identities. Each of the characters achieve emotional and identity satisfaction by the end of the series. Jason, who begins as a hypermasculine jock unable to confront his internalised homophobia, realigns his sense of masculinity with his overall identity by reaffirming what it 'means' to be a gay man. Nelson, who begins as the stereotypical 'invert' who feels outcast and victimised, finds a relationship of mutual and equal male love with

like minded Manny in *Rainbow Road*. His (masculine) gendered identity reaches a point of emotional control whereby he accepts responsibility for his decision to remain in Los Angeles, acknowledges the uncertainty of the future, and calmly asserts his individuality over the will of his mother (Sanchez, 2005a: 236). Kyle "embodies many of the same stereotypical and troublesome characteristics traditionally assigned in literature to females: he is emotional, sensitive, and willing to put his own needs secondary to those of the dominant male" (Crisp, 2008: 246), who in this case is Jason. Whilst Crisp argues that Kyle "remains unchanged" and "unfailingly self-sacrificing" (2008: 248), from a gendered perspective he manages to reconcile his willingness to help others with an assertive sense of individuality. By accepting a placement at Princeton University as opposed to remaining at community college with Jason, and by acknowledging that Jason is his relationship equal (a primary narrative of *Rainbow Road* is this self-discovery), Kyle negotiates his position from being hierarchically inferior to a position of mutual stimulation and acceptance. To return to the question posed at the start of this paragraph, it is necessary to explore *how* these gendered negotiations, which are integral parts of the characters' gay identities, are possible. As I have discussed, Halperin argues that a modern discourse of homosexuality is based on the combination of sexual objectification, orientation, and behaviour. The development of a homosexual-based identity is, however, firmly rooted in a specific set of social, economic, and cultural conditions.

From a historical perspective, John D'Emilio (1993) argues that the economic shift from a family-based mode of production to a neoliberal system of wage labour directly facilitated the development of what Halperin essentially identifies as 'homosexuality as an orientation'. He suggests that prior to the nineteenth century economic and social 'survival' was structured on the family unit, where the self-sufficient workplace was located in the home (469). The European and colonial American system of economic production was structured around the nuclear family, and it was necessary to be an active participant in this unit for sustainability (470). Whilst same-sex sexual interactions undoubtedly occurred, there was "no 'social space' in the colonial system of production that allowed men and women to be gay" (470). The social and economic structures of this period did not allow for individual sexual expression, but instead were firmly based on gendered hierarchies. Indeed, D'Emilio illustrates that the extreme of this was a colonial law which "prohibit[ed] unmarried adults from living outside family units" (470).

Within a Western context, a shift to industrialisation and nineteenth century paid labour trends marked the decline of the importance of the nuclear family as a central component to economic survival. The rise of capitalism towards the latter half of the nineteenth century had the effect of undermining "the material basis of the nuclear family by taking away the economic

functions that cemented the ties between family members" (473), with the effect of altering the dynamics of 'heterosexual' relationships. By mid-nineteenth century a sense of individualisation and individual success had arisen, facilitated by the ability of an individual to exist independent from the economic support structures that had previously bound all people to the family unity. The result of this, D'Emilio argues, was the development of social *spaces* outside of the home-base and beyond the reach of the dynamics of the family. As it was no longer necessary to invest all of one's time, focus and resources into the maintenance of an effective gendered system of production, one was able to explore on a sociable level individual ideas and interests (470). This is not to suggest, of course, that by the end of the nineteenth century all gendered social expectations had vanished. The morals of the Victorian period are still being felt today, as discussed above. Rather, D'Emilio suggests that the shift to wage labour assisted one in becoming (relatively) independent, which in turn facilitated the forging of individual identities based on desire. In this context, then, it became possible for same-sex sexual desire to "coalesce into a personal identity" (470). Indeed, it is at this time period that Halperin (2000) identifies the orientation discourse of homosexuality as arising.

The effect of this was that by the end of the nineteenth century a "class of men and women existed who recognized their erotic interest in their own sex, saw it as a trait that set them apart from the majority, and sought others like themselves" (D'Emilio, 1993: 470). Patterns of living then began evolving into what we can now recognise as the roots of 'gay culture', where 'gay identities' are celebrated. What was crucial to the development of this self-identification and connection, however, was the availability of *spaces* where erotic interests were encouraged – or, at the least, openly tolerated. The start of the twentieth century saw, in many major American cities, the development of bars, cruising areas, drag ball events, literary societies, and private social clubs all specifically geared towards those who, at least in part, based aspects of their identity on feelings of same-sex sexual desire (470). The rise of capitalism during this time further aided in the individualisation of identity, as it allowed people to survive "beyond the confines of the family" (471).

The majority of these spaces, however, were by no means "mainstream" and did not exist openly and seamlessly within what has become understood to be the heterosexual norm. Similarly, despite individuals having the social spaces to explore sexual identities, these identities were still largely bound within "traditional patterns of gender relations and sexuality" (471). Far from suggesting a sudden surge of sexual freedom, D'Emilio's argument merely seeks to highlight the potential for existing in a traditional (Western) gender system whilst having the personal resources (economic and physical, in terms of the spaces available) to explore aspects of individual identity

which were previously unnamed and unnavigable. What D'Emilio seeks to debunk is the "myth" of contemporary interpretations of gay identity that, prior to the liberation movement in the 1960s (which will be discussed below), most lesbian or gay people came to terms with their same-sex desires in complete isolation, "without any resources for naming and understanding what they felt" (468). The value of this, in relation to my project, is an identification of the continuing importance of spaces and their link to surrounding ideologies in the development of a definition of gayness, so that one may recognise that gay men "are a product of history, and have come into existence in a specific historical era" (468), and that the discursive qualities of the identity continue to be defined by surrounding structures.

This link is further entrenched and reflected in the post Second World War years. The war "severely disrupted traditional patterns of gender relations and sexuality" (471): men and women were removed from familiar gendered social spaces, and reorganised into "sex-segregated" situations (472). These new and temporary spaces fostered an "erotic situation conducive to homosexual expression" (471), whereby those who already identified as gay were able to connect, and those who had not had the spatial opportunity to explore their sexualities were more easily able to do so (472). The acknowledgement of gay identity during the 1940s by those who identified as gay resulted in the development of more permanent urban spaces specifically geared towards gay people. Indeed, by the 1950s a "subculture of gay men and lesbians" had developed in many large cities, resulting in increased press visibility during the 1950s and 1960s (472). D'Emilio identifies a distinctive 'community' as existing during this time period: identity formation within this discourse is specifically bound to the spatial resources available as a result of an increasing degree of individualisation. As visibility grew, however, state oppression increased: the period of McCarthyism in America scapegoated gay people as "sexual perverts" who needed repressive state monitoring (473). This involved the gradual elimination of spaces which fostered sexual identity development: President Eisenhower banned the employment of gays and lesbians by government bodies and affiliates; the FBI conducted surveillance checks on "perverts"; the post office tracked the correspondence of gay men; and there were numerous and regular entrapments in home and bars (473). The response to this elimination of spaces was what has become known as the gay liberation movement: the Stonewall Riots of 1969 marked the instance where members of the queer community fought back against a police raid in a response to what D'Emilio calls "the danger involved in being gay" (473). The 1960s saw the shift of gay identity becoming consciously bound to political issues, with a recognition of social injustices and the desire to create safer spaces and a more tolerant society forming the foundation of the experiential quality of gayness. Whilst the political issues changed over the decades which followed, an intrinsic aspect of gay identity has

been the link between the identity, a recognition of social inequality (even if solely through personal social injustice), and a recognition for the need to create "the ideological conditions that make it easier for people" to openly identify as gay (474). As the first epigraph at the start of this chapter highlights, gay identity exists in a specifically forged space of Otherness, and the identity itself depends on the continued political consciousness that drives the forces which aid in the construction of further 'safe spaces'. Specifically, in the American context to which gay is so fundamentally linked, this refers to the increasing legal battle for protection against sexual discrimination, equal marriage rights, anti-bullying measures, and Federal Constitution protection.

Contextualising this argument within the *Rainbow* trilogy gay identity is connected to two interweaving concepts: space, and socio-political structures of change/repression. The affirmative end to each of the characters' personal journeys within the narrative structure is possible only through a negotiation of the gendered aspect of identity discussed above taking place within spaces specifically geared towards affirmation, informed by structures of support and connected by a continuing social battle for legal protection. The series begins with an insecure and homophobic Jason going to a Saturday meeting of the Rainbow Youth Hot Line. This group is a distinct 'safe space', and the meetings throughout the series involve the discussion of a variety of gay-related issues, including safe-sex, HIV, and family dynamics. Within this space Jason learns that Kyle is gay, and the first meeting becomes the catalyst for the journeys of self-discovery of the three characters. This journey ends in a similar 'safe space', that of the fictional Harry Hay High School that Jason is invited to speak at. This school, named after the early leader of the liberation movement who had a unique view that gay people are "a separate, distinct minority with certain traits and talents" which needed to be fostered for the good of all humanity (Thompson, 2003: 25), is an ideological utopia – a marker of the ideal endpoint of personal identity reconciliation and societal tolerance and integration. Jason observes

kids with green hair and purple hair, with earrings and nose rings, kids he wasn't sure were boys or girls – all excited and hyper and giggling, as kids were meant to be, in a school where they could be themselves without being called names or fearing they'd get pounded. (Sanchez, 2005a: 226)

In relation to a contemporary understanding of gay identity development, the crucial difference between Jason's self-perception and understanding within these two spaces is his "coming out" (of the metaphorical closet) process. Coming out, as Cage (2003) illustrates, is the non-linear process of gradually recognising aspects of what ultimately becomes a publicly acknowledged gay identity (7). Critical literature is consistent regarding the development of gay identity, whereby individuals

"model the relationship of people to their thoughts and bodies that result in their becoming proud self-identified gays who are in communities founded on common sexual orientations and expression" (Leatt and Hendricks, 2004: 305). Within this consistency, Coleman offers the insight that the formation of a gay identity, in relation to coming out, takes place in four stages: pre-coming out, involving a denial or repression of same-sex sexual thoughts; initial coming out, whereby an individual acknowledges erotic attraction to the same sex; sexual exploration, marked by the negotiation of gender roles and the meaning of sexual orientation; and finally an integration stage where "individuals incorporate their public and private identities into one self-image" (Coleman, 1981: 31-9). Each of the characters in the trilogy enact different stages of this developmental process. As Sanchez summarises,

[y]ou have Jason, who is very closeted and confused, uncomfortable about accepting his sexuality, and then you have Kyle who is sort of in between. He's come out to Nelson and some other friends, but he's not out to his parents yet, and he wants to start exploring a love relationship. And then we have Nelson, who is very out and outspoken, and out to not only his parents and friends, but really to the whole world. (Sanchez in Sipe, 2008: 265)

The concept of coming out is crucial to an understanding of gayness. Whilst it is important not to overemphasise the coming out process as the be-all of gay identity, it is the core historical concept behind the idea of a shared gay identity. The coming out of gay people during the post-war years resulted in the state oppression of the 1950s and 1960s, and the Stonewall riots (as a mass instance of coming out) emphasised the importance of a public recognition of civil liberties and civil existence based, in part, on sexual identity. The processes of coming out – to oneself, one's peers and family, and to the 'public' – are important to gay identity due to need to create spaces of individual existence. Drawing on D'Emilio's argument, the coming out process directly aids in the dual ventures of creating a common connection between those identifying as gay, and creating a common space (such as the Rainbow Youth Hot Line group meetings or the Harry Hay School, or its real-life equivalent, Harvey Milk High School) where those people can reaffirm their identities and further come out, in the hopes of reaching a stage of integration.

In interpreting the *Rainbow Trilogy* and placing the characters within the historical discourses discussed above, it may be determined that this process of coming out is aided by three factors: spatial-ideological affirmation, exposure to positive images of integrated gayness, and exposure to the social struggles which shape a path to legal equality.

1) Spatial-ideological affirmation

Regarding the first factor, each of the characters progresses towards integration within the context of specifically designated spaces which function with dynamics that stretch beyond the boundaries of heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity. A primary space, as mentioned above, is the Rainbow Youth Hot Line group. Beyond these group meetings, however, Nelson, Kyle, and Jason form and participate in a "gay-straight alliance" (GSA) organisation at their school. This group, existing within the high school (the domain of supreme heteronormative hierarchical organisation), functions to explicitly "address the violence and fear gay people experience at school and to help promote tolerance" (Sanchez, 2001: 39). Whilst the group is met with opposition from parents and students alike, the participants are guided by role-model and lesbian teacher Ms MacTraugh, who aids them in realising that "words have power" (Sanchez, 2003: 1) and guides them in connecting with their identities by expressing their hopes, dreams, and anxieties. The prologue to *Rainbow High* is testimony to this: Nelson, Kyle, and Jason, within the space of the GSA meeting room, write reflection pieces on their journeys, helping them acknowledge the processes of coming out that they have been through and the directions in which they perceive themselves to be headed. What the GSA room and the Rainbow Youth meetings represent are constructed spaces that defy heteronormativity by offering a space of ideological exploration and relative safety from the pressures and everyday dangers of heteronormative opposition. Without these two important spaces none of the characters would have successfully negotiated their gender roles as discussed above, and none of them would have been able to progress through the stages of coming out and identity development: both groups offer explanations on what it 'means' to be gay, and how to deal with anxieties of identity. Another crucial space is the already-mentioned Radical Faerie Sanctuary that the boys accidentally travel to in *Rainbow Road*. Within this ideological space, similarly constructed as separate-to yet existent-within larger heteronormative surroundings, Nelson, Kyle, and Jason are exposed to the diversity of sexuality, and the projected idea that, in the words of Harry Hay (who founded the Radical Faeries) "'tis a gift to be gay...and, honey, don't you ever forget it!" (Thompson, 2003: 26). The interactions with Horn-Boy, Lady-Bugger, Yoko Kim-Ono, and Sonny Bone-Nose challenge Kyle and Jason on their definitions of normality, and yet ultimately assist them in the coming-out process by making them realise their own patterns of hatred and appreciate the value of being completely comfortable with oneself. This is reflected by Jason's initial view that the Faeries "are freaks" and his unwillingness to enter the space of the sanctuary (Sanchez, 2005a: 69), and his later self-reflection upon entering the National Civil Rights Museum about how people "can hate so much" (98).

Whilst the importance of these larger spaces which challenge hegemonic ideologies cannot be overstated, it is also crucial to note the day-to-day creation of temporary spaces which directly aid in the coming-out process. The conversation that Kyle and Jason have in Kyle's car around their respective anxieties regarding their identities (Sanchez, 2001: 44-5) serves as an example of how even a transient space is important in the shaping of identity. Within this space Kyle admits to Jason that he is gay, and Jason expresses his confusion surrounding a negotiation of his current feelings with the fact that he had had sex with his long-term girlfriend, Debra. This discussion aids Kyle in transitioning from an initial coming-out phase to what becomes a phase of sexual exploration, and similarly aids Jason by creating a confidant and positively identifiable figure who will later assist him in progressing from a pre-coming-out phase to an initial coming-out phase. The most significant space, however, is that of the Harry Hay School hall, where Jason delivers his speech as guest of honour. Addressing a diverse range of students, teachers, and parents in what is essentially a constructed, educative safe-space, he remarks that

I understand why it's so important to come out, and speak out, and reach out, and to have schools like this... Because when we stop being alone, we get what I had on the court: a team to play with, to work with, to encourage each other, and to be there for one another, stronger than any single one of us could ever be. (Sanchez, 2005a: 225)

The roaring applause of the audience as a response to this explicitly highlights the role that spaces have in shifting ideologies and aiding in the coming-out process. Similarly, Jason's observation – which marks his ultimate transition to a position of integration – emphasises the fundamental relationship between coming out and gay identity: without a process of coming out there can be no gay identity, and there can be no coming out process without the aid of spaces specifically geared toward identity support.

2) Exposure to positive images of integrated gayness

The second factor which aids coming out, and thus forms an understanding of gayness, is the extent to which the characters are exposed to positive images of other queers. Leatt and Hendrick reflect that within Coleman's model of gay identity development it is necessary to have positive representations to reinforce a sense of self-worth, connection, and a desire to grow (2004: 305). There are several individuals whom the characters meet and interact with throughout the series who fulfil this function. Primarily there is the openly lesbian art teacher, Ms MacTraugh, to whom Jason, Kyle, and Nelson all go for advice. The protagonists also meet Miguel and Todd (2005a: 144), a couple who are "touring the west" (145) for their twentieth anniversary. They serve to reassure

Jason, Kyle, and Nelson (and through them, the reader) that a process of coming out is rewarding, as it helps one come to terms with one's identity, which in turn makes the possibility of long-term romantic love a reality – a concern of each of the characters in turn in *Rainbow Road*. On a larger 'gay culture' scale, Kyle recognises in *Rainbow Boys* that his stages of initial coming out were marked by a negative influence of classmates making gay and Aids-related jokes (2001: 12), but this was ultimately negated by his exposure to the news, where "he saw images of gay people different from the caricatures of jokes", including openly-gay soldiers, lesbian moms, Aids activists, and participants in Pride parades (12-13). His exposure to these positive images was his "one source of hope" (12-13), and he recognises that his self-acknowledgement of gayness, and his sense of connection to a wider but as yet unexplored community, was dependent on this exposure. What the novels therefore suggest is that the process of coming out is not only shaped by an ultimate personal reconciliation, but by a fundamental link to representations of gayness and a sense of common connection.

3) Exposure to the social struggles which shape a path to legal equality

The final factor that is central to the process of coming out is linked to an exposure to positive images. Drawing on D'Emilio's project, what is understood today to be 'gay identity' is built on a history of social awareness and agency. The development of spaces for expression occurs as a direct result of social inequalities, and the subsequent identity development *within* these spaces is linked to an overarching consciousness regarding these inequalities. Thus, identities which formed within the gay subculture that grew in the 1970s were, in part, shaped by the spatial responses to political and legal oppression. A part of the process of integration, therefore, is growth based on consciousness: 'gay' is fundamentally linked to 'gay liberation' as an ideology and movement. Within the trilogy, Kyle displays the most conscious awareness of civil and social rights. As discussed in the paragraph above, his coming-out process was directly aided by positively identifying with the social struggles he saw other gay people facing on the news. Similarly, his coming out to the headmaster of his school is shaped by his willingness to form the GSA, where he challenges the headmaster's unwillingness to allow the group to be formed, in that doing so would be a "violation of the First Amendment and the [...] Federal Equal Access Act" (2001: 37). In this instance, a connection to social inequality and the legal measures in place to combat this is an intrinsic part of the coming-out process. Similarly, Jason and Nelson's maturation is facilitated by Kyle's insistence that they visit the National Civil Rights Museum whilst on their roadtrip (2005a: 96-7). What is most significant, however, is how explicit the novels are in linking reader identity maturation with a sense of social justice. At the back of each novel the reader can find substantial

information (including a blurb, website, and telephone number) for the following causes: Organising a Peer Group; Violence and Hate Crimes against Gays and Lesbians; Human Rights Campaign; Issues with Parents; HIV and Aids; Teen Sexuality; Gay and Lesbian Teen Suicides; Gay and Lesbian Teen Services on the Internet; Youth Advocacy; and Youth Activism.

If one regards the novels as 'signposts' for the process of forming a gay identity, then these resources clearly illustrate the link between coming out and social awareness. Whilst not all men who identify as gay are necessarily politically active, and whilst I do not assume that every reader will utilise these resources, the novels – as cultural artefacts representing a definition of gay culture – reflect the relationship that 'being gay' has between a sense of continuing social struggle and negotiation, and integration. Just as coming out in the 1960s can be linked to the social struggle of increasing state opposition and a desire to reaffirm a sense of self-worth and belonging, so coming out as gay in the context of the trilogy marks a link to the seemingly never-ending social quest for legal equality. Indeed, legal equality, brought about through social change, is at the heart of gay identity: gay identity arose within a context of absolute legal inequality, signified by repressive state actions, and gay identity seeks to "defend and expand" the terrain of social spaces that underlie a sense of community, connection, and integration (D'Emilio, 1993: 474), which can only be done by bringing about legal reform. On a minor level, the physical bullying that Kyle and Nelson experience at the hands of Jack Ransom and José Montero continues because there exists no legal form of protection against homophobic bullying at schools (an issue currently under debate in America). On a much larger scale, the novels form a part of a movement that seeks absolute Constitutional equality. A fundamental aspect of integrated gay identity is the acknowledgement of one's non-heterosexuality, which in turn highlights the legal inequality that one automatically experiences due to Otherness. Indeed, reflecting on the various discourses discussed above, a social movement or consciousness geared towards legal reform has always been – in varying degrees of size and intensity – at the core of an American discourse of gayness.

What is evident, then, is that through the culmination of these three factors the characters are able to negotiate gender confusion and come out in a gradual process of sexual orientation acknowledgement. The series ends, then, with all three characters "integrated": the positive representations of gayness they have been exposed to, as well as the grounding sense of a drive towards social justice, ultimately allow them align their private senses of self with their public images. Of course, I do not propose that what I have highlighted here is the norm for every self-identified/identifying gay male living in America. The news is regularly filled by stories of suicides that result from homophobic bullying, gay teens kicked out of their homes by their parents (which

is one of Kyle's concerns in *Rainbow Boys*), anti-gay murders, and schools suspending or expelling students who defy gender norms. Instead, I merely propose that this is the broad ideological framework that informs a contemporary sense of gayness. Without disregarding the difficulties that many individuals face, I offer the interpretation that 'gay' refers to a specific set of gender relationships, historical discourses, social practices, social histories, ideological practices, and political acknowledgements.

The culmination of this chapter is not to suggest, of course, that the same-sex sexual practices and the sexual orientation which incorporates these practices do not exist within other cultures or context. Rather, I am arguing that what is understood (in a South African context in particular) as 'gay' today is specifically built on a fundamentally Western system of social facilitation and interpretation. Similarly, how we appreciate the experiences of those who identify as gay is shaped by Anglo-American constructs. This is not to take credit away from the work of South African individuals and organisations whose activism was the driving force behind legal change in South Africa (De Waal and Manion, 2006: 7). Indeed, as will be discussed in the following chapters, the legislative benefits that queer people today experience are a direct result of organisations such as the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand working in a post-1990 environment to actively create an environment in which one can identify as gay. In the continental context where there is still extreme intolerance towards 'homosexuality', South Africa's current legal freedom is a result of the politics of a Western identity category.

Consequently, the conclusion of this chapter, and the arguments in the following chapter, should not be read as absolutist assertions that gay has no place in South Africa. What we ultimately can conclude from this overview, rather, is that a contemporary definition of gay and gayness is far from apolitical and neutral, and similarly far removed from simply being defined by shallow popular stereotypes. Gay, as a marker of identity stemming from a discourse of homosexuality, is bound to a very Western understanding of gender relationships and the expressions of competing masculinities. Beyond the explicit and implicit enactment of gender roles linked to the merging of (Western) historical discourses, the actual identification process that underlies a contemporary understanding of gayness is fundamentally linked to an Americanised space of capitalist-driven growth. It is similarly bound to the social structures that have arisen from the economic and cultural developments in America, forging both ideological and physical spaces that act as signposts and tools for identity development. These spaces facilitate the coming-out process, which is core to a gay identity. A positive identification with gayness is facilitated by the ability to move from ideologically oppressive spaces to spaces which positively

(re)affirm this identification. These spaces forge a sense of deep underlying connection to a continuing common struggle for legal reform and social acceptance, and it is these connections – to spaces and histories – that form the basis of a contemporary gay identity. Without these connections one has to begin to question one's assumed understanding of the experiences of those who identify as gay, or risk dismissing a plethora of lived experiences which may fundamentally challenge globalised notions of "the eternal homosexual" and the binary of Western gender roles.

If this is a (lengthy) definition of 'gay', then conversely an application of the label 'gay' to a context invokes discourses of Western space, structures, support, and goals. Regarding someone in an American context as gay speaks to the crucible of discourses discussed in this chapter. This in itself is not wholly problematic in a wider context: certainly within the South African context, as will be discussed below, there is room for people to individually identify with the marker. 'Gay', as an internal American marker, signifies the complex histories and social anxieties that shape an aspect of that person's identity and life experiences. The potential problem, of course, is when 'gay' becomes an analytical cultural export of globalisation. Is it possible to refer to *all* people living in non-American, or non-Western, contexts as gay? Or does doing so negate local histories and discourses, and dismiss very real societal concerns under a banner of sexual homogeneity? Similarly, does an emphasis placed on the process of coming out fundamentally render any attempts to locally negotiate gender and sexuality as ideologically void? I explore these questions in the following chapter, where I problematise the popular and academic use of 'gay' in a South African context. In doing this, I begin to offer a framework for understanding that acknowledges the complexity of sexual identities and sexual politics, but allows for a uniquely local interpretation of social anxieties.

Chapter Three: South African Experience(s)

[L]esbian and gay organizers in the United States [...] judge the level of "progress" another country is making in the arena of lesbian and gay rights by the uniquely U.S. trajectories of Stonewall, coming out, and identity-based civil rights. Of course, it is always the U.S. Standard that these other countries must live up to, and, naturally, the United States is always the leader in this race for gay utopia.

Ian Barnard (2001: 136)

Building on my brief historiography of the term 'gay' (and linked to it, discourses of 'homosexuality') in the previous chapter, this chapter is dedicated to locating these discourses within a South African context. Using the text *Moffie* (Van der Merwe, 2006) I interpret the institutions and spaces which critically contributed to and aided (or impeded) in the shaping of what was called 'gay identity' during the 1970s. In framing the historical South African context alongside the development of the international gay liberation movement highlighted above I use *Moffie* to explore a history of the demographic chosen for this project – namely those labelled/self-identifying as white, middle-class, urban, gay, male youth. In discussing the cultural import of the label 'gay', I illustrate that even within a brief historical interpretation it is evident that South African ideologies dictate the need for a varied perspective. I link this to a contemporary context by briefly signposting the use of 'gay' in South Africa through using Malan and Johaardien's collection of narratives (2010), and by reflecting on the popular *Mr Gay South Africa* competition I problematise the accepted norm of using 'gay' as a marker of identity. In this latter half of this chapter I discuss the fact that the pageant, which is a locally and internationally high-profile event for visibility, promotes continued exclusion and – within a framework of assimilating to a Western transnational label of 'gay' – does not adequately speak to the everyday experiences of those whom it claims to represent.

An important primary recognition within the South African context is that discourses of sexuality are intrinsically bound to discourses of race, nation, and gender. We should not regard these varying aspects of identity as "separate axes" (Barnard, 2001: 129), but rather as inter-connected systems which give mutual shape and understanding. Despite efforts – both academic and social – to err on the side of political correctness, and without dismissing the importance of

attempts to 'undo the wrongs of the past', any goals of social deconstruction with the intention of development or further understanding need to be pinned on the realisation that the country's history of extreme racial policies and methods of implementation, and its current connection to global and transnational flows of power and information, stretch beyond neatly-categorised questions of race. Societal questions of nationality are racialised; questions of race are inherently gendered and sexualised; and questions of gender and sexuality are influenced by the discourses of nationhood and citizenship (129). The policy and system of apartheid, officially implemented between 1948 and 1994, had the explicit effect of developing parallel queer histories: the separation of 'whiteness' from 'non-whiteness' was accompanied by drastic differences in the availability of space, social structures, and legal support, which in turn resulted in racialised experiential differences of sexual identification and ideological responses (Cage, 2003: 11). It is not my intention to be reductive and suggest that there are no historical experiential similarities between those classified as 'white' and 'non-white' queers. As discussed in Chapter Two, however, care needs to be taken in applying labels in attempts to understand the interstices of discourses. Rather, I merely seek to recognise that the difference in spatial development, accompanied by the aggressive patriarchal ideology of apartheid, resulted in fundamental differences in experience for these (crudely and broadly) classified groups. As will be discussed below, the apartheid government viewed same-sex sexual activity between white people as a wholly different phenomenon to same-sex sexual activity between (for example) black people, resulting in a very distinct set of legal and social responses to the 'threat' of white male homosexuality. This is important to acknowledge at this point for two reasons relevant to this project. Firstly, the emphasis placed on white male homosexuality and the interpreted 'gay identity', which "threatened the very existence of a patriarchal apartheid system" (Elder, 1995: 62), has implications for understanding the current demographic that was historically targeted by the apartheid government under fears of sexual corruption and destruction. The link of a contemporary identity to a relatable historical struggle is, as discussed in Chapter Two, a crucial element to definitions of gayness. Secondly, this emphasis resulted in the essentialising and homogenising of gayness, to the point that homosexuality (popularly synonymous with gayness and a 'gay identity') became bound to a discourse of whiteness, resulting in the invisibility of other demographics (Gevisser and Cameron, 1994: 3). The impact of this, as discussed in Chapter One, has been the literary and representative shift *away* from this 'essentialised' demographic, to the point that the local experiences of those grouped as 'white' and 'gay' are unacknowledged and misinterpreted. This, of course, forms the foundation of this particular project. What this indicates, however, is the need to root contemporary anxieties

around the intersection of whiteness/maleness/gayness in the historical interpretation of this demographic.

Historically locating white 'gayness'

André Carl van der Merwe's 2006 novel *Moffie* is an important cultural artefact, as it takes steps in highlighting the extraordinary difficulties that men who identified as 'gay', and men who were interpreted as being 'gay', faced during the apartheid regime. Whilst a work of fiction, the novel is certainly semi-autobiographical (7), and the author's references to institutional experiences (in particular the psychiatric Ward 22, which will be discussed below) have been substantiated by personal accounts gathered through interviewing processes (8). "Moffie" is a pejorative Afrikaans word first recorded in 1929 as sailor slang ("morphy") for an effeminate and/or 'gay' man (Cage, 2003: 82-3), and Van der Merwe dedicates the novel to "all the people who suffered prejudice" under apartheid (2006: 6), with the intention of the novel being perceived as a personal navigation of feelings and sexuality based on the facts that "the church regarded me as sinful, the government told me it was unlawful and the rest of society considered it offensive" (7). The novel explores the experiences of Nicholas, a 19-year-old white man from an Afrikaans and English background, as he attempts to come to terms with his sexual identity whilst serving a compulsory two years of military training in the Defence Force. As a text, *Moffie* can help us trace the vastly different everyday historical experiences of this demographic in relation to what has been established as a 'gay identity', which in turn speaks to an understanding of this demographic today.

The period in South Africa following the Second World War saw the rise of a 'gay culture' similar to that existing in Europe and North America. The influx of (white) men in search of work in large cities allowed for the exploration of sexual diversity and relative development of non-normative identities outside of the constraints of traditional and conservative expectations (Cage, 2003: 11; Gevisser and Cameron, 1994: 22-25). This exploration in large cities was facilitated by the creation of private clubs, parties, and bars which specifically catered for 'gay' men. These spaces, whilst by no means accepted by mainstream ideologies of gender conformity and heteronormativity, were largely ignored during the initial years of official apartheid implementation (Cage, 2003: 12), as the government focused on increased legal and social policies directed towards racial segregation and stratification. The various Acts passed during the apartheid period were based on discourses of Calvinistic white supremacy as well as a highly gendered and "well-established masculine order" (Elder, 1995: 56), which absolutely distinguished between male and female and revered (and demanded) a hegemonic and patriarchal valuing of "aggression, competitiveness, [and] emotional ineptitude"(Nixon, 1997: 296) as indicators of a 'true'

masculinity. A primary ideology within the apartheid framework was the strict separation of the public and private, substantiated by a draconian monitoring of these spaces. The monitoring of spaces, however, was problematic in relation to sexuality, as sexuality – unlike other state-regulated social relations – transcended the spaces of the public and the private (Elder, 1995: 56). Consequently, the attempted gendered control of sexuality became a central tenet of the apartheid system, with the Immorality Act in 1957 prohibiting sexual interactions between white and non-white people (56), an extreme effort of regulated spatial and ideological separation.

Following a raid of a private party in Johannesburg in January 1966, the 'issue' of 'gayness' in white suburbs and urban areas came to the attention of the administration (Cage, 2003: 12; Elder, 1995: 61-2). As the international gay-liberation movement began to gain momentum at this time, within the South African paradigm of constructing white masculinity as the ultimate manifestation of subjective control through the extreme Othering of race and sex, white male 'homosexuality' became seen as a disruptive force. Glen Elder (1995) argues that sexuality was controlled in different ways, depending on three factors: one's racial demographic, "where they acted out their sexual intimacy and where it came under public scrutiny" (58). Using a case study of gendered male relationships within mining communities, Elder notes that the same-sex sexual encounters occurring between black men within these communities were openly acknowledged by authorities (58-60), yet not actively 'reformed' due to the "containable" (62) nature of the threat (both racial and sexual). The spaces of the mines, as segregated arenas regulated by racial policy, were distinct from the urban and suburban centres of white existence, and the counter-hegemonic gendering of these spaces formed a part of the Othering quality of defining white supremacy. However, within urban and suburban spaces the white male objectification of white males – the demographic that shaped and practised apartheid – was at odds with an ideology of control (Elder, 1995: 62). White male 'homosexuals' formed a part of the 'supreme' demographic, and same-sex sexual actions not only threatened understandings of desire and subjectification, but also understandings of gender and masculinity. The separation of public and private, and the monitoring of sexuality within these domains, became blurred: white male 'homosexuals' were not bound to the space of a mine, and could easily "infiltrate the comforts of white middle-class suburbia" (64). Consequently, white 'homosexuality' became perceived as a threat to white masculinity and to the "moral basis of the populace" itself (62). In an effort to control this threat and maintain a distinction between the public and private a Parliamentary Committee was established to investigate the phenomenon, observing in 1968 that

Homosexuals have no difficulty in identifying one another and know precisely how to approach one another when they find themselves in a strange area [...] The older members of the queers derive pleasure in getting an attractive young man dressed as a female. The latter then performs a vulgar 'strip tease', this satisfying the onlookers sexually [...] A queer is 'just ripe' for homosexuality from the age of 18 years. His 'life span' is approximately to the age of 30. After that he is 'over his youth'. He still practices it thereafter but he is introverted and he has acquired a mate and they are satisfied together [...] The facts embodied herein were obtained by discussing the matter with queers, as well as from persons who associate with the latter without practicing the cult. (*Report of the Select Committee on the Immorality Act Amendment Bill*, in Elder, 1995: 63)

The ultimate result of this report was an amendment to the Immorality Act, which guaranteed criminal consequences for any "male person who commit[ted] with another male person at a party any act which [was] calculated to stimulate sexual passion or to give sexual gratification" (62). Homosexual men became perceived to be at the heart of a conspiracy to "overthrow the 'moral order' of apartheid" (62-3), with the result of intensified raids on clubs and other perceived 'gay spaces' throughout the 1970s (Cage, 2003: 14). The "Gestapo-esque" (Cage's term) campaign of the government included men found at clubs or parties being arrested and photographed, the vehicle number-plates of nearby cars being recorded, and this information being published – with the inevitable result of job loss and commonplace familial rejection (14). Whilst raids and arrests eased during the 1980s, the government adopted a conscious policy of censorship to "isolate gay men and women from the outside world and from gay consciousness movements" (15).

It is this legal framework that shaped the experiences of 'gay' men in apartheid South Africa, and the experiences of Nicholas in *Moffie*. As discussed in Chapter Two, the process of 'coming out' is central to a 'gay identity', and this process is aided by spatial-ideological affirmation, exposure to positive images of integrated gayness, and exposure to the social struggles which shape a path to legal equality. Apartheid was "bent on establishing identities as immutable" (Phillips, 2004: 138), and white male homosexuality was perceived as an unconditional deviation from the white norm of apartheid, and regarded to be a "threat to survival of the minority race" (Cage, 2003: 15). What is striking in *Moffie* is the pervasive quality of official gendered regulation prior to 1994: the ideological institutions which give Nicholas a sense of identity are all fundamentally opposed to his sense of self. The ability to 'come out' was impeded by the illegality of declaring a 'homosexual identity' and by the repressive actions authorised by legislation. Whilst Nicholas manages to connect with other queer people serving in the Defence Force, and is able to

eventually comfortably acknowledge his own desires and confide in his friends (Van der Merwe, 2006: 167-71), this acknowledgement is never able to stretch beyond a strictly self-monitored private space – certainly not to the degree of publicly "coming out" that lies at the heart of an American sense of integrated gay identity. Nicholas' experiences are centred around negotiating his family unit and serving in the military. The family and the state are one and the same in their intentions to police expressions of gender and sexuality, and this policing – existing within a system of legally 'justified' differentiation and persecution – creates a set of circumstances distinctly different from those experiences in North America and Europe during the same time period. Within a private space of home Nicholas regularly reflects on his father's expectations that he conform to attitudes of revering violence, have contempt for other races, and be blindly nationalistic. After being hit in the face by his father for disagreeing with apartheid policies (19), Nicholas grimly acknowledges that "[b]eating or mentally abusing your child is condoned, particularly if the child doesn't conform" (21). This norm of abuse exists alongside the continual trials of masculinity, including the expectation that four-year-old Nicholas will participate in and enjoy hunting antelope (37-40) and beating puppies to death (49), and the threat of death and absolute familial dehumanisation at a failure to conform to gendered norms (89). In the ideological space of the family and the physical space of the home, homosexuality is painted as the ultimate failure of masculinity, engraining a deep sense of self-loathing and self-policing in Nicholas who reflects that

[p]oofter, queer, moffie, sissy, homo, pansy, fairy, *trassie* – how those words scare me. I'm so terrified of being 'discovered' that I obsess about it. Being a homo gives everybody the licence to persecute one. If I'm found out my life will be ruined. I MUST, AT ALL COST, KEEP THIS A SECRET. (59)

Far from having a support network at school, spaces of education further entrench a valuing of hypermasculinity and a villainisation of an "unwelcome lust" (111) for the same sex. Rumours that Nicholas's teacher and mentor, Mr Davids, is gay results in Mr Davids being beaten up by a group of students. The accusations are never substantiated, but the allegation alone is enough to result in police action and the school completely distancing itself from him (113). Despite the lack of proof, Nicholas's parents reinforce this victimisation by exclaiming that Mr Davids "should be fired ... no, castrated on the spot! The pervert! [...] He is the worst type of evil" (114). The school's treatment of Mr Davids, and the continual verbal abuse that boys who are perceived to deviate from the gender norm face, makes Nicholas feel "disgusted by [his] own desires", culminating in the daily prayer that "everybody calls [him] normal and correct" (111). The spaces of the school and family, founded on discourses of religious fundamentalism, engrain such a deep sense of self-loathing and

hatred that Nicholas views himself as "the *unmentionable*, the worse, the utterly sinful, irredeemable" (115, emphasis in original) whose simple existence is a "living hell" (115). The family and the school offer no room to negotiate the gendered foundation of a 'gay identity' as discussed in Chapter Two, as any negotiation or even the expression of a desire to step beyond gendered expectations carries the very real threat of absolute ideological rejection and excessive physical harm.

Whilst these sentiments are by no means exclusive to the historical South African context (indeed, this family and school situation is all too rife across the country and globe in current times), a crucial difference lies in the link between these private spaces and the public space of the military. The Defence Force is a microcosm of idealised apartheid society: forced conformity to masculine norms and unquestioned disciplinary actions are implemented to correct any deviance. The transition from a space of family to a space of state is marked by a relatively seamless ideological transition: Nicholas has no positive ideological reinforcements within his family, and no tools to assist him in gaining some sense of agency, and within the military this is taken to the next extreme by the fact that Nicholas (and other young white men) became property of the state, thus stripping them of agency even further. Nicholas and the other conscripts are reminded by their commanding officer that "[y]ou're not allowed to harm yourself, because you have no right over yourself", and that they are simply "army property" (158). The Defence Force played a pivotal role in shaping the experiences of all white men in South Africa, as all men over the age of 16 were conscripted for two years of compulsory service. During this time, and within the spaces of military training camps, Nicholas is 'trained' to conform to appropriate forms of masculine expression through the threat of extreme physical punishment and an intrinsic terror around the possibility of being 'discovered' to be 'gay'. When his best friend, Dylan, commits suicide Nicholas is forced to control his distress and trauma out of fear of being perceived as unmasculine. His "army programming" (155) compels him to avoid showing emotion and avoid expressing his feelings of grief. He does so out of a "sense of survival" (155), where he realises that

if I allow myself to give in to my feelings, everything will spiral out of control. In an environment where there is no mercy or understanding for the expression of love between two men, I need to keep absolute control. So I suppress what is boiling up inside me. (155-6)

This self-policing of emotion is reinforced by the explicit attitudes expressed by commanding officers and fellow officers of hatred towards homosexual practices and 'homosexuals'. Two men are caught kissing, and are confronted by their instructors, who heroically (129) assault them with

pillowcases filled with rifle parts. The extreme physical punishment, approved of by superior officers, is coupled with the emotional punishment of the men being called up to stand in front of an entire parade ground and denounced as "the lowest form of life" the officers will ever see (130). The commanding officer dehumanises them by calling them "shit, kaffirs, dogs, animals. No, you are not worthy of being called animals; not even animals carry on like you do" (130). Beyond this, the men's parents and communities are informed of their illegal deviances, and – as "property of the State" (129) – the men are sent to a State-regulated psychiatric ward for treatment of their "sickness" (157). The official view of the army, and thus the State, was that *moffies* were "mentally ill" (156) and in need of intervention, as "they hate themselves so much for their evil lusts that they simply can't live with themselves" (157). What this and the Parliamentary Committee Report mentioned above indicate is that the apartheid State viewed 'homosexuals' as a sub-species engaging in extreme cult-like practices. The deviance from the gender and sexuality norm that coupled this draconian view of homosexuality suggests that 'homosexuals' were in no way 'real' white men, and that they were suffering a condition that the State, in all its benevolence, was trying to remedy (129). In an effort to maintain the status quo of the divine authority and perfection of male whiteness, the State completely distanced itself from the manifestation of so-called "situational male homosexuality" (Elder, 1995: 57) and the possibility of a 'gay identity' by constructing any same-sex sexual interactions as manifestations of a psychological condition – thus rendering those caught as immediate outsiders. The option of "curing" was indeed considered the "humane" alternative to a court-martial and detention barracks (129).

This "curing" takes the most extreme form of ideological-spatial oppression in the novel. The psychiatric ward that 'homosexuals' are sent to, called Ward 22 in the text, has the intention of treating "patients" with "sophisticated techniques" to "eventually give society a perfectly balanced individual who can integrate, get married and have children" (158). Indeed, Nicholas and other officers are presented with the mindset that this is a favourable choice over the commander's alternative, and preferred strategy, of just "shoot[ing] the fucks" (158). Ward 22, however, carries the rumoured threat of ultimate physical punishment, engraining a sense of absolute fear in those who have 'homosexual desires'. Nicholas's best friend and fellow conscript, Malcolm, reveals that he is friends with someone who was sent to Ward 22 for being perceived to be 'gay' (179). Malcolm, who is also 'gay', reveals his friend's experiences of "hormone therapy, shock therapy, aversion therapy" (178) with Nicholas, with both of them realising the psychological breaking point that results from such 'treatments' (179). Nicholas's secret romantic interest throughout the novel, Ethan, works at the hospital that Ward 22 is located in, and during a visit to Ethan Nicholas encounters one of the men, Deon, caught in the kissing scandal. Nicholas is disturbed by his

interaction with Deon, who in a semi-lucid state attempts to tell Nicholas what occurs in the Ward (282-4). Unsettled by this, Nicholas approaches Ethan with questions. Ethan reveals that patients are exposed to a variety of psychological and physical torture methods, all aimed at 'curing them'. These include patients being sedated and put into a boxing ring and forced to fight with a champion boxer whilst the officers watch; patients being locked "in the mortuary for two days and two nights, with body parts all over the place – people who died on the border, pieces lying open on trays, everywhere" (285); and the more-publicised (and accepted) methods of shock and hormone treatments.

The threat of the space of Ward 22, therefore, is a powerful force in shaping the process of identity development. Sanctioned and regulated by the government, this psychiatric facility is merely an extension of the space of the Defence Force, and of the ideology of gendered policing that infiltrates both public and private spaces. A model of development that focuses on coming out and integration, from the perspective of being aided by spatial-ideological affirmation, is severely impeded by this very real threat of physical and emotional punishment: to openly acknowledge that one has 'homosexual desires' is not only illegal in the context of the novel, but also a guarantee of abuse within the Defence Force and a deportation to the Ward. Indeed, this threat is so great and all-encompassing that Nicholas turns to his religious background, which plays a fundamental role in shaping both his family's and the State's attitudes to 'homosexuality', for salvation, offering the prayer that

'Dearest, dearest, Lord ... please, please, please ... I beg of you, God, make me straight [...] God, this is not what I want. It is not my choice. I beg you; I beg you, make me straight. I believe that you can, Lord. I believe it. Please, my Holy father [...].'¹ I think of the words I heard today, words that drove daggers into me: Homosexuals are from Satan. No Christian can be a homosexual. Evil spirits possess them. I shudder and start praying again. (124)

The spaces of major influence within this context, then, wholly reject any sense of identity development which favours complete integration, as the public acknowledgement necessary for integration is oppressed by an overwhelming ideology of absolute intolerance. However, the novel does trace the journey of Nicholas as he comes to terms with his self-identity, and negotiates the relationship between his spirituality and sexuality. Whilst it is impossible for him to 'achieve' an integrated identity that frames a Western understanding of gayness, he still manages to reconcile his sense of self, through a process of sexual exploration, with the negotiation of gender roles and the meaning of sexual orientation. What this suggests, then, is that the 'gay identity' that Nicholas claims is distinctly different from the gay identities found within the *Rainbow* trilogy and indeed

within the historical contexts of America and Europe framed above. Crucial to this journey are the temporary spaces that he (illegally) immerses himself in. As Ken Cage notes, "legislation did not stamp out homosexuality; it simply drove it underground into bars and clubs" (2003: 13). The all-encompassing ideologies of the state forced 'gay' men to "lead second, concealed lives" (16). Despite the illegality of homosexuality during this context what is important to note is that a distinct queer community certainly did exist within the demographic during the apartheid era. To call this a 'gay community', however, would involve the mistaken assumption of a direct parallel between identity formation within this community and international communities. Nicholas and Malcolm, on a weekend break from their service, decide to visit an underground gay club in Johannesburg. Within this space Nicholas, for the first time, is reaffirmed in his self-identification, where, upon entering, he finds that

most of the men are just regular guys like Mal and I. [...] As we walk towards the building, I repeat to myself, over and over, like footprints into my new life, 'Out and proud, out and proud. I am gay, I am gay,' and for the first time in my life, 'I am ok.' (170)

The club, which is holding a pageant competition, includes the 'regular guys' that Nicholas is attracted to and drag artists providing entertainment for the carnivalesque evening (171). Within this space the drag artist and Malcolm speak what is referred to as Gayle: a sub-cultural co-language used by 'gay' men as a form of their own communication for purposes of enjoyment and – more importantly – "secrecy and discretion" (Cage, 2003: 22). Ken Cage traces the fascinating history of Gayle (the so-called "language of Kinks and Queens") in his 2003 project, and what is important to note is that this form of expression, which incorporated words from English and Afrikaans to refer to a variety of everyday thoughts and objects, was not used as a tool of political protest but rather as a linguistic marker for identification within an overarching culture of oppression. Gayle served as a tool for 'gay' men to identify one another and subtly resist explicit forms of subjugation. Malcolm's insult of calling an abusive conscript "Nora" (75) (translation: "stupid" (Cage, 2003: 84)), therefore, goes undetected by the patriarchal authorities and yet serves the purpose of identifying him to other 'gay' men and having a momentary 'victory' against a system that reviles who he is as a person. The situational use of Gayle points towards a sense of connection and community amongst white 'gay' men, with Nicholas asking Malcolm to teach him "the words" (Van der Merwe, 2006: 243) in order to feel a part of this community.

This indicates that whilst the majority of spaces were geared towards the direct oppression of gender and sexual variety, a culture of subversive spaces – both permanent in the form of underground clubs, and temporary where gay men spoke in Gayle – existed to reaffirm a sense of

connection and identity.⁸ Cage importantly emphasises that these spaces were not based on a political consciousness, as the "white gay experience in South Africa has never attained the political dimensions that it has in other countries such as the United States and Britain" (2003: 20). White homosexual men living in South Africa during apartheid, whilst being part of the favoured racial demographic, did not have sufficient strength, support, community cohesion or political momentum to begin to challenge socio-political perceptions of them (Tucker, 2009: 46-7). Within a model of identity development, then, a situation existed that is distinctly different from a Western context. Where the international context generated an integrated identity based on openly reaffirming social structures and a link to a conscious socio-political movement aimed at bringing about legal reform in the shape of gay rights, the context of *Moffie* reveals a process of identity negotiation based on fleeting interactions with subversive structures of reaffirmation yet located in an overall social system of legal, social, and cultural oppression. The 'gay culture' that existed "never became a force in the South African political landscape" (Cage, 2003: 20), and any sense of political consciousness surrounding sexual orientation was overshadowed by the constant presence of "greater political issues at stake" (20). Despite Nicholas's acknowledgement that he is "out and proud", this is not truly the case: to be "out and proud" speaks to the gay liberation and the process of 'coming out' on a public level, as a final step of identity development – a final step that Nicholas can never achieve, as to come out would necessarily result in his persecution, thus illustrating the impossibility of his being able to live an 'open' daily life.

A Shift Towards Democracy

South Africa's transition into democracy in 1994 saw momentous shifts in every sphere of society. Most notable amongst these shifts, from a queer perspective, was the change in policy regarding sexuality and sexual orientation. The period between 1990 and 1996 was marked by the dramatic move from fully-fledged illegality of homosexuality and open hostility towards sexual 'deviance' to Constitutional protection on the basis of one's orientation and a flourish of increased social visibility for all queer people. As a contributing force behind this visibility the first 'gay' Pride march in 1990 set a primary goal of challenging the media to "present images of homosexuality in responsible and appropriate ways that counter the dominant negative myths" (De Waal and

⁸ Cage traces the connections between Gayle and historical gay languages in other contexts. He specifically refers to Polari, the name for the slang-language used by gay men in the United Kingdom for the last three hundred years (2003: 17). By the 1950s, Polari had developed in Britain from being the slang of travelling showmen who wandered the countryside to an "elaborate code used [... by gay men] to conceal their identity while at the same time communicating with others of similar persuasion" (18). Polari was an intrinsic part of a politicised, organised gay community, and the language played an important part in creating a sense of mobilisation and unity – which is distinctly different to the role that Gayle played in South Africa.

Manion, 2006: 15). The slow increase in mainstream media visibility and the development of a print and online queer press helped to achieve a wider appreciation for the sexual diversity in the country. The transition into a democratic state was pushed by a variety of groups and organisations, and aided by decades of local and, to an extent, international discontent. Hoad, Martin and Reid (2005) present a detailed account of the intertwined organisations and groups dedicated to changing sexual and gender policy in the country. Although no official unified queer rights movement existed in South Africa as it did in America or the United Kingdom (Tucker, 2009: 47), the legalised persecution of homosexuals during the apartheid regime ultimately led to the development of certain organisations in the 1980s and 1990s which were focused on instilling a sense of pride and equality in South Africa, drawing inspiration from a worldwide gay rights movement (Cage, 2003: 4) – in particular The Women's National Coalition and the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Equality (van Zyl, 2009: 365). The idea of sexual rights as human rights was first explicitly named at the Vienna Conference on Human Rights in 1993 (364), and as a result of these South African groups aligning themselves with the anti-apartheid struggle the final South African Constitution of 1996 included an equality clause specifically geared toward sexual identity equality which extended to all citizens regardless of race, class or context (Cock, 2005: 188). Similar equality was afforded to queer people by the legalisation of same-sex marriage with the promulgation of the Civil Unions Act of 2006. South Africa's legal status, therefore, is particularly progressive when one considers that only nine other countries offer same-sex marriage, and the American and British contexts are still marked by a struggle for this right.

This monumental "shift in the regulation of sexualities" (van Zyl, 2009: 365), from a draconian system of "patriarchal privacy regulation" (365) to complete legal recognition within a "framework of human rights", occurring within just twelve years of achieving democracy, has radical implications for understanding questions of 'gayness', history, and community. Of course, this rather favourable historical legal context sits in stark contrast with the reality for the majority of queer citizens. Whilst Constitutional inclusion affords theoretical equality, the "assertion of a public gay identity is particularly problematic" (Cock, 2005: 202). The openly vocalised homophobia of President Jacob Zuma (BBC 2006), and his government's silence on matters relating to gay rights in Africa, succinctly capture the social situation of the country. Similarly, reflecting on my own subject position as a young, gay, middle-class white man from urban South Africa, my experience suggests that within my demographic (certainly amongst many of my peers from the same age bracket) there exists no sense of struggle or future for queer rights. Other countries, we see in the media, are fighting for legal recognition or the right to marry. As these already exist in South Africa, a sense of unity and solidarity surrounding a particular queer cause does not exist.

To suggest that no progress is needed is, of course, absurd: personal experiences of day-to-day abuse ignored by authority figures and institutions illustrates that the gap between legal and social context is indeed wide. However, within an understanding of the development of gay identity, this lack of social struggle for legal change is fundamentally at odds with the 'requirement' of an exposure to a lived liberation movement that is framed within the *Rainbow* trilogy and a Western understanding of gay identity. Indeed, "what has become known internationally as the 'queer movement' is far removed from the world view of most South African [...] individuals" (Nel, 2004: 289). Similarly, any sense of "public gay culture" that is emerging reflects the "deep social cleavages" of the past and present (Cock 2005: 205). My own fears extend to the possibility of being 'gay bashed' if I am open about my sexuality in a very public place. But the reality for many rural queer people includes the horrific trend of "corrective rape" in their local home environments, where a lesbian-identified woman is raped (often by a gang of men) in attempts to 'cure' her of her homosexuality (see Cameron, 2007). Many of my peers living in the major cities are not concerned with being open about their sexuality – this, however, is a luxury that the majority of queer people in South Africa are most certainly not afforded. Having spoken to peers about such issues on countless occasions, I have observed a distinct lack of knowledge about the challenges that queer people from other cultures and demographics face, and a subsequent lack of connection felt to any sense of 'community'. This will, however, be discussed in Chapter Four.

What is important to re-emphasise at this stage is that, from a psychological and identity perspective, a sense of connection to a community, rooted in a sense of solidarity based on the struggle for legal reform, is fundamental to the development of a 'healthy' or integrated gay identity (Leatt and Hendricks, 2004: 306). The struggle for formal protection in South Africa was "dramatically different from the progress towards equivalent protection in most of the Western world" (Lind, 2004: 335). As evident in *Moffie*, no political mobilisation around the issue of individual sexual rights existed as an integral part of acknowledging one's own desires. Whilst a "weak" (340) political 'gay community' existed in the 1990s in South Africa, the shift to a "Western [tradition] of liberal individualism" (336) has resulted in no single, unified sense of gay or queer community or rights movement (Isaacs and McKendrick 1992: xiii; Cage 2003; Tucker 2009) existing in a contemporary context.

The fact that queer people continue to face discrimination and horrific abuse in some contexts suggests that there is still a vital need for visibility – both within the mainstream and queer press. The massive amount of resources and energy that went into combating white male homosexuality partly resulted in the popular historical understanding in South Africa that "the gay

experience" has been that of this demographic (Gevisser and Cameron, 1994: 3). The advent of legal protection, however, sits hand-in-hand with the slow increase in visibility of sexual-identity-related experiences of demographics marginalised by the apartheid regime, and a shift away from focusing on white male homosexuality. Indeed, authors continually stress the importance of recognising the diversity of the queer 'community' in South Africa (Isaacs and McKendrick, 1992; Gevisser and Cameron, 1994; Hoad, Martin and Reid, 2005) in an effort to escape the Western-influenced transnationalisation of gay identity (Hoad, 1998: 34), to the point of mistaken emphasis being placed on the demographic of white/middle-class/urban/male as the "essential" 'queer' South Africa identity (Gevisser and Cameron, 1994: 3). Coupled with this, the choice to interpret identity development during the historical context of *Moffie* as a 'gay identity' immediately transposes the discourses linked to gayness onto a historical South African context, despite my suggesting above that the development of identity in *Moffie* is distinctly different from that found in a Western context. The effect of adopting a Western system of democracy has been that "the categories of individual" to which individual rights protection is ascribed is "also an import of the West" (Lind, 2004: 337): the labels that are used to describe the diversity that encompasses a democratic mode of existence are bound to the Western system in which they took shape.

The result of this cultural importation has been the development of tensions between visibility and invisibility; identity and anti-identity; struggle and celebration; and the desire for and resistance to a sense of 'community'. The essentialising of white 'gayness', and in the use of this term the adoption of all Western discourses bound to it, has had the accumulated effect of generating a sense of reductive homogeneity around the label of 'gay'. In an effort to increase visibility, Robin Malan and Ashraf Johaardien compiled a collection of "writing by South African gay men" entitled *Yes, I am!* (2010). In the foreword to the collection, Edwin Cameron writes that silence and the accompanying invisibility are the challenges which need to drive any sense of political and social consciousness (Cameron in Malan and Johaardien, 2010: 7). He argues that the book is an "empowering" agent of social visibility, speaking to the experiences of "South African men [...] who self-identify as gay or bisexual" (Cameron in Malan and Johaardien, 2010: 7). Malan and Johaardien acknowledge that a core guiding structure within the collection is that the "experiences of lesbian, transgender, intersex and 'questioning' people are vastly different from those of gay males [...]. If anything, each of those areas of 'different sexuality' needs a separate collection" (11). This guideline is coupled with the idea that "[a]uthors would not be restricted to 'young' gay men. Any gay male experience would be eligible; so, no ageism for us" (11). Together these acknowledgements seem quite bizarre, and fundamentally flawed, in that a category of 'gay' can be objectively applied to all men in South Africa, regardless of background and age, to describe

the experiences around same-sex sexual attraction and identity development. Ian Barnard's criticism (2001) of Gevisser and Cameron's iconic *Defiant Desire* (1994) can be applied to the basis of this very collection, in that the category of 'gay' is deeply embedded in discourses of race and gender (Barnard, 2001: 137). The epigraph at the start of this chapter refers to this criticism, in that the use of 'gay' in a South African context necessarily imports the cultural assumptions of a white American mode of existence, and an American history of sexual rights, with the effect that it may exclude many "uniquely South African queer identities and formations" (137). If the intention of the collection is to increase visibility, one has to question whether this is possible when it takes place under a banner of a globalised sexual label, and is not rooted in uniquely South African discourses.

The collection is, it must be acknowledged, an important step in recognising the experiences of those with non-normative sexual identities. To group all the men featured under a label of 'gay', however, is extremely problematic. As discussed at length above, a 'gay identity' relies heavily on a strategy of coming out. The collection emphasises this process in a chapter focusing on a *Facebook* discussion around the question of "when did you first come out?" (46). Within this chapter, however, there is no discussion of the social structures and spaces which aided in the processes, nor advice from the compilers on where to find support. Whilst the discussion does not necessarily have to revolve around the provision of support for those in the process of coming out, if the intention of the book is to increase visibility then it should at the very least feature some form of local contextualisation about what it 'means' to come out. One of the participants' responses highlight the very real need to understand local issues and ideologies, and stretch questions of representation beyond matters of increasing visibility to include notions of localised understanding:

The worst part of coming out, is the reaction of those around you. Fortunately I never had to tell my parents, they have disowned me a year ago because of religious issues. My uncle told them though, all I heard was my father flipped his lid. They are very religious, so they would never have accepted it anyway. It was easier coming out not worrying as to what they'd be thinking, as we have lost all contact about a year ago. (Neil Kaplan in Malan and Johaardien, 2010: 47)

Whilst Neil does not go into detail about his personal journey, the matter-of-fact difficulties he expresses are in no way followed up by any of the other readers. Indeed, the unsupported coming-out process is also reflected in Shaun de Waal's contribution of an extract from a graphic novel, entitled "Justin shares his problem" (2010: 53). In this, a young man confides in his teacher that he

is "a homosexual" (56). The teacher responds with comforting and reassuring words, informing Justin that just because prejudice exists it does not necessarily mean that the thoughts at the heart of that prejudice are true reflections of oneself. However, the teacher's reassurance that things will improve and people will accept Justin is based on the condition that Justin remains "discreet" and "not blatantly gay... not too open" (58). Far from the coming out process being guided by exposure to social support structures or positive reinforcements of integrated 'gayness', it is instead guided by the passive threat that unless one downplays one's desires and identity one will never be fully accepted by society. Whether De Waal intends this to be a reflection on this popularly expected attitude of discretion, or whether he is intentionally propagating the perspective is unclear. This ambiguity is ultimately irrelevant, as both interpretations point to the reality of a journey of relatively blind self-discovery based on an attitude of caution, leaving the reader with the self-policing question of 'what does it actually mean to be "blatantly gay", and am I in danger of being it?'

The collection does offer the reader some degree of spatial reinforcement, with Shaundré Balie's narrative (2010) of meeting an ex-schoolmate at a gay club shedding light on the importance of such social spaces in a stage of sexual exploration. Similarly, Digby Watson's (2010) reflection on being a high school student and sneaking out to go watch a gay-themed movie speaks to the importance of exposure to such content in the development of identity. These exploration of spaces, however, are not rooted in a self-aware history of community. Gayness, as it is constructed in an American context, is based in a self-conscious awareness of a wider 'community' and a history of struggle, and a continuing force of gay liberation aimed at bringing about legal reform. None of these aspects, however, is reflected in the collection. The collection itself may be regarded as an attempt to piece together a sense of community: as stated above, the compilers intentionally chose 'gay experiences' based on the assumed experiential commonality between all those adopting/interpreted-under the label of 'gay'. However, what historically may have existed as a sense of community as reflected in *Moffie* does not exist in *Yes, I am!* Similarly, the experiences recorded are not 'bound' to any sense of political activism or conscious movement of social change. This is, partly, because South Africa exists as a relative legal utopia for sexual rights – certainly in comparison to other countries around the world. Unlike the American or British contexts, which are both characterised at present by a social gay movement working towards legal reform to recognise gay marriages, South Africa is characterised by the "disjuncture between the rights encompassed by citizenship and liveable lives" (van Zyl, 2009: 365) in that the challenges 'gay men' face are rooted in social attitudes, not legal frameworks. Using 'gay', then, as a unifying identity label becomes particularly problematic when the core aspects of a 'gay identity' do not exist. The

collection's quest for visibility, whilst certainly important, is overshadowed by the cultural disjuncture inherent in the use of the label 'gay'.

The South African context is imbued with a complex amalgamation of discourses of race, gender, sexuality, and nation. The use of 'gay' as a marker for identity is historically problematic due to the very different set of circumstances in place in South Africa when compared to the Western history bound to the label. The use of the label post-1994 is coupled with the assumption that 'white gayness' is rooted in Western experiences, and thus unnecessary to discuss. What *Yes, I am!* reflects is a shift back to the desire for an increased invisibility, and the desire for an increased understanding of lived experiences. Using 'gay' to describe these experiences, however, ignores the racial and globalised connotations of the term, and ultimately shifts emphasis *away* from understanding uniquely post-apartheid South African identities and practices. This use of 'gay' as a unifying label can be similarly seen in another text aimed at increasing visibility – namely, the recent *Mr Gay South Africa* competition.

Questions of Visibility and Identity: The *Mr Gay South Africa* Competition

Contemporary understandings of sexuality are subject to and results of systems of social and economic commodification and commercialisation (Sigusch, 1998: 343), and the media, as a part of such systems, aid in the construction and perpetuation of social understandings and attitudes (Hall, 1997: 21). Recognising the continuing role that the media have in "educating us how to behave and what to think, feel, believe, fear, and desire" (Kellner, 2003: 9) is the basis of this part of the chapter. To date, queer-related issues hardly feature in 'regular' mainstream television, radio and print media. The introduction of a 'gay' plotline in *Generations*, the most-watched soap in South Africa, was met with general outrage and threats of violence (Mofokeng, 2009). The story of Zoliswa Nkonyana, the 19-year-old woman who was beaten to death with a golf club by a group of men because she was lesbian, took over two weeks to reach the mainstream press (Cameron, 2007), where other attacks based on race or nationality frequent 'breaking news' slots. The development of a queer mainstream and popular sense of 'gay identity' and 'gay culture' have developed from the continued Western commercialisation and commodification of sexuality (Sigusch, 1998), whereby the ideal queer consumer has neatly coincided with this historical 'essentialised' gay identity (Sender, 2003: 335). The only readily available queer-oriented glossy magazines, *Gay Pages* and *Wrapped*, and the few popular Anglo-American gay-themed films that circulate, largely cater for young, white, urban gay men. The commercialisation of this identity in these magazines and films serves to ingrain the perception of the "homogeneous nature of the (white male) queer" (Rushbrook, 2002: 184). Not only is this problematic from a perspective of

gender (as queer-identified women continue to be grossly underrepresented in the queer press), but also from a perspective of understanding "mainstream". There exists a chasm between the availability of material in urban areas and in rural areas, as well as between different cities. The liberal nature of a space like Cape Town, with a reputation for being an international gay tourist destination, will offer different resources when compared to a more conservative city. The newspaper *Exit*, which is often distributed free at night clubs in major cities, and available at certain bookstores, certainly reflects a more diverse range of content when compared to other available media sources: the cover pages reflect identities other than white muscle-men, and issues regularly address topical issues such as health and how to connect with other queer people. This publication, however, is not free from largely catering for urban white men: a visit to the website⁹ shows adverts for a dating community, healthy living with HIV, a sex chat line, and a fetish website – all of which feature attractive, muscled, white men as their 'faces of'. These adverts are similarly reflected in print editions of the publication. The Internet has, of course, played a monumental role in enhancing queer visibility, with people from all sexual orientations theoretically more able to explore their potential identities (or indeed lack thereof). Indeed, websites such as *Behind the Mask*¹⁰ speak to the racial, gender and cultural diversity of South Africa, and the online work of religious organisations such as the *Reformerende Kerk*¹¹ reaches out to religious queer people who may be experiencing crises of faith and identity. However, only 10.8% of South Africans have access to the Internet (Internet World Stats, 2009). Flourishing in a sector of privileged access, Internet usage arguably perpetuates transnationalised patterns of consumption, and so popular queer news sources such as *MambaOnline*¹² function within pre-existing notions of identity and privilege.

The most recent nation-wide event for the queer 'community' in South Africa has been the *Mr Gay South Africa* competition. Acknowledging the premise of this competition as a contest to find "a gay man of impeccable character, taste and style [...] [a] candidate of whom the LGBTI community – in all [its] diversity – can be proud" (Mr Gay South Africa Group, 2009)¹³ this part of the chapter seeks to critique the concept and image of this competition, looking at its founding 2009 - 2010 season, through an analysis of the available popular queer online representations of it.

⁹ www.exit.co.za/Default.aspx, accessed 10 March 2012

¹⁰ www.mask.org.za

¹¹ www.gaychurch.co.za

¹² www.mambaonline.co.za/i_headlines.asp

¹³ LGBTI being an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and intersexed

Performed in relation to the goals of the contest, and the role that online popular queer media may play in assisting/impeding 'progress', the purpose behind this critique is to locate this pageant and representations of it within contemporary "anxieties of identity" (Creed, 1995) in South Africa. Recognising that visibility within the media is representative of wider socio-political negotiations (Gamson, 2002: 326), I argue that through an analysis of popular queer representations it is evident that both the pageant and the surrounding media content are symbolic of an assimilationist approach to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and intersexed issues, ultimately perpetuating a Westernised, homonormative, monolithic identity. This, in turn, is unproductive for understanding and fairly representing the complex experiences that many 'queer' South Africans face in relation to questions of identity, culture(s) and social expectations.

As stated, I have chosen to discuss the pageant in relation to the queer media content surrounding it. I have chosen this mediated focus for two reasons: firstly, the majority of queer people in South Africa experienced this event through the media sources available to them, as the actual event was accessible only to the elite few who could afford to travel to the pageant competitions and the finale in Pretoria. Secondly, the pageant was sponsored by specific queer publications, several editors of which sat on the judging panel (Mr Gay South Africa Group, 2009). The pageant as a 'community' representative event can only be understood in relation to the educating and informing roles that the media play (Kellner, 2003: 9). The pageant organisers list six media sponsors: *Exit*; *Gay Pages*¹⁴; *gayspeak*¹⁵; *MambaOnline*; *The Pink Tongue*¹⁶; and *The Pink Eye*¹⁷ (Mr Gay South Africa, 2010a). Of these sponsors, only *Exit*, *gayspeak* and *MambaOnline* were readily accessible as online news sources with information relating to the pageant at the time of writing this chapter. Despite *The Pink Eye* being an online glossy magazine its website had been offline for some time, and *The Pink Tongue* had no pageant-specific information available. Similarly, *Gay Pages* is a quarterly print magazine which published an article on the pageant several months after the finale. Consequently this section will focus on the pageant as represented by *Exit*, *gayspeak*, *MambaOnline* and an 'unofficial' queer news source, *Queer Life*¹⁸. Whilst there are numerous websites which specifically cater for issues that queer people may face, such as religious or community-project related sites, this project is concerned with explicit representations of the

¹⁴ www.gaypagessa.co.za

¹⁵ www.gayspeak.co.za

¹⁶ www.pinktongue.co.za

¹⁷ www.thepinkeye.co.za

¹⁸ www.queerlife.co.za

pageant. A separate project is necessary if one is to understand the full extent of representations, and issues surrounding the availability of media in general.

Whilst the subject of this section may be regarded as a celebratory and somewhat frivolous beauty pageant, I seek to remain conscious of the social responsibilities that the media may have in building a democracy. I aim to build the arguments of this section on the first Pride march's premise that the media needs to help combat negative myths if true equality is ever to be achieved.

The pageant itself was formed in 2009, becoming the only competition of its kind in South Africa endorsed to send a representative to the *World Wide Mr Gay* pageant (MambaOnline, 2009). People wishing to compete enter at a regional level, and winners (and in certain instances, runners-up) progress through to the finale, which in 2009 was held in Pretoria (Mr Gay South Africa, 2010b). As already quoted in my introduction, the pageant strives to find a gay man to represent the entire LGBTI community in South Africa. The official entry form lists the following basic "characteristics" necessary if application is to be considered (all verbatim):

1. A healthy body and mind
2. A successful career in whatever field
3. Socially matured
4. Communication skills – must be able to command a room!
5. Must be able to carry himself in all company – gay and straight
6. Must be able to travel and be an Ambassador for the LGBTI Community in SA internationally
7. Intelligent – with a reasonable general knowledge
8. Keen to be involved in the gay community
9. Proudly a gay SA man – out and proud
10. Someone that can endeavor life and swallow pieces whole

(Mr Gay South Africa, 2010b)

The vague nature of these "characteristics" will be discussed below (although I am by no means experienced enough to suggest what "endeavor[ing] life" and "swallow[ing] pieces whole" may involve).

What is immediately evident, however, is that the pageant is structured around the issues of visibility and representation. Emphasis is placed, both in this competition and in its link to the international contest, on the community representative quality of the selected winner. The social basis of the newly formed pageant is that despite the legal recognition of rights regardless of sexual orientation there is still a serious lack of adequate media representation for sexual minorities, and the realisation that increased media visibility has the potential to change social perceptions. Cohen, Wilk and Stoltje illustrate that a general academic and social opposition exists towards beauty pageants which regards them with contempt and yet "morbid fascination" (1996: 6). However, such pageants, they argue, should be regarded as cultural artefacts worthy of attention. Although the competitions themselves may appear to be light-hearted and frivolous, they are representative of wider social values and cultural meanings (8). The authors argue that pageants "showcase values, concepts, and behaviour that exist at the center of a group's sense of itself and exhibit values of morality, gender, and place" (2). Regarding the *Mr Gay SA Pageant* as an exhibition of 'gay' identity in South Africa, one can appreciate the pageant as a microcosm of the society at large, and a showcase of the values that the queer press and queer 'community' value. The pageant can be understood as a site of struggle for publicity and visibility (2) where power is mapped according to the values of the hegemonic ideology. But, as in everyday existence where citizens experience "intersecting systems and structures" of cultural values and political issues (11), it is a site where this power is "produced, consumed, *and* rejected" (8). Certainly there is value in viewing the construction and intentional representations of the pageant as neither positive nor negative, but rather as a reflection of society at large. Indeed, the perceived visibility that the pageant offers theoretically has the potential to increase queer civil rights protection and the possibility of providing an empowering image of identification for a group that often receives no positive validation at all (Hennessy in Gamson, 2002: 311).

However, this needs to be measured against the media that the pageant actually utilises, as well as the overall strategy and ideology employed by such representations that frame the pageant. Working within the confines of what media is available, the pageant nonetheless perpetuates the image that 'homosexuality', and indeed all things "LGBTI", are epitomised by the long fought-against image of the essential South African gay identity. Observe Appendix One for the finalists for the 2009 competition. As one can see, these sixteen contestants hardly represent

the racial diversity of South Africa. Race is a contentious issue, and one needs to question whether it is necessary to be politically correct and have a fair 'sampling' of all ethnic groups. This inadequate racial representation was acknowledged by the organisers, however, as the official *MambaOnline* interview with winner Charl van der Berg posed the question, "*Why do you think so few gay men of colour took part in the Mr Gay SA pageant?*" (MambaOnline 2010). One reader wrote in response to this¹⁹,

Please could somebody tell me why did the colour issue have to be brought into his interview, was it needed. I am a gay man of colour and I am sick of the colour issue that is always asked to the white community, could we please move on already !!!!! (*cummpuppy* on MambaOnline, 2010)

Van der Berg attributes the lack of "gay men of colour" participating to the difficulty of being an openly gay man "of colour" living in intolerant cultures. He credits the organisers of the pageant as going "out of their way to attract more entrants of colour as they wanted the competition as representative of the entire LGBTI community as possible" (MambaOnline, 2010). However, as discussed above, all discussions surrounding the competition in 'official' media affiliations are distinctly positioned to cater for the privileged, essentialised demographic.

The corporate positioning of the pageant is one of an alignment with the existing cemented notion of the 'gay community' as a sector of society defined by wealth, social status and international urban appeal: the target market for sponsors is specifically stated as adults between the ages of 25 and 40, living within a middle- to upper-income bracket and of a quality of life characteristic of a living standard measure of 8-10 (GaySpeak, 2009b). Both the pageant organisers and Van der Berg seemed content with 2nd runner up Iggi Mnisi's presence in the competition, portraying him – as a black contestant – as wholly representative of all suppressed people of colour. As an image-conforming urban-based professional, Mnisi similarly represents a marketable and profitable sector of society; one which is already visible in the media. One must realise, of course, that the pageant is a business, and that seeking international-standard sponsors may prove to be fruitless when catering for a lower-income bracket that does not match an overall international commercial understanding of homosexuality, namely that of the "affluent, white, male, thirtysomething, genderconforming" consumer (Sender, 2003: 335).

¹⁹ All user comment have been copied verbatim, and I have not corrected grammar or spelling from these through a desire to preserve the Online modes of expression.

"Genderconforming" is an important aspect of the image that is presented by the pageant, suggesting an assimilationist ideology behind the formation of the competition. Indeed, the requirements and representations of the pageant reflect this. The assimilationist "streak" in gay politics in South Africa argues that "except in the matter of sexual preference, we are just like everyone else, and should be treated like everyone else" (De Waal and Manion, 2006: 9). Steven Seidman argues that the creation of the "good sexual citizen" involves creating a "safe space of social tolerance" (2002: 137) for "'normal' gays who leave heterosexual marriage and family ideals, as well as dominant gender divisions uncontested" (Goltz, 2010: 96). Reflecting on Connell's arguments regarding hegemonic masculinity, highlighted in Chapter Two, the current South African hegemonic masculinity is one that still values the characteristics revered by the apartheid government's masculine order, reflected in *Moffie*: aggression, competitiveness, and emotional ineptitude. Homosexuality, within this patriarchal ideology that pervades all aspects of South African existence, is still "the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, 2005: 78).

Applying this concept of hegemonic masculinity to the pageant can assist one in understanding how the competition is a product of assimilationist politics. Homosexuality is continually conflated with effeminacy (Halperin 2000; Connell, 2005: 79), and a strategy for 'gay' men to resist the negative implications of a 'failed' gender performance has been to develop a masculinity complicit with the hegemonic project and be assimilated into the gender system (Connell, 2005: 79). One of the requirements for the pageants is, obviously, outward beauty. This is partly defined by the "temple of a body" requirement of all contestants (Mr Gay South Africa Group, 2009). All of the webpages dedicated to the pageant feature such an image of 'the gay man' – well-muscled men, in model poses, wearing as little as possible, all undeniably and unmistakably *masculine*. The importance of the body for a gay man lies in its status as a "last-ditch defence against merging with the feminine" (Dyer, 1993: 136) where the valued aesthetic of "lean, taut, sinuous muscles [...] designed for movement, for sex" (Bordo, 1999: 171) is on display for all those who may assume that a same-sex desire strips one of the capacity for the characteristics that this hegemonic masculinity so favours: physical superiority, control, and power. Online representations of this are often positioned against the 'undesirable' characteristics of this complicit masculinity. The most common instance of this is the inclusion of photographs of drag queens that hosted various regional competitions, such as finale performer Cathy Specific, to illustrate what the contestants do *not* epitomise.

Indeed, the inclusion of drag queens and over-the-top performers appears to be a standard international feature of pageants that favour the "Aberzombie archetype" (Philebrity, 2008) – a reference to the macho heteronormative image of the Abercrombie fashion label, whose adverts feature chiselled models engaged in traditionally masculine physical activities. This, as commentators on the Philadelphia's *Mr Gay* contest observed, largely reinforces stereotyped perceptions of what the 'gay community' comprises (Philebrity, 2010), but also symbolically serves to emphasise that which the pageant *does not* want to present as a viable business and social image. The *Mr Gay SA Pageant* is part of a social context where same-sex marriage, the "holy grail of gay assimilation" (Tucker, 2009: 85), has already been achieved. That same-sex couples have the option to marry is certainly an achievement worth celebrating. However, with this step towards ideological assimilation, it is a mere issue of commercial image that is needed to reinforce a masculinity indistinguishable from the patriarchal ideal. This "Aberzombie archetype" that all the media articles about the pageant feature and worship epitomises a masculinity complicit with the hegemonic project. There are no images, on any of the webpages, of gay men who deviate from this norm – whether they be the slender and androgynous 'indie' men favoured in England and growing in favour in South Africa, or the "coloured moffie[s]" that Gevisser and Cameron (1994) describe as having such a rich heritage in the country.

The representations of the pageant create a distinct "homonormativity": these 'mainstream' gay representations present an image that is "a firm and absolute commitment to a fixed gay identity" (Goltz, 2010: 94), which in turn is complicit with the demands of hegemonic masculinity. Reflecting on Cohen, Wilk and Stoltjes's observation that pageants should be understood as microcosms of the tensions in society, one can almost begin to understand the resistance to choosing, for example, a contestant who resists gender conventions and does not fall into the desired image constructed by the homonormativity of a complicit masculinity. In a context fraught with negative stereotypes it is perhaps reasonable to expect a rejection of any image that may reinforce heteronormative disdain. The problem with this homonormative construction, however, is that it has a "depolicizing effect on queer communities" (Goltz, 2010: 99): the process of assimilation into the hegemony of patriarchal culture requires the "taming, constraining and privatization of queer sexuality" (Goltz, 2010: 102) to the point of breaking away from notions of *community* altogether (2010: 97). An intrinsic contradiction therefore exists between the pageant's vision and its construction/representation: it aims to produce a suitable representative for the entire queer community in South Africa, yet through its representation limits this to qualities characteristic of tamed, homo- and heteronormatively palatable gender expression. The homonormativity that the pageant perpetuates directly impedes any attempt to understand the

local experiences of local queers, by framing these experiences within a dual adoption of Western 'gayness' and heteronormative structures of existence.

The pageant, like *Yes, I am!*, has the goal of visibility. This has certainly been achieved on all of the websites: during the months leading up to the finale both *MambaOnline* and *GaySpeak* included full features on certain contestants, dedicating headlines to the progress of the regional competitions. Visibility was even extended to the 'heterosexual mainstream'. Initial lack of coverage of the pageant resulted in the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation accusing the South African media of being homophobic, leading to an article published on *News24.com* (Masinga, 2010). Following Charl van der Berg's win at *World Wide Mr Gay* several more mainstream news sources printed and aired articles, including *News24.com* (News24, 2010); *Beeld* (Beeld, 2010); a segment on the show *Kwela* on the subscription channel *KykNet* (Mr Gay World, 2010); and a radio interview on *Outspoken*, a subscription radio service (Outspoken, 2010). The *News24* and *Beeld* articles, however, largely focused on the representative from China in light of the Chinese government trying to prevent him from competing, and not on Van der Berg and the South African context at all. Province-specific local media may have run articles relating to Van der Berg's win, but these are not accessible to the majority of queer people spread out across the country. Nonetheless, one may argue that the pageant certainly gained visibility for the 'gay community' in South Africa. The pageant and representations achieve this visibility, however, at the expense of queer identities that exist beyond the region of the homonormative image offered. Those queer South Africans who do not fall into the commercial profile of the pageant remain invisible; those who do not mesh with the assimilationist image remain unnoticed by both the mainstream and queer press; and those whose experiences are not shaped by the structures that underlie a Western gayness remain unrepresented and misunderstood.

These representations are a far cry from the goals of the gay rights 'movement' in the 1990s. De Waal and Manion preserve the attitude of the 1996 Pride march in the form of an "open letter to the closed community". Addressing the growing concern that a new homonormativity was developing in South Africa, Steven Cohen created a banner that read "give us your children [...] what we can't fuck we eat". Understandably controversial, Cohen wrote in response to criticism that

[s]ome gays are so surprised to be out there that they have to saccharine their image – they buy into the demands that heterosexual society makes of us freaks – they try to be better than straights, beyond reproach. [...] Mincing on the march, Vasili and I were confronted with a horrible truth about beautiful moffiedom – some of us have already

become what we despise: judgemental moralists and finger-pointing accusers. [...] The queer voice is a chorus which must include activists, drags, drugged dead-heads, freaks, perverts and fucked-shut sluts. (Steven Cohen in De Waal and Manion, 2006: 98)

It is in this spirit that the queer press developed, and it is from this perspective that the *Mr Gay South Africa* pageant alleges to stem. The true 'nature' of sexual diversity in South Africa can of course never be captured by a single representative. However, the ideology of the macho, 'normal', gender-conforming gay man presented in the articles about the pageant indicates that representing any form of sexual diversity is by no means desirable.

In a turn of events that almost seems to be an intrinsic part of contemporary pageantry it was revealed that Van der Berg had been involved in making pornography in the past. This story only surfaced after he won the South African title, and interestingly did not prevent him from winning the international title despite the competition distancing itself from the pornography industry (Pridebook, 2010). Arguably it was his vocalised stance that sexuality is a "private matter", which reportedly gained him "great favour with the judges" (Exit, 2010), that prevented this deviance from the sexually discreet nature of the homonormative model counting against him. Alternatively, it may have been the solo nature of the pornography that prevented his being associated with anything so overtly homosexual as the image of gay sex, which is by no means commercially viable in the heterosexual "mainstream" (Sender, 2003). Such speculation is secondary, however, to his response about the private nature of sexuality. Far from a queer approach to 'gay' culture, which would "disclaim difference and oppose classification of all kinds" (Herdt, 1997: 9), this statement reflects the strategy of disavowing anything that may be deemed as "anti-assimilationist" and the inherent threat therein to civil rights strategies (Gamson, 2002: 328). Indeed, all post-international-win articles featuring on the chosen websites emphasise Van der Berg's 'admirable' answer and leave no room for the possibility of his sexual exploits being related to a negative stereotype of gay promiscuity. Following this 'scandal' *Mr Gay South Africa* updated the entry requirements to include a compulsory full disclosure of any pornographic activity that one may have been involved in (Mr Gay South Africa, 2010b).

The favouring of such an ideology, combined with the prioritising of a distinct homonormative image in the images of the pageant, acts to perpetuate a depoliticised understanding of queer culture in South Africa. The lack of invested interest in politics is reflected in the fact that only a *MambaOnline* interview with Van der Berg deals with his 'duties' and views as the newly voted representative of the LGBTI community in South Africa. The content of the articles on *GaySpeak* focuses on the entertainment factors of the pageant, informing readers of the

various parties and events revolving around a competition. Whilst *QueerLife* and *MambaOnline* provide news articles, no official pageant-related source exists where the public can access the contestants' views; engage in an 'interactive' discussion about the issues facing the LGBTI community; or offer input about what 'they' as the community members themselves wanted from a representative. The brief radio interview with Van der Berg spends time talking about his emotions, and only poses one question related to politics of the pageant – what does it *mean* to have won the competition? Van der Berg's response of being a "voice for people who do not necessarily have a voice" may be genuine, but is somewhat of a regurgitation of the foundation of the pageant (Outspoken, 2010). The *MambaOnline* interview with Van der Berg is a standard 'getting-to-know-you' formula, which does not test his knowledge of genuine issues facing LGBTI people in South Africa, nor challenge him in any regard (MambaOnline, 2010). The apolitical nature of the representations is captured by the seemingly socially conscious user *1985minotaur* commenting that

Beauty queens (and the question about the 'reign' of this one implies even the interviewer knows Mr Gay SA is little more than a beauty contestant) need to accept that they are not "scholarship winners"; they are there to "look pretty"

and the equally outraged user *altf4*'s response that

This guy is a slightly better than average looking idiot who is way outta his league. He is just proliferating stereotypes of the gay community. Should be voted off the island!
(MambaOnline, 2010)

The emphasis that the radio interview and *Gay Speak* place on the pageant's link to Pride perhaps epitomises the apolitical and commercial ideology that truly lies behind the pageant. Pride, although it may have begun as a genuine resistance to hegemonic oppression, has recently been described as a visual manifestation of the Western commercialisation of gay identity (De Waal and Manion, 2006: 115) which simply caters for the "resourced community" with no thought for the "real gay world" at all (Phybia Dlamini in de Waal and Manion 2006: 175).

At this point it may be argued that I am being overly critical of this pageant. It is, after all, a beauty pageant, and Van der Berg's win should be celebrated as a step towards greater recognition for the progress that South Africa has made. He has not, it is true, been elected as a Member of Parliament, and so should not necessarily be a knowledgeable gender and queer rights activist. The negative history surrounding queer identities has indeed needed a competitive positive image. The politics of affirmation (Manning, 1996: 99) that the *Mr Gay South Africa* pageant propagates is

intended to be such a strategy. It may be argued that the use of a well-entrenched identity as a platform for increasing LGBT visibility is an admirable strategy. Richard Dyer argues that stereotypes have an important role to play in ordering society and expressing values to the point of making "visible the invisible", with the potentially positive effect of removing anxieties around Otherness (1993: 16). The visibility that Van der Berg's win gained in the mainstream media, however small in comparison to other news stories, may be regarded as a positive step towards creating an increased level of tolerance in a society that is constantly on edge. The perceived alternative of non-representation would indeed be tragic, as the "symbolic annihilation" (Gamson, 2002: 312) that would accompany the invisibility of queer identities altogether would serve no purpose in changing the horrendous social reality of fear, stigmatisation and oppression for the majority of queer citizens. Indeed, Charl van der Berg, based on the media representations that I have analysed, seems to be an admirable person who is passionate about life and an 'out and proud' queer man in a country that, socially and culturally, is opposed to his very being.

Whilst I agree with the observation that one should regard such a beauty pageant as a microcosm for social anxieties, and that visibility should be strategised as a "series of political negotiations" (Gamson, 2002: 326), I would argue that the *Mr Gay Pageant* is a dangerous construction on the basis that it perpetuates already present attitudes and widens the gap between those already visible and those who remain invisible, and it perpetuates a discourse of gayness that does not speak to local experiences. I make this observation based not only on my own subjective experiences, and on the interactions I have had with peers who do not feel comfortable with gayness as it is represented in the South African media, but on the narratives which can be found in the appendices. Certainly a more thorough ethnographic study would have to be conducted if one is to fully engage with what constitutes local, as opposed to foreign or international, experiences. However, in reading the pageant and the surrounding media, one is struck by the predictability of content: advertisements for before and after parties at upmarket, mainstream clubs; content on fashion and dress codes; and discussions around the prizes the winners receive. This observation is not to discredit the valuable feature articles which appear on the websites on occasion – certainly over the years I have personally read pieces on religion, health, and safety. Within the focus on the pageant, representations are restricted to a decidedly mainstream, familiar, image of assimilated gayness. Certainly I did not come across any representations of the 'less desirable' sub-identities that Steven Cohen recognised. The pageant seeks to represent all 'LGBTI' people in South Africa, and yet the 'local experiences – the questions and challenges of everyday belonging – for those who do not relate with the identity presented by the pageant remain disturbingly invisible. The pageant and the queer media covering it seem intent

on exclaiming "we're here and we're gay", but this is done in a manner that is ultimately 'approved' by society at large. As Joshua Gamson observes, "[c]ultural visibility, especially when it is taking place through commerce, is not a direct route to liberation; in fact, it can easily lead elsewhere" (2002: 312).

Sociological reasons motivating the formation of this pageant, which exist alongside the obvious capitalist reasons, need to be explored in a paper much more detailed than this discursive analysis of media representations. I would venture, however, that a "duality of experiences" (Isaacs and McKendrick, 1992: 6) for the essentialised and commercially ideal demographic of white/urban/middle-class/young/gay/man is partially responsible. As I have already stated, authors have explored at length the diversity of the queer community in South Africa. The only representations of this essentialised, yet very real, queer 'community' have been in the forms of connections to a cosmopolitan and transnational Westernised gay 'culture'. The lack of positive representations in local popular culture (a lack which I certainly experienced during adolescence) is indeed a potential reason for the drive behind developing the *Mr Gay South Africa* pageant. The strategy that this has manifested itself as, however, is one of assimilation politics as opposed to a queer appreciation for the extent of diversity in the country. The pageant has reduced a potentially 'queer community' to a 'LGBTI community' (where did those who do not identify as such run off to?), which in turn is represented by the *man* selected by a panel of judges who have invested interests in the commercial resource of the white/urban/middle-class/young/gay/male identity. The online articles I was exposed to, as well as the podcast and *youtube* clips that I watched, all depoliticised the pageant. The finalists chosen were all cut from the same model. The contestants were presented as "ordinary people" (Manning, 1996: 99), all part of a uniformly righteous 'culture' (102) that in every way barring sexual attraction was 'the same as' heterosexual normality. The lack of resistance to what is viewed as 'normal' resulted in the pageant reinforcing a decade-old homonormativity – except this time the locally produced image has been reinforced by the 'international gay community' and proudly embraced as a representative for all 'queers' in South Africa.

Whilst the assertion of a public identity is needed (Cock, 2005: 201), the monolithic identity that the pageant and representations of it promote cannot be regarded as positive. The pageant both reinforces and combats stereotypes: it capitalises on the stereotype of the white identity as *the* queer identity in South Africa, yet through power invested in the image of the homonormative body resists other 'negative' stereotypes based on effeminacy and gender resistance. By pushing a strategy of depoliticised assimilation the pageant and the queer media effectively "obliterat[e]

difference and diversity even as [they] apparently [embrace] it" (Manning 1996: 107-8). Only those who can afford to buy into the mediated and marketed image presented by the pageant have had their visibility enhanced. And whilst surface visibility is enhanced, even those who are represented are done so in a manner that embraces Western discourses of belonging, with no reflection on local experiences. What is immediately gathered from the representations of the pageant is that it has been set up within the spectrum of a transnationalised vision of the definition of 'gay culture' and 'gay identity': the link to the *World Wide Mr Gay* competition illustrates the investment that the CEO and Board of Directors have placed in securing a recognised and identifiable image for an international market.

Of course, there is the overarching question of *do we actually want or need a unified community in South Africa?* There is no simple answer to a question so invested in history, culture and context. What strategies of identity politics have suggested thus far, however, are that sexual politics in South Africa cannot be fought by simply reworking the heteronormative standard. The *Mr Gay South Africa* pageant may have noble intentions, but these are undermined by complicity with hegemonic masculinity. My own personal sense, based on lived cultural experiences, is that a vision of solidarity is favourable over a vision of community and community representatives. Jacklyn Cock argues that the challenge is "to define a lesbian and gay identity as an inclusive African identity" (2005: 205). This needs to be done by building upon a history of self-expressions that defy fixed identities (Gevisser and Cameron, 1994: 5), with the recognition that "so long as inequality and injustice of any kind remain, our own enjoyment of our freedoms must remain suspect" (Edwin Cameron in De Waal and Manion, 2006: 6). Indeed, a primary step in defining an inclusive queer African identity would be to move away from exclusively using the label 'gay' as the 'natural' benchmark for 'homosexual' expression and identity. As recognised above, gay certainly has a place within a more inclusive paradigm, allowing for local negotiations of the label. This recognition, however, should not perpetuate the assumption that gay is a neutral term that can be unproblematically adopted to understand and represent all contexts.

What value *can* be taken from the pageant, perhaps, is that it has people talking. It, as Cohen, Wilk and Stoltje state, has achieved the desired effect of producing, consuming *and* rejecting power (1996: 8). The success of Charl van der Berg has drawn in more local and international interest over subsequent years of the pageant. Indeed, the success has already had the effect increasing the popularity of the contest, with the current season being a continued topic of conversation on social-networking sites like *Facebook*²⁰ and *Twitter*²¹. However, if the *Mr Gay*

²⁰ <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=104602494319>

South Africa pageant, in keeping in line with an approach of social responsibility, truly seeks to produce a power that rejects heteronormativity, it needs to shift its standard of what beauty is away from the homonormative model that resists all things queer and unmasculine. It more importantly needs to shift away from an importation of the commercialised and Western label of 'gay', in an effort to speak to local experiences and identities. In doing so the queer press will instead begin to be filled with those identities which currently *are* invisible, fulfilling the task of educating those ignorant of the true extent of diversity. This will undoubtedly cause controversy both within the queer and straight 'communities', but the "activists, drags, drugged dead-heads, freaks, perverts and fucked-shut sluts" that make up the spectrum of resistant sexual identities need to be acknowledged if the organisers, and winners, of the pageant ever hope to truly 'make a difference' on the landscape of sexual politics in South Africa.

Beyond a rhetoric of visibility and inclusivity, however, is a far more pressing issue: the politics of assimilation contributes not only to a divide in citizenship and solidarity, but to a necessary dismissal of the local experiences of the contestants which it so heavily features. The link to a highly profitable represented demographic, complete with the attempted adoption of the histories and discourses associated with 'gay' renders the pageant – as one of the most accessible cultural resources for the demographic of this project – a grossly misleading artefact. The shroud of 'gayness' masks the anxieties and locally-specific difficulties, grouping any experiences that a contestant (or, indeed, an identifying spectator) within a paradigm of Americanised gayness, complete with the expectation that one should come out and achieve an integrated (assimilated) identity, and the assumption that one has the resources and spaces necessary to achieve this.

A new framework is needed in order to begin to understand the incredibly complex experiences of living under an assumed label of 'white gayness'. This is what Chapter Four will encompass. In the next chapter I consider all that I have highlighted above, and offer – based on collected narratives of people within the demographic of 'young, white, urban, gay men' – an approach for appreciating the histories, discourses, spaces, ideologies, and support structures that shape lived experiences. I will propose a shift away from emphases on coming out in relation to spaces, structures, and histories, and instead emphasise the importance of positively recognising the effects of globalisation, hybridity, and sexual fluidity. In shifting focus away from 'homo', I actively seek to generate visibility rooted in social responsibility and positive social change by offering a framework of 'pomo'.

²¹ <http://twitter.com/mrgaysouthafric>

Chapter Four: Gauzing the Lacuna

Being gay is a gift, being gay may have been very difficult growing up but I was able to see the world from the outside in; to analyse societies default settings about gender and sexuality and live independently of these traditional expectations.

DJ (2011)

This final chapter has two purposes. Firstly, by sharing the narratives of five men from the demographic of 'young, white, urban, gay' it serves to begin gauzing the lacuna in non-commodified, local representation for this demographic. I use the term 'gauzing' to invoke an image of medical care: in much the same way that gauze is applied over wounds to help the healing process by bringing together the surrounding skin, so this chapter will serve as a tool to help bring together surrounding discourses and heal the 'wound' in representation. Rather than relying on mediated images rooted in commercialisation, homogeneity, and the dissociation of sexuality (Sigusch, 1998), or on assumed essentialism of a South African history for representation, this chapter offers uniquely contemporary South African experiences. The chapter aims to begin to give insight – albeit a very small amount considering the scope of this project – into authentic lived experiences.

Secondly, in relation to these shared narratives, the chapter offers the foundation of a new framework for understanding and relating. Moving away from understanding the demographic as unified under an essentialised identity marker of 'gay', it offers a reading of pomosexuality, as outlined in Chapter One. Shifting from understanding the demographic as 'homo', complete with transnational links to an assimilationist Western rhetoric, to 'pomo' will help researchers and social activists move beyond assumptions of homogeneity and unity (rooted in spaces, history, and coming out). The importance of this is not to impose new markers, but to recognise the difficulties that members of this demographic face, and to recognise the need for representation-beyond-commodification – a recognition that is not possible whilst working under a label of gayness.

Methodology

As discussed in Chapter One, auto-ethnographic experiences have shaped the direction of this project, and form an implicit part of this chapter. As a form of ethnographic information dispersal, auto-ethnography is a "highly personalised [account that draws] upon the experience of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding" (Sparkes in Wall, 2008: 39). The process of identity negotiation is continuous, and Probyn (1993) speaks of the difficulty that one can experience in locating one's experiences of culture in general, and the tension that one may experience between experience and structures. For implicit foundational purposes Probyn's distinction between an epistemological self and an ontological self is useful in discerning how one's experiences produce cultural meanings and negotiate a view of the world. Coupled with the general confusion surrounding identity and culture in South Africa, my own lived experience serves as an "articulation between epistemological and ontological levels" of existence (Probyn, 1993: 304). That is, using my subjective position "in relation to the absence and presence of the concepts of truth, confession, experience [...], sex, sexuality and gender" (Probyn, 1993: 292) I utilise my own exposure to constructive discourses to identify the links between 'gay' men and society, and the "lived experience of the social formation" (Probyn, 1993: 296). In this chapter I use my own experiences, coupled with the experiences of the participants, to critically explore and problematise the 'conditions' that articulate senses of gayness and identity (Probyn, 1993: 290). By no means do I suggest that my experiences as a 'member' of this demographic are shared by all, or form a unifying force. Indeed, the very nature of this project is a desire to shift *away* from homogenous identity markers. Rather, a critical reflection on my own experiences (that is, auto-ethnography) has been used as a starting point to problematise notions of gayness, identity, and belonging.

I do not extensively include examples from my life. Rather, the auto-ethnographic approach I assume is one of familiarity in relation to identity: my own experiences have generated an awareness of the lacuna in representation, and these experiences shape the guiding structure of the narratives. The primary advantage of auto-ethnography in this context is a general advancing of "sociological understanding" (Wall, 2008: 39). Although the chapter is not a strict auto-ethnography in the sense that it is not an absolute deconstruction of myself, it is essentially based on identity elements from my own personal narrative in hopes of addressing the broad key issues identified above, namely "structure, agency and their intersection; [and] social reproduction and social change" (Laslett in Wall, 2008: 39). Whilst there are several interpretations regarding the use and structure of auto-ethnographies, I primarily use a method of negotiation between a sense of

self and sociological connection (Wall, 2008: 39). I have selected this avenue of interpretation because in exploring discourses of sexuality, gender and identity, I realise that whilst I am active in my daily experiences I am still shaped by a multitude of interconnected discourses and grand narratives.

The debates surrounding gender, sexuality, orientation, and identity are intrinsically bound to emotion and experience. As such, this chapter has the added task of realising the very real emotional struggles that precede discursive and identity deconstruction. This realisation of emotion, however, "[serves] a purpose that cannot be served by traditional approaches to knowledge sharing" (Wall, 2008: 44). Alongside the benefit of offering sociological insight, the use of auto-ethnographic elements in this chapter allows me to make use of the experiences of people I have encountered who share a personal interest in this project. The overarching methodology of this chapter is rooted in a broad ethnography, through the emphasis placed on "describing and interpreting cultural behaviour" (Dawson, 2007: 19). This ethnography takes the form of narratives gathered from five participants. During various stages of research, each of the participants approached me with an interest to be involved on some level. The participants had been exposed to one or more of my key texts in their own capacities, and were interested in expressing their own views and sharing their own experiences. I selected the participants featured in this chapter prior to extensively engaging with them, as not to generate any perceptions of discursive manipulation, and provided each participant with an informed consent document explaining the scope of my research and my intentions (Appendix 2). The men chosen fall within the demographic, in that they are all between the ages of 20 and 27 (indicating that their exposure to identities and representations would have primarily occurred during the post-apartheid period); they are self-identified as 'white'; and they live in one of the main urban areas of South Africa (namely Cape Town, Durban, or Johannesburg). With the intention of being open-ended with my emphases, I constructed a broad questionnaire (Appendix 3) which was given to each participant. The questions featured relate to personal experiences of spaces, institutions, gender, identities, and politics. These questions are guided by the theoretical establishments of Chapters Two and Three and my key texts, in that they seek to relate the identity development process of a 'gay identity' to personal experiences of space, history, and culture. In my initial interactions with the participants I re-emphasised the sentiment of the informed consent document, in that they could answer the questions in as much or as little detail as they wanted. I emphasised that my intention was to gather their life stories in which they had the freedom to emphasise the experiences and memories which were important to them. The result of this is a set of distinct pieces, which form sources of cultural information. Each of the participants' complete narratives can be found in Appendices 4

through 8. I have left responses within their broad guiding questions for ease of reading, but have not corrected grammar as it is my intention to retain an authentic individual voice for each piece. In the interests of maintaining ethical privacy, each of the participants has been given a pseudonym.

It should be noted at this point that I do not intend these narratives to 'simply' be attachments at the end of a project, only to serve the purpose of forming the basis for analysis and to be glanced over by any interested reader. A core aspect of this project is the recognition that the chosen demographic exists largely unrepresented in relation to personal, identifiable, local experiences. As such, these narratives should be regarded as steps towards an acknowledgement of experiences, and as deeply personal expressions of the difficulties and anxieties, as well as the achievements and triumphs, that these men have faced. This chapter offers a grounded approach to fully appreciating the scope of complex discourses and histories that shape and inform these narratives, but by no means intends to impose a blanket label of self-identification for these men. It is my intention that the chapter be read alongside the narratives as a collection of experiences, with the purpose of generating a new degree of visibility and awareness, and not as a dehumanising and unappreciative imposition of values from the ivory tower. It is necessary to reiterate that it is *not* my intention to claim that these five narratives speak for all those people within this demographic. These narratives have been gathered to show the a small portion of the diversity that exists within a perceived homogenous 'community', and to show that a marker of 'gay' inhibits understanding. My intention is to generate awareness, and to offer points of identifiable representation.

The participants come from a variety of backgrounds, have varying degrees of knowledge about gender and sexuality, and their narratives are products of their cultural backgrounds, education levels, and personal experiences. It is important to emphasise that whilst I do not seek to convey the participants *as* pomosexual, but rather view them through a pomosexual lens, their responses reflect a level of individual identity negotiation: they all reflect on their standing as individuals, with strong senses of individual identity and an acute awareness of the disjuncture between their own identities and how their supposed community identities are represented in the media. From this perspective, interpreting the participants as *being* pomosexual shows a link between pomosexuality and privilege: all of the participants come from middle-class backgrounds, and have all finished high school at the least. Their standing as privileged members of society arguably affords them access to a wider range of representations and cultural artefacts with which they can explore identity possibilities – certainly in comparison to a less-privileged, uneducated member of a smaller rural community. This is, of course, a generalisation, based only on an

observation founded in analysis. Privilege does not automatically guarantee personal security and self-assurance – something to which I can personally testify. However, the focus of this project is pomosexuality as interpretation: self-identification with the label will need to be explored in a different project. Yet it is important to acknowledge the potential link between pomosexuality and privilege as the lacuna which I am attempting to gauze relates to a specific sector of society. However, the paradigm of interpretation may be equally applied to those 'less privileged': pomosexuality-as-interpretation, as has been discussed above and will be discussed below, takes cognisance of multiple discourses, and allows for the recognition of unique local experiences and contexts.

As stated above, the participants were selected based on a self-professed interest in my research. They are as follows: Appendix 4 is the narrative of DJ, who is based in Cape Town and who approached me after attending a conference where I presented the early stages of Chapter Three. He comes from an English and Afrikaans background, and was studying towards a Bachelor's Degree at the time of the project. Appendix 5 is the narrative of Johannesburg-based Scott, who similarly became aware of my work at the conference. Scott has an English background, and was studying towards a Masters degree at the time of the project. Appendix 6 is the narrative of Cape Town-based Patrick who contacted me via an online profile I created as a part of preliminary research for this project, and who expressed an interest in being involved in some capacity. He is from an English and French background, and holds a high school pass. Appendix 7 is the narrative of Ken, who lives in Durban and is aware of my work through his connection to the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Ken holds a Bachelor's Degree, and is English. Appendix eight is the narrative of Daniel, who similarly lives in Durban, and English, and is aware of my work through his connection to UKZN. At the time of the project, Daniel was studying towards his Bachelor's Degree.

Discussion

As discussed in Chapter Two, the foundation of a 'gay identity' is the core concept of 'coming out' in various stages, culminating in an integrated public and private identity. Coleman's model (1981), which frames the experiences of the characters in the *Rainbow* trilogy (Sanchez, 2001; 2003; 2005), emphasises that the coming-out process, and thus 'gayness', is rooted in various degrees of spatial-ideological affirmation. This affirmation is structured around tangible and identifiable resources – such as official school policies, national organisations, and support structures readily available in a local context. This idea of spatial-ideological affirmation serves as an entry point for reading the participants' narratives and relating them to understandings of 'gayness'. In relation to a perspective of pomosexuality, caution must be exercised to avoid a potential "overreliance on a

strategy of coming out" (D'Emilio, 1993: 468) in attempts to understand the experiences of this demographic. Whilst the participants have all 'come out' in terms of personally and publicly acknowledging an aspect of their identities as being rooted in same-sex sexual desire, their forms of 'integration' are distinctly different from those of Kyle, Jason, or Nelson. Reading the participants as 'gay' carries the implicit assumption of a connection to gay culture, gay community, and gay politics – all of which the participants explicitly reject in one form or another. To read the participants through a pomosexual lens is a step towards truly appreciating local experiences. The core components of such an approach or framework, necessary from the perspective of the cultural reader, are as follows: an acknowledgement of pluralistic experiences within spaces of uncertainty; a recognised individualistic development rooted in unmapped possibilities, including the liminal exposure to and exclusion from mediated points of connection; an appreciated self-conscious discomfort with the politicisation of sexuality at the intersecting point of individual experience and social expectation; and the ultimate emphasis placed on an understood daily existence favouring human rights and human connection over politicised sexual definitions. These aspects will be used to guide a discussion of the narratives, with the broad overarching intentions of increasing awareness and generating relevant representations to which one may relate.

As a starting point, reflecting on the *Rainbow* trilogy, school experiences have a fundamental role in shaping an understanding of gayness and identity. Regarding the participants, Scott's school experiences stand out as distinctly positive when compared to the other participants, who all suffered varying degrees of anxiety or bullying. His school environment was a space of tolerance, which positively reaffirmed his sense of self and attraction to the same sex. For Scott, his sense of 'gay' – which he uses to describe himself – is self-consciously limited to a same-sex sexual attraction, with no sense of connection to a wider 'culture' or aesthetic. His chance meeting of an "openly gay" man at a young age enabled him to put a name to his sexual feelings, and to 'come out' to his supportive family at the young age of 14 (Scott: 2011). The space of his school provided him with the resources to further develop his sense of self. What is interesting to note, however, is that it was as a result of his revealing of his sexual 'otherness' during class that the school organised special sessions to talk about his feelings and educate others about "alternative sexualities" (Scott: 2011). He acknowledges that his school was open-minded and accepting, but it was only as a result of his own initiative that the school exposed other students to sexual diversity in the form of a life-skills course. Had he not 'come out', the school would not have provided this resource. The threat of heteronormative oppression was seemingly implicit, in that his only experience of bullying was "the fact that the rugby jocks wouldn't change into their swimming speedos in front of [him] during PE [physical education] anymore" (Scott: 2011). Scott acknowledges that this was more a

devastating blow to his desires for sexual exploration than to his sense of identity, but it does indicate a remarkable sense of self-security: a similar attitude from Kyle's swimming-team members in the *Rainbow* trilogy leaves Kyle feeling completely overwhelmed and insecure. However, this implicit teasing seems negligible to the school experiences of DJ, who reflects that

I was relentlessly teased for being a "moffie" and called a "faggot", even being subjected to violence by peers. Faggot, moffie, gay, queer, girlie... I have been called them all. I recall the scariest incident being in Gr 2 [aged 7] and these rather large Gr 7 [aged 13] boys thought it would be funny to chase me home after school while throwing stones at me, shouting faggot. I avoided serious injuring [*sic*] due to my smart hiding techniques, but the emotional damage was just as severe. I have faced violence. I have faced intimidation, all of which led to serious contemplation of suicide. (DJ: 2011)

School, for DJ, was a space of physical and emotional oppression, with a complete lack of supportive attitudes or structures. His active attempts to seek help were dismissed by teachers, who "didn't seem to care or were more uncomfortable with the subject" than he was (DJ: 2011). Daniel and Ken similarly faced explicit attitudes of intolerance, coupled with a lack of information and resources about their sexual feelings. Both Daniel and Ken recognised from an early age that they had feelings of same-sex sexual desire, but hid these desires at school: Ken's school environment simply ignored sexual diversity, generating the impression that it was something shameful and taboo, and Daniel's school environment was openly "hostile towards homosexuality in general" (Daniel: 2011). Briefly reflecting on my own school experiences may help in appreciating this disjuncture between a perception of identity stability and reality (after all, as a member of this 'essentialised' demographic I am assumed to have the cultural resources and personal strength at my disposal to adequately deal with any anxieties). Whilst I never suffered physical violence, the underlying attitudes of macho heteronormativity certainly inhibited any sense of positive self-development. The all-boys' high school I attended had a strong rugby culture, and during my second year at the school the headmaster made the decision to remove drama as a subject under the rationale that it was "an easy choice for cream puffs", and the subsequent decision that an all-boys' school no longer needed a guidance counsellor or life-skills, as "real men don't need that rubbish". This reality is far removed from the school setting of the *Rainbow* trilogy: despite Constitutional equality of genders and sexualities, and despite educational policies directed towards equipping students with life-skills (never skills on how boys should approach boys they fancied, though – of course), my school environment was void of all resources aimed at helping students understand their sexualities. My journey of self-discovery was firmly rooted in my own

privately constructed spaces, where my exposure to what it 'meant' to be gay was limited to the fundamentalist Christian teachings at school and the rare glimpses of "moffies" on television.

Similarly, then, DJ, Daniel, and Ken all negotiated and explored their own identities in their own private spaces, with varying degrees of personal anxiety experienced. DJ, Ken, Scott, and Daniel all acknowledge the role that mediated representations of sexual identities had in giving them a sense of understanding around issues of 'gayness', similarly acknowledging that these representations were distinctly non-South African (with specific references made to *Will & Grace* as a source which provided role models). Whilst this aspect will be discussed below, what is important to recognise is that their journeys (and my journey) of self-discovery to achieving what would traditionally be interpreted as their (and my) 'integrated gay identities' today have been distinctly self-motivated and isolated. Each of the participants had to take it upon themselves to seek resources, and none had information or support structures at their disposal. Unlike the Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) or the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) organisations openly existing in the *Rainbow* trilogy, or the multitude of hotlines and local websites offered at the backs of these novels, the formative experiences of Ken, Daniel, and DJ were uninfluenced by positive messages of ideological reinforcement. Patrick succinctly expresses this individualistic journey of self-discovery in his sentiment that "each person should interpret what gay means to them in their own way", based solely on a recognition that "gay is being sexually attracted to men only", and not on anything else (Patrick: 2011). Whilst the idea of school being a space of uncertainty is seemingly obvious to state, within a framework of pomosexual analysis it is important to recognise, as it draws attention to the drastically different structures and attitudes that each of the men experiences. Far from their years of school experimentation and self-discovery being shaped by an overarching institutional policy of same-sex desire sexual education, or the provision of resources, or the promise of local helplines made available at the backs of locally-written novels, they were instead shaped by a lack of connection and a lack of guidance. Ken, Daniel, DJ, and Scott all share the sentiment that educative spaces need to provide ideologically-reaffirming resources to aid in a journey that otherwise leaves one feeling as if one is "flying completely blind" (Ken: 2011). Ken writes that he was "in desperate need of support and education" about sexual diversity (2011), and Daniel emphasises that "an environment where questions can be asked by individuals [...] needs to be provided" (2011). These foundational experiences were, on the whole, randomly dependent on the schools that they attended. Indeed, the experiences remain distinctly unrelated in that not even a broad struggle for legal equality surrounding student rights or education policy in relation to sexuality existed.

What this signifies, then, is a wholly individualistic navigation of identity. Coming out, for these men, was not rooted in a structure of spatial support or even an exposure to the promise of local organisations dedicated to their identities. Within these contexts of a lack of supportive spaces each of the participants expresses varying degrees of discontent towards a label of 'gay' in a South African context. Whilst all of the men define gay as a basic same-sex sexual attraction, they are all implicitly aware of the connections of the identity to an American context. This awareness comes with a mixture of responses from the participants, ranging from Patrick's outright disdain for the commodification of sexuality to DJ's celebration of global connection. What is important, however, is a self-conscious awareness of the lack of local authenticity these transnational connections hold for their own lives, signifying a liminal process of identity negotiation. Ken's awareness of 'gay culture' as it is represented in the media exists within the uncomfortable realisation that the only commonality between his experiences and those represented are the shared experiences of prejudice "based on who we are" (2011). Scott recognises that "the meaning of being gay is produced and enforced by predominantly American popular culture", which underpins his concern that any local struggle for human rights has been "hijacked" by Western representations and mediated encodings (2011). DJ, who immerses himself in mediated representations of gayness, feels a connection based on aesthetic grounds, but suggests that this connection "seems to be more of a generic international gay culture" (2011), rather than anything substantially rooted in local experiences. Central to the Western notion of coming out is a connection to a historical community, which reaffirms integrated identities. The representations that the participants have been exposed to, such as *Will & Grace*, developed an awareness of the elusive 'gay culture', forming what it 'means' to be gay in their narratives. However, this awareness is coupled with a realisation that South Africa is "too isolated and removed from a geographical perspective to truly develop any Mzansi [South African] Gay community" (Patrick: 2011). The process of individual identity negotiation takes place in a continual space of liminality, whereby an awareness exists of what gay men 'should' be doing, and 'should' be experiencing, and yet is unsupported by local immersive experiences. The school and social spaces that the participants encountered are far removed from the mediated world of *Will & Grace*. Interpreting the men as typically or 'essentially' gay ignores the very real emotional tension experiences in one's exposure to an ideal way of life and the hard-hitting reality that one has no means of achieving those modes of 'integrated' interaction and expression. From a point of personal reflection, I can recall feeling utterly depressed at seeing young men, my age, living openly gay lives in American or British contexts, attending gay-themed parties and regularly visiting gay community centres, but not being able to do or experience any of those things myself. Indeed, I still have a residual feeling of

isolation: I have caught myself yearning for a sense of solidarity or connection that I see represented in texts. This ideological space of uncertainty is crucial to the experiences of the participants, and can only be recognised through a pomosexual lens, as pomosexuality consciously emphasises the processes of negotiation within spaces beyond the boundaries of contemporary binary existence (Queen and Schimel, 1997:23).

This liminal negotiation is captured in the participants' understanding of contemporary representations of their demographic and cultural expectations surrounding a unifying gayness. Reflecting on attempted representations of 'local gayness', Patrick, Ken, Daniel, and DJ are all critical of the *Mr Gay South Africa* competition. Far from indicating a sense of common connection and reaffirming support, Patrick views the pageant as filled with "[i]nsecure ego queens who [sic] willing to make themselves open to manipulation to the bigger plans of others. Pointless, stupid and pathetic!" (2011). Similarly, Ken suggests that the competition actually made him feel less secure about himself, causing him to wonder "why even have a *Mr Gay* pageant when all I really saw was a male beauty pageant, it could easily have been a *Mr South Africa* pageant" (2011). The disjuncture between represented understandings of gayness and local experience is taken to the extreme by Patrick's sentiments that he "hate[s] gay culture" as "[i]t's based in fake pretence and weak characters", and believes that any further exposure to and deification of transnational representations

will serve as a feeding pipe to mould confused minds into the plastic culture currently being spewed by identityless men who see the gay scene as the gospel of pink and all gays who do not subscribe to this gospel is seen as backwards. (Patrick: 2011).

Whilst the men all use gay as personal markers, there is a distinct discomfort rooted in a lack of lived identification. The experiences of gayness for this demographic that are mediated do not match with the lived experiences of the participants. The space of 'the gay club', which is an important part of 'gay identity' as it is represented in the media – including in the *Rainbow* trilogy – does not hold the same degree of identity-support in the local context. DJ notes that "young people turn to the only gay thing they know about, gay clubs" (2011), but these clubs often leave people feeling less accepted and less secure – as Ken reflects, in his note that the "most awkward I have felt in social spaces in Durban has been amongst the gay community [...which is why] I and my partner no longer go to the only gay club" (2011). The expected sense of a unifying force that underlies understandings of gayness also stretches into historical associations, as reflected upon in Chapter Two. Within a Western framework, crucial to an integrated 'gay identity' is the recognition – however small – of a historical struggle for gay rights, and a sense of contemporary connection,

through identifiable shared experiences, with this struggle. However, as Scott suggests regarding his reading of *Moffie* (Van der Merwe, 2006), the South African history of this interpreted demographic is completely foreign to him and the other participants, as it bears no similarities to their own experiences (Scott: 2011).

Beyond the threat of military conscription, the participants express a sense of disconnect from any 'gay rights movement' in South Africa. As Scott observes, "sexuality is decreasingly becoming a legitimate site of struggle" in this country (Scott: 2011). Ken acknowledges the lack of visibility of any 'gay rights' issues within (what he loosely calls) a South African 'gay community', and Daniel's perspective indicates that any issues of 'rights' exist on a social level, in the form of homophobia and administrative complications in the Department of Home Affairs. These struggles for social change and social acceptance are distinctly different from struggles for legal change. This is, of course, because the legal context is starkly different from the majority of the rest of the world, as discussed in Chapter Three. A unified gay rights movement does not exist in South Africa as it does in the United Kingdom or America. The lack of a social struggle for legal acceptance is crucial in appreciating the importance of a pomosexual understanding rather than a blanket interpretation of gayness. Pomosexuality encapsulates a shift away from a deep-seated sense of connection (Queen and Schimel, 1997:24), and a similar shift away from a unifying marker of 'gayness' rooted in assumed shared social struggles for political change. Reading the narratives as pomosexual incorporates an acknowledgement of the lack of historical connection, and an acknowledgement of the distinctly different set of socio-political circumstances that men grouped within this demographic experience.

It is important to emphasise, as discussed in Chapter One, that it is not my intention to declare that all people should be understood as being pomosexual (which would imply with unfounded certainty in that they individually call themselves pomosexuals). Nor am I suggesting that pomosexuality is an ideal identity label to which individuals should aspire (though, of course, some individuals may personally 'connect' with the label). Rather, pomosexuality as a broad framework of interpretation offers us a useful way for appreciating the fluidity of sexuality and the multitude of experiences which may occur in a single context. Certainly, regarding the point above, it may be argued that I am finding evidence of pomosexuality-as-an-identity in South Africa. What I wish to emphasise, however, is that from a perspective of analysis and interpretation, pomosexuality requires a fluidity of thought to enable one to move away from assumptions rooted in community-based similarity, to understandings which recognise connections, but are neither dependent nor based on them. Pomosexuality allows for communities and senses of connection,

but does not rely on the assumption of homogeneity to offer insight. Through a lens of pomosexuality, understandings of experiences are not confined by an all-encompassing assumption of community: gayness is intrinsically bound to discussions of community based on shared history and shared challenges, as discussed above, and interpretations through a lens of gayness are shaped by an implicit presumption of shared history and challenges. To read and understand these men as essentially gay, within a framework of Western understanding, then, is to assume the provision of resources and connection to a community that go hand-in-hand with an American conceptualisation of coming out.

What the narratives suggest, however, is not a process of coming out as gay that culminates in an awareness of an immersive 'gay culture' working towards gay rights. Rather, it is a process of coming out as sexually-othered with an awareness of individual *human* struggles. Each of the participants emphasises the importance of human rights over an understanding of 'gay rights'. Patrick expresses the view that "[g]ay rights should not be called 'gay rights' but just the same rights for all. There should be no distinguishing between gay and straight rights" (2011), and Scott similarly emphasises that sexuality "should be a space for human rights activism" (2011). What this suggests is that within the South African context, members of this demographic have shifted personal understandings away from a politicisation of their own sexual identities towards understandings of the importance of an appreciation for broader human rights. Breaking away from the metanarrative of gayness, Ken reflects that he does not "share any more with other *gays* than [he does] with other *straights*" (2011, emphasis in original), and Patrick emphasises that he connects "with people on things of life, not based on sexuality" (2011). Indeed, Scott explicitly recognises his own apprehension toward the idea of his sexuality "becoming a site of minority cultural cohesion and identification" (2011), indicating an awareness of the political 'nature' of gender and sexuality, but a self-conscious depoliticisation of these aspects of identity in favour of a worldview that values broader human rights. Reflecting on the theoretical structure outlined in Chapter One, this self-conscious depoliticisation speaks directly to a pomosexual mode of existence. Scott is acutely aware of the political nature of sexuality, and self-consciously avoids calling himself "queer" due to this term's connotations of political militancy and the disjuncture between these and his own "political ontology" (Scott: 2011). Both he and Patrick express an awareness of stereotypes and negative connotations about "a range of characteristics" to which neither of them conforms (Scott: 2011), linked to the idea of 'gayness', which fuels Patrick's "deep disdain for [people] wanting to brand all gay men as "them gays"" (Patrick: 2011). This sentiment speaks to an awareness of the political roots of 'gay', and an intentional shift *away* from this term

in their own identifications and self-expressions, speaking, instead, in favour of a connection and identification based on common human ethics.

It may be argued, of course, that this is just a rehashing of the argument I presented against the *Mr Gay South Africa* competition in Chapter Three, in that the participants are buying into an assimilationist ideology that states they are 'regular men in every way, except that they are attracted to the same sex'. Whilst this will certainly be the case with some members of this demographic, within a pomosexual framework one can acknowledge the fact that each of the participants resists this form of politicisation by discussing or implying a degree of gender negotiation and exploration beyond the confines of assimilated gayness. Their narratives reflect that all of the men are self-consciously aware of gender-conforming discourses inherent in a label of homosexuality, and yet rather than emulate a level of integrated and passable gender negotiation akin to Kyle, Jason, or Nelson, they critique local and international representations and their gendered expectations. In doing so, they achieve a level of gendered comfort beyond the politics of a binary of assimilation or a militant queerness, and shift a personal focus to the intrinsic link between gendered forms of expression and human rights. DJ, for example, shares his emotional journey of attempting to "shadow [his] feminine nature" in an attempt to "erase the gay", but ultimately came to believe in a "more fluid expression of gender and sexuality" (DJ: 2011). Rather than try and assimilate, therefore, he celebrates being able to wear a dress and make-up on one day and have stubble and play rugby the next. The epigraph at the start of this chapter speaks to this point: his unique experiences have enabled him to move beyond local and international expectations and politicisations of sexual identity, and to exist comfortably in a (pomosexual) liminal space of self-exploration. This, in turn, signifies a worldview and form of personal expression that is distinct from a Western configuration of gayness. Rather than attempt to utilise a politicised 'gay identity' to bring about social change, DJ utilises a mode of pluralistic uncertainty to explore rights that transcend limitations of a single sexual marker.

This broader scope of ethics is masked within a paradigm of gayness, and only truly becomes visible when utilising a perspective of pomosexuality. Within the former paradigm, Patrick's rather evident loathing of all things subscribing to the "Hollywood stereotype" of gayness (2011) could arguably be interpreted as a failure to fully reach a stage of integrated coming out. His distaste for the "Bronx queens [...] in their underwear on a float marching through the streets" – a reference to the Cape Town gay club, Bronx, and 'queens' being used as derogatory term for (effeminate) gay men in this sense – and the "characterless humdrum of self important queens who seek affirmation from other men to feed their egos" (Patrick: 2011) could be interpreted as a

projection of an assimilationist perspective that aggressively resists any deviation from seamless integration into heteronormative society. This lens, however, gives no credit to his contextualisation of human rights and his passionate self-aware shift away from being bound within a perceived political category of gayness. Reading Patrick as 'another' white, gay man necessarily assumes a complicit perspective with a transnational, cosmopolitan, imposed identity. Using a lens of pomosexuality, however, not only offers the reader greater room for understanding his experiences, but also offers Patrick the opportunity to have his experiences and views adequately represented, without being bound by discursive political connotations. Through this lens, his entertaining camp humour suggests a self-conscious parodying of gender expectations. However, this reaches beyond the realm of parodying gender with the intention of advancing gay rights: in conjunction with his continued emphasis on the rhetoric of 'gay rights' as being a contributing factor to the perpetuation of a homogenous identity, it acts as a marker of a scope of ethics that stretches beyond gender/sexuality. These two aspects of Patrick's narrative, through a pomosexual lens, draw attention to his immersion in a culture of greater concerns. Patrick explicitly resists a politics of labelling people, and thus explicitly resists an interpretation of gayness. In order to appreciate this, however, a pomosexual recognition of his choice to have first and foremost a *human* existence is necessary.

At this point it is necessary to reflect on a potential criticism of assumed homogeneity. In arguing against homogenising the chosen demographic, by selecting participants from within the demographic and grouping them under a new 'imposed' framework I am arguably perpetuating the very homogenisation I seek to undermine. However, the primary recognition of pomosexuality is the existence of "multiple subjectivities" with a set of multiple discourses, existing in a state of constant uncertainty, unbound by metanarratives of sexuality, gender, citizenship, and belonging (Queen and Schimel, 1997: 21). In relation to the chosen demographic, pomosexuality recognises the formative links of being exposed to a transnational gay culture as an American import (Hoad, 1998: 34), but does not rely on these links for a foundational structure. Indeed, the very 'nature' of pomosexuality is that it destabilises assumptions of structure. Consequently, a pomosexual framework for interpreting the narratives does not rely on any set of assumed shared experiences between the participants – indeed, it altogether offers a means to stretch *beyond* the assumptions of universal qualities bound to identities. Within the pomosexual framework, the only inherent unifying factor is a disjuncture between theoretical assumptions and lived experiences. This, in turn, can refer to a multitude of sexualities and genders within the postcolonial context. This framework could, in theory, be extended to an appreciation of other same-sex sexual identities with the intentions of recognising ethics beyond the realm of identity and sexual politics, and

generating a greater understanding of lived cultural experiences. In relation to this project, therefore, a pomosexual approach to the narratives does not seek to unify 'young, gay, urban, white, men' under a new marker. Rather, it seeks to offer insights into local experiences of this essentialised demographic, whilst simultaneously breaking the assumption of homogeneity.

As reflected by the narratives themselves, the experiences of those grouped within this demographic vary in many regards. Indeed, the only similarities between the participants are a self-acknowledged attraction towards the same sex, and – as Ken suggests – the commonality that they all have suffered different degrees of prejudice based on who they are. In applying the framework and recognising these two broad similarities one can immediately begin to appreciate how bizarre the grouping of all these men into one demographic truly is. Building on this, this project has not explored the differences (and similarities) in experiences between white men with an English background, and white men with an Afrikaans background; or the niche differences in experiences based on urban interactions in the distinctly different spaces of Durban, Cape Town, or Johannesburg; or the differences in understandings and experiences based on levels of education. Such factors are beyond the scope of this project. I have to question, however, how relevant an exploration of all these stratifications would ultimately be. Working within the confines of an already prescribed demographic, a pomosexual model effectively has room to recognise these stratifications but ultimately shifts attention away from them as primary markers of identity. Pomosexuality draws attention away from familiar discourses of identity formation to instead focus on the lived relationship between an individual and society, without politicising and polarising aspects of identity. As I stated in Chapter One, pomosexuality as a lens acts as a deliberate attempt to move away from the cycle of exclusion inherent in the politicisation of identity. By its very nature a pomosexual lens cannot exclude: as a perspective, not as a self-adopted description of identity, pomosexuality allows one to immerse oneself in a cultural understanding of experiences without being drawn into a focus on individual identity politics. Whilst identities that are interpreted within a pomosexual framework may indeed still be political, this is a politics of a human community. Of course, this is a highly idealised viewpoint. The reading of individual texts within a pomosexual framework by no means serves as a miraculous liberation from all the oppression in the world. Rather, it merely serves as a starting point, within a South African context, to stretch beyond the assumption of apolitical homogeneity and the assumption that no representation is needed. A pomosexual framework has the potential to call into question issues of representation and social support, as it draws attention to non-existent factors (such as space and community involvement) which are often assumed to exist.

There is, of course, the recognition that pomosexuality is rooted in American academia, and as such is also American import. Indeed, the emphasis that gayness places on community is arguably more aligned with traditional (South) African philosophies, where the value of the individual is often secondary to the value and importance of the community. Pomosexuality certainly captures the Western project of the rights of the individual. However, as discussed above, pomosexuality in the South African context should not be viewed as exclusively moving away from notions of community and connection. Rather, the paradigm allows for community identification, but recognises that these identifications are influenced by numerous local discourses, including a discourse of individuality. There is no cultural import of what the community has to signify or encapsulate, nor is there any predisposed notion of what constitutes "belonging": pomosexuality is applicable to the South African context precisely because it has the capability of recognising parallel and intersecting discourses of multiculturalism, context, sexuality, gender, and belonging. Gayness, however, carries discourses which are specific to a Western context. Pomosexuality recognises these discourses, but does not impose them on local experiences. Regarding this project, the narratives of this chapter are distinct, unified only by the fact that the participants are historically grouped within the same demographic. The only 'traditional' unifying factor within the narratives themselves, however, is the shared same-sex sexual attraction of the participants. Beyond that, experiences of space and institution are vastly different. Reading these narratives within a framework of gayness necessarily politicises their sexual identities within a Western paradigm, emphasising a commonality rooted in history and structural exposure and support. The narratives, however, reflect no such commonality. Instead, the similarities that DJ, Ken, Patrick, Daniel, and Scott share are rooted in a broader scope of ethical concern based on experiences within spaces of ambiguity and uncertainty. The simultaneous connection to a culture and history of 'gayness' (through mediated representations) and a lived experience drastically different from these representations generates a distinctly pomosexual form of existence: their experiences are pluralistic, and their conscious depoliticisation of 'gay' speaks instead towards a politicisation of values. Patrick emphasises that rights should be based on shared humanity, not sexuality; DJ and Ken recognise that any understanding of 'gay rights' is fundamentally an understanding of human rights; Daniel emphasises that he is "a person first, with personality, morals and values" (2011) before he is called gay; and Scott strongly emphasises that sexuality is just a form of free expression, and thus encompassed by broader human rights. These views all represent a shift away from an understanding of 'gay liberation'. Far from arguing for bringing about legal reform through the politicisation of a sexual identity, the narratives argue for social change in the form of support structures rooted in human connections and equal human rights. These, as Patrick notes, are not

separable "gay rights". In reflecting on *Yes, I am!* (Malan and Johardien, 2010), Scott's discomfort in his questioning of the editors' distinct categorisation of 'gay experiences' captures the need for a pomosexual understanding. He questions if there are "not some (if not many) experiences that traverse these different categories? Are issues of sex, love and hate really that separable?" (Scott: 2011). This indicates an intrinsic anxiety around the pre-determined Western categorisation of 'gay' and 'gay experiences', as they do not speak to his personal trajectory of individual self-determination within a context of removed-yet-immersed sexual understanding. The mapping of all preconceived possibilities is at odds with South African existence, where the existing legal structures and the lack of reinforcement by social attitudes and ideological spaces speak more towards the "unmapped possibility" (Queen and Schimel, 1997:23) of everyday experiences.

These unmapped possibilities are at the centre of the lacuna in representation: the assumption of known identity development has led to a mistaken belief that the experiences of men within the chosen demographic are adequately represented in popular media texts. However, these texts speak to the mapped possibility of a transnational, commodified quasi-gay identity – which can never be fully 'achieved' based on the limitations of context. A pomosexual approach and framework are thus needed to move away from this metanarrative of gayness and to take a step towards the very real, emotional, and lived individual processes of navigating a liminal space of unmapped possibility. Working within this perspective, one can begin to move away from an overreliance on an American perspective of 'coming-out as a step towards integration' and work towards an appreciation of 'coming-out as a step towards acknowledging a politicisation of values'. The following aspects of interpretation are necessary in order to achieve this appreciation: an acknowledgement of pluralistic experiences within spaces of uncertainty; a recognition of individualistic development rooted in unmapped possibilities, including in the liminal exposure to and exclusion from mediated points of connection; an appreciation of self-conscious discomfort with the politicisation of sexuality at the intersecting point of individual experience and social expectation; and the ultimate emphasis placed on an understood daily existence favouring human rights and human connection over politicised sexual definitions.

It has not been my intention in this chapter to thoroughly psychoanalyse each of the participants. As stated at the onset, a major part of this project has been to generate some degree of authentic, local visibility for a demographic that is often dismissed as essentialised and over-represented. These artefacts of representation take the form of the participants' narratives. Consequently, the discussion of these narratives serves primarily as a starting point for understanding local experiences beyond the framework of 'gayness'. Ideally, this perspective could

be applied to any future compilations, whereby as opposed to focusing on a set of misguided and misleading 'unifying' experiences such as those laid out in *Yes, I am!*, a collection could focus on an ethic of human connection and a politicisation of values rather than an attempted politicisation of sexual identity in a climate that offers no legal end-point (or starting-point) for such an imagined movement.

Chapter Five: Concluding Remarks

[I]n order to claim one's rights to equality, a queer person has to come 'out of the closet' – that is, disclose one's identity. Therefore the struggle for enabling conditions which will make life liveable for queers is increased cultural visibility [...]. The values of respect, equality and diversity professed in the Constitution and bandied about in the name of *ubuntu* are not part of South Africans' popular imagination. Unless our constitutional rights are upheld in everyday life [...] marginalisation and Othering will prevent people from feeling free to express their identities.

Mikki van Zyl (2009: 377-8)

This project as a whole has achieved four distinct goals. These goals have been shaped by the recognition that the demographic focused on has been regarded by many authors as over-represented, and a reductive symbol of the multitude of sexualities that exist in South Africa. The basis for research was the recognition, based in auto-ethnographic experience, that there is a lacuna in identifiable, relevant representation, and the goals sought to address this.

Firstly, this project has argued that 'gay' is not a neutral term used 'simply' to describe same-sex sexual attraction. I have argued that the discourse of gayness has a strong Western history, steeped in complex competing discourses of homosexuality. I have shown that 'gay identity' is constructed and understood within a very specific set of sociological circumstances, fundamentally linked to the idea of 'coming out' whilst being immersed in a broad culture of ideological support and a social struggle for legal rights. The use of 'gay', therefore, necessarily invokes these discourses, and immediately imposes a politics of identity.

Secondly, this project has shown that the current South African context is a crucible of historical, social, economic, cultural, and political discourses which delicately attempt to blur a historical focus on white, male 'homosexuality' with a contemporary imposed demographic. It has shown that the assumption of representation for this demographic is rooted in the cultural importation of a marker of 'gayness', facilitated by commercialised sources of commodified identity. Contemporary representations, specifically the *Mr Gay South Africa* competition, not only perpetuate a sense of racial division, but also perpetuate the mistaken assumption that these

representations adequately speak to the lived experiences of members of this demographic. They similarly perpetuate the assumption that no further representation is necessary – that is, they contribute to the lacuna in representations of real, immersed cultural experience.

The third achievement of this project has been the start of 'gauzing' this lacuna. By compiling five distinct personal narratives, the project has started a shift away from mediated, commercial representations to texts which speak to the anxieties and triumphs of everyday life for members of this demographic. In doing this, the project has also drawn attention to the instability of the assumption that this group is homogenous, due to the vastly different experiences of the participants.

The final, yet overarching, achievement of this project has been the offering of a framework of interpretation that allows for both local and international recognition, but draws attention away from the misplaced emphasis on over-representation. In offering a perspective and understanding of pomosexuality in relation to the narratives (that is, reading them as pomo instead of homo), this project has immersed itself in a contemporary desire to draw attention to what is needed in the fields of representation and cultural empathy. This framework is a step away from the imported discourses of gayness in that it recognises three key factors relevant to the contemporary South African context: 1) that there is an overreliance on the strategy of 'coming out', in that it places an emphasis on a connection to a Western sense of gayness; 2) that local experiences are individual navigations of unmapped liminal spaces, largely unsupported by official structures; and 3) that the stage of personal reconciliation in a local context is rooted in a self-aware desire for a *human* connection, not a 'gay connection'. This framework helps appreciate the emotional lived experiences of members of this demographic, reflected by the narratives of the participants, and offers the potential to gauze the lacuna further in the future.

Beyond recognising lived experiences, however, a pomosexual framework has the potential to draw attention to the severe lack of resources of support. Certainly this is not to suggest that this demographic should take priority preference over all concerns in the country. Rather, the framework illustrates the challenges and difficulties that people face in existing in this liminal space, and will hopefully be a useful aid in generating potential artefacts to guide and support young people. Educative tools – whether those include novels, support websites, hotlines, or organisations – can potentially move away from reinforcing a dichotomy of gay/straight, male/female, which, in my personal experience, only serves to entrench a further fear of oneself. In reference to the epigraph at the start of this conclusion, if one regards the *Mr Gay South Africa* competition as an indication of the current trajectory of representation, one can begin to

understand that a current struggle for visibility is bound by an ideology of assimilation. Current cultural artefacts – including media and literary representations – work within an existing perspective of Western gayness, which perpetuates a cycle of homonormative 'visibility'. The cultural texts which are available to the demographic of this project continue to be interpreted and understood within an approach of gayness, which ultimately works *against* goals of representation and visibility. They reinforce an assumption of belonging, based on an assumed history of over-representation and structural support. A struggle against marginalisation, however, can only come with a local understanding that reaches beyond the imposition of a global framework.

The only way to truly achieve belonging and visibility, then, is by shifting our understanding and perspective. In this light, a pomosexual approach to representation emphasises an ethic of human similarity beyond the confines of an imposed demographic. Whilst lived experiences may differ, within a pomosexual approach one may generate a sense of tangible *human* connection, rather than a vague identification with a distanced culture rooted in a politics of identity that has no relevance to one's own context. It is my hope that this project will be a first step in recognising these factors, and a step towards ending the feelings of isolation and hopelessness that I certainly felt when I was searching for identifiable representations of what it 'meant' to be me. To refer back to the sentiment that DJ expressed in the epigraph of Chapter Four, being 'gay' is a gift – and it is my hope that this project and this framework will begin to help young people realise that they are indeed *gifted*.

Appendix 1: Mr Gay South Africa Finalists

Source: GaySpeak 2009a Online



Karel Petzer

Wild Card



Nate de Vries

Runner-up: Gauteng / Northern Provinces



Tyrone Roberts

Winner: Kwa-Zulu Natal



Dale Joseph

Wild Card



Jacques Snyman

Runner-up: Western & Northern Cape



Shahin Eskandar

Winner: Western & Northern Cape



Iggi Mnisi

Runner-up: Gauteng / Northern Provinces



Leo Jan de Beer

Runner-up: Eastern Cape



Gavin Deale

Runner-up: Kwa-Zulu Natal



Chris Macgregor

Winner: Eastern Cape



Tyrone Nell

Runner-up: Eastern Cape



Charl vd Berg

Runner-up: Western & Northern Cape



Jan du Toit

Winner: Free State



Jacques Krause

Runner-up: Free State



DuPreez Strauss

Runner-up: Gauteng / Northern Provinces



Jose Rodrigues

Winner: Gauteng / Northern Provinces

Appendix 2: Informed Consent Document

Dear Participant

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. Your involvement forms part of my Masters dissertation for English Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The title of my research is “*From Homo to Pomo: ‘gay identity’ amongst young white men in contemporary South Africa*”. My research aims at understanding what it ‘means’ to be a young, white, urban, South African gay man. I have found that there are no local novels that deal with your demographic: the only form of representation you have comes in the form of Anglo-American films and internationally-based magazines. As such, I aim to understand what the label of ‘gay’ means to this demographic, and whether ‘gay’ is a suitable identity label for you. I also aim to explore the pressures that you face/have faced from your family and school in relation to being ‘gay’. I want to do this because I have found that there are several international novels available that offer help and support through their stories, and feel that there is a necessity for a South African equivalent.

All you will be required to do is fill in a questionnaire to answer a few simple questions on yourself. Your answers will form a “personal narrative”. In my research I will treat this as an individual text – a story that has merit and represents a member of our society. You will be given a pseudonym, so only I will know who you truly are. Your answers will then be used to relate the key novels and film of my study to a ‘real’ South African experience. Your identity will remain strictly confidential, and your responses will be typed up and included as appendices in my work. You will be able to have the questionnaire for two weeks so that you can take time to think about your answers and respond in your own time.

You will not be obliged to answer the questions in any more detail that you are comfortable with. If you choose to refuse to participate, then you will not be at any disadvantage. Similarly, choosing to withdraw at any point during the research will not leave you disadvantaged in any way. You will not be expected to justify or explain your reasons for withdrawal.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me or my Supervisor.

Thank you for your time!

Matthew Beetar

Consent for Research Project:

I.....(full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

.....

Appendix 3: Questionnaire

Questionnaire: “From Homo to Pomo: gay identity’ amongst young white men in contemporary South Africa”

Please answer these questions on a separate page in as much detail as you are comfortable with.

Don’t rush your responses – take time to think about the questions.

- 1) What is your definition of ‘gay’? What does it *mean* to be gay?

- 2) Your personal labels:
 - a. What labels would you personally apply to describe your sexual identity (for example: gay, straight, bi, pan, omni, queer etc)?
 - b. What is your definition of this/these label/s that you use?
 - c. Are you aware of any stereotypes around the label ‘gay’? Are you comfortable with the label gay?

- 3) How did you come to realise your identity? That is, how did you come to associate yourself with this label? (For example, was it a ‘lightbulb’ moment? Did someone call you a name at school? Was it a slow process? Did you read about it? Did you relate to a film you saw?) Please expand here – write about your moment of recognition.

- 4) Would you describe yourself as ‘out’? Who knows about your attraction to the same sex?

- 5) People refer to your demographic, in part, as ‘gay’. In relation to ‘gay’ identity, what were your experiences at **school**? (For example: were you ‘out’ at school? Were you teased at school? If you were teased, how so? Was your school tolerant of sexuality difference? Were you supported at school?)

- 6) People refer to your demographic, in part, as ‘gay’. In relation to ‘gay’ identity, what have been your experiences with **family**? (For example: do your family know that you are ‘gay’? How do different members feel about ‘homosexuality’? What have been some reactions to gay people or ‘gay culture’? Are you supported by your family?)

- 7) Do you feel a sense of connection to other gay people? Do you feel a part of a ‘gay culture’? Do you feel a part of a South African gay community? Please elaborate.

- 8) Rights:
- a. How have you been/are you educated about issues facing 'gay' people? Are you aware of gay rights organisations and movements around South Africa and the world?
 - b. How important are *gay* rights to you? As far as rights in general go, is it important to emphasise gay rights?
- 9) Representation:
- a. What forms of representations of young, white, gay, urban South African men have been available to you? (For example: magazines, SA novels, films that you have been exposed to) Are these easily accessible?
 - b. What/who educated you on what it 'means' to be gay?
 - c. Do you feel that you have needed support or information in the past in relation to issues of being gay?
 - d. Do you feel that there should be more support for your demographic? How could this be provided?
- 10) You have been exposed to one of my key texts – *Rainbow Boys*, *Yes I Am!*, *Moffie*, or the *Mr Gay SA* pageant. Write your response to this/these texts. Explore what stood out for you and why, especially regarding issues of 'gay identity' and belonging. How did this/these texts make you feel?

Appendix 4: DJ

What is your definition of 'gay'? What does it *mean* to be gay?

Gay for me is a synonym for homosexual. Gay means you find the same sex attractive. I mostly use it to refer to gay men but it can also be used to refer to lesbians too. Those are the facts which is why I am confused by people who identify as MSM (men who have sex with men) as that is the same thing as gay to me. I do suppose I associate the term gay with connotations of effemininity, promiscuity and artist ability (which are often refuted in my daily experience though).

What labels would you personally apply to describe your sexual identity (for example: gay, straight, bi, pan, omni, queer etc)? What is your definition of this/these label/s that you use?

Gay and perhaps queer if I wanted to sound intellectually advanced or mysterious (but more in an overseas context). South Africa doesn't seem to grasp the complex fluidity of such a term yet.

Gay explains and embodies who I am. I find other men attractive and act on that. Queer is more of an intellectually fluid term based in queer theory.

Are you aware of any stereotypes around the label 'gay'? Are you comfortable with the label gay?

I am very aware of the gay stereotypes. Bitchy queens, muscle maries, butch, fems, bottoms, tops...

I am extremely comfortable with the gay stereotype as I am one of THOSE gays. I am a loud, pretty, musical loving, ballet dancing, drag dressing, make-up wearing, fashion obsessed boy. Obviously that is not all I am and despite my obvious feminine nature I too can be masculine. This is where the limited perception of the label gay becomes a problem both for the gay community and the general public who want to put you in a box and keep you there. I believe in a more fluid expression of gender and sexuality which is non-conforming. One day I want to wear a dress and make up and the next I want to play rugby and have stubble; and I do. People have difficulty comprehending this. Just because I am gay doesn't make me a women or less of a man. The general public does not seem to grasp that which is a source of immense frustration. This frustration has lead me to become an avid educator of what it means to be gay through my general existence and my blog which uses visuals and humour to "edutain" people about gay issues and queer topics they would not normally be exposed to.

How did you come to realise your identity? That is, how did you come to associate yourself with this label? (For example, was it a 'lightbulb' moment? Did someone call you a name at school? Was it a slow process? Did you read about it? Did you relate to a film you saw?)

Since about 5 years old I have realized my gender and sexual attraction (I had my first same sex experience at about 5 of which I still remember clearly was an anomaly). I even have a home video of myself dancing on the back of my couch, throwing my legs up in the air to Tina Turner's "simply the best" and modeling around the pool with a fierce hand on hip... at the ripe age of 5 years old. I have known I was different from a young age but I wasn't always this flippant about being gay, in fact a short while ago it was quite the opposite.

I figured out I was different from a young age, as I become older I realised there was a label and connotations associated with these feelings... the word GAY and it was not positive.

Will and grace was the first TV show I ever saw that put a spot light on gay people without condemning them as mentally ill or demon possessed. I related completely to the show and loved it passionately but i had to secretly watch it when ever I could as my parents refused to let me as it had gays in it. Obviously seeing homosexuality as something extremely evil and destructive.

Although I was never in denial about my homosexual feelings of desire I hoped and prayed they would go away or I would grow into the same feelings about women and masculinity. I finally realised that these feelings were never going to change at the end of high school/beginning of university which culminated in a watershed moment in my late teens when I watched (secretly again) the mini series Angles in America which moved me so profoundly I was obsessed with one of the character who refused to acknowledge his homosexuality because of his religion and the destructive nature of this denial. I saw myself and a possible future in the character and it frightened me out of the haze of denial into a clarity where I saw an open an honest lifestyle as the only one where my soul would survive. I already knew I was a homosexual (I had known this since I was a child and every time a fantasised about another man) but only now realised I needed to live a gay lifestyle to be happy but also that I would wait for the right time to come out. Which was university and moving out of home

The following two things made me ready to come out to my parents and the world.

In the period where I was coming out to my friends and growing ever more open and honest about my sexuality I was also researching as much about it as I could. What is homosexuality? What is it caused by? etc The documentary film: The Bible Tells Me So illustrated to me so perfectly the reconciliation of Christianity and homosexuality that it filled me with the ammunition to rebut my parents' arguments on homosexuality.

At UCT I saw people like me, living life exactly as they were uninhibited by societies expectations. This is all I needed, a safe haven to run to incase I lost everything. As soon as I had that support through the LGBTI society at UCT I told my family at 21.

It was people living a happy gay lifestyle whether on the tv or at uni that I thought was not possible that jolted me out of my never end of hoping-to-be-straight and made my embrace my homosexuality that I had been so clearly aware of since I was a child. Once I realized I would never change, I was able to embrace these feelings and I was able to say “ I am gay” which I avoided as much as possible when I first came out.

Would you describe yourself as ‘out’? Who knows about your attraction to the same sex?

Yes I am out and everyone I know knows I am gay. I am very public about my sexuality.

People refer to your demographic, in part, as ‘gay’. In relation to ‘gay’ identity, what were your experiences at school? (For example: were you ‘out’ at school? Were you teased at school? If you were teased, how so? Was your school tolerant of sexuality difference? Were you supported at school?)

I have been called gay since before I even knew what that meant. I have been severely bullied since I was in pre-primary school, throughout primary school and into High School ... Hell EVEN at university and on the streets I still face a couple of bigots.

At school I was ostracised from the boys for not being typically masculine. I was significantly prettier than most boys; I had an extremely high voice and loved activities that were considered feminine or for girls, like playing in the dolls corner and dressing up. I was relentlessly teased for being a “moffie” and called a “faggot”, even being subjected to violence by peers.

Faggot, moffie, gay, queer, girlie... I have been called them all. I recall the scariest incident being in Gr 2 and these rather large Gr 7 boys thought it would be funny to chase me home after school while throwing stones at me, shouting faggot. I avoided serious injuring due to my smart hiding techniques but the emotional damage was just as severe.

I have faced violence. I have faced intimidation, all of which led to serious contemplation of suicide. Luckily that never became a reality for me but it so easily could have.

Although I was the typical effeminate campy drama kid I was not openly gay at school until university. Both my primary and high school were traditionally Christian making them very

intolerant to anything out of the norm... me. Looking back there were clearly gay teachers but they were not out or open about their sexuality and never offered me support or advice.

I stopped asking the teachers for help after realising they never did much. They didn't seem to care or were more uncomfortable with the subject than I was. I remember seeing this student teacher, who I absolutely adored, in the shops one day and as kids do, I run up to her enthusiastically and gave her a big hug. She was with her friend at the time and referring to me said something in Afrikaans that I didn't understand. She said: "Dis is die klas meisie kind." Needless to say she underestimated my intelligence and thought I wouldn't pick up on the social cues. I memorised what she said and asked my Afrikaans friend to translate. I never liked her after that.

BUT it does get easier and easier to withstand. It made me stronger and smarter. I became an overachiever in an attempt to shadow my feminine nature so I could rather be known as the smart kid. Alas, I just ended up being known as the smart, gay kid. I became a model citizen. A Sunday school teacher and straight (homophobic fucks)-A student but that was never enough to erase the gay.

I was never part of the group as a young child and as a positive side effect I become a leader which continued into university where I have made a name for my self as a student leader on campus, being elected onto the SRC and Chairperson of RainbowUCT (UCT's LGBTI society) amongst other positions. It seems I wasn't the only one. UCT's student leaders are disproportionally populated with gay leaders.

In relation to 'gay' identity, what have been your experiences with family? (For example: do your family know that you are 'gay'? How do different members feel about 'homosexuality'? What have been some reactions to gay people or 'gay culture'? Are you supported by your family?)

My family and I were part of the Happy Clappy Christian Clan and as you can imagine gay and Christian are not two words you use comfortably in the same sentence. I was guilt ridden about my desires and condemned as a sinner. I harboured serious self hatred as I knew my families opinions of gay people and homosexuality. That is was a sin and god didn't make gay people and that they were filled with demons and going to hell.

The behaviour of my parents and peers and their reaction to my unique behaviour for a boy made me increasing aware that I wasn't "normal" and very aware of what was considered normal for a boy to act like by observing my father and other idealised boys. Instead of becoming introverted or

conforming to the masculine stereotype others expected of me, I rebelled. I became an extrovert that flaunted my difference, although it took many more years to accept that I wasn't inferior for being different. This inferiority complex propelled me to prove my masculinity. I, as a result, became a chronic-overachiever and leader despite the fact that others viewed my effeminate nature as weak.

I never told my parents that I faced intense teasing everyday for almost my entire school career as I didn't want them to worry or see me as weak, let alone ask probing questions that I wasn't ready to answer. It was lonely as I never really shared this with my parents as I was ashamed of not being ideal or normal; I did not want to disappoint them or cause them shame; or run the risk of them trying to "fix" me. Although I had these feelings of inadequacy, I never forced myself to become something I wasn't, even though I was tempted to force change for social acceptance. It would have been much easier for me to pretend I loved sports and liked cars instead of dance and dolls, but I knew that I couldn't change this innate characteristic. I often wished to become a girl so I could be accepted for who I was, rather than change who I was on the inside to suit my exterior. To cope, I became a very good actor and judge of social situations. I learnt to adapt to fit in and survive. I had many girls who were friends and forced myself to play sport in an attempt to find acceptance from the other boys. This did help slightly although proved to be very difficult for me. I learnt what society expected of me but I didn't necessarily obey them. I found loop holes and grey areas which were safe havens in my day to day interactions.

I suppose my story is quite different to most. Even though my family life was very typical I presented as would society would consider not entirely gender conforming. Despite this, I was fully- if not more- aware, of what society considered the "norm" or "ideal" masculine or feminine behaviour. I learnt this from my family and peers in my household and at school. This knowledge confused and frightened me because I didn't fit into either one completely. My parents never celebrated my difference neither did they acknowledge it in front of me. I never considered them to have pressurised me more than other parents to play sport or act more "manly". This pressure, in my opinion, came mostly from the media, religion and peers and it was this pressure that was the reason it took me 21 years to come out to my family as a homosexual.

I came out to my parents, after I had moved out of home, over SMS. My mom sent me a sms saying "Your aunt thinks you're gay because of your facebook". Well I was planning on telling them the next week when I was going to visit them in Joburg so I just replied: "She is right. I am gay".

Well my parents were horrified at first, saying I was being lied to by Satan and needed to see the truth but I was ready with films and reading material to answer all their questions about religion and sexuality. They were ignorant about what it meant to be gay. They thought I would change and become an HIV positive hairdresser. After a while (6 months) of seeing I was still the same they started to realize it wasn't the end of the world. Our relationship is now better than ever as I can share my life with them and their understanding of what it means to be gay is only ever increasing. It was tough at first as they didn't understand me but I am working hard to change that. My dad now jokes that I need to get my butt into gear and get a boyfriend.

All their horrible opinions of gay people were based on ignorance, religion and the homophobic fabric of society. With a little reading and movie watching that is transforming drastically. Any thing gay still makes them feel uncomfortable but I make an effort to talk about gay issues and rights. I made my parents attend a PFLAG meeting held in Joburg too which showed them there are happy and healthy families with gay members out there. It was a guest event but I wish there were more PFLAG events in SA.

Do you feel a sense of connection to other gay people? Do you feel a part of a 'gay culture'? Do you feel a part of a South African gay community?

ABSOLUTELY! The more I explored gay film, literature and the gay community the more I realised this was where I feel that most at home. I have finally found a place I belong. I related strongly to other gay people and feel like that even understood me and my personal journey far more than any straight person. I see the gay community as my brothers and sisters; my family.

I feel very much part of a gay culture! Not so much a SA gay culture. It seems to be more of a generic international gay culture as I feel the kinship with international gay people as well.

How have you been/are you educated about issues facing 'gay' people? Are you aware of gay rights organisations and movements around South Africa and the world?

I make sure I stay abreast of gay news both locally and international via the internet through popular pink news sites. I am aware of all the SA organisations and movements as I was very involved as an activist for gay equality in SA as a member of the Joint Working Group representing RainbowUCT when I was the chairperson in 2010. I am always interested in knowing more about the gay community in SA and abroad as I believe it directly affects me.

How important are *gay* rights to you? As far as rights in general go, is it important to emphasise *gay* rights?

Gay rights are PIVOTAL to my freedom and recognition as an equal and thus my existence. I am fervently passionate about the fight for gay rights and human rights in general because of this. As a gay man, the fight for gay rights has given me insight into the importance of human rights. Thus gay rights are number 1 priority but I will fight for any minority's equality as gay rights are just one of the many human rights.

What forms of representations of young, white, gay, urban South African men have been available to you? (For example: magazines, SA novels, films that you have been exposed to) Are these easily accessible?

Mambaonline is my safe haven and showed me what South Africa has to offer. Mamba and SA gay newspapers, Exit and The Pink Tongue, are the most instrumental in exposing me to SA's white gay community. Skoonheid is the only South African gay film I have seen that dealt with a white person. These are sometime very difficult to get hold of as there are no online versions and are at different locations at different times. Its by chance that you see these publications and pick them up I find. I have not read any SA novels on gay issues.

What/who educated you on what it 'means' to be gay?

I would probably have to say TV and anything I could get my hand on via the internet. But I don't think any thing or body taught me to be gay. I am just myself and I realised that fitted in with what everyone else perceived as gay. When I first came out I read and watched anything and everything on the topic of being gay.

Do you feel that you have needed support or information in the past in relation to issues of being gay?

YES! I wanted answered to all my questions. Why am I gay? What does religion say? What doesn't science say? Is there a gay history? How do you have gay sex? Am I normal? I had all these questions and no one I could go to to answer them.

Do you feel that there should be more support for your demographic? How could this be provided?

YES! For young people coming to terms with their sexuality. There are hardly any out and proud gay role models in society and so there is no one to answer the deluge of questions young gay

people have. The little support and resources available are not widely known about. So young people turn to the only gay thing they know about, gay clubs. The LGBTI health and informant centre should be the lighthouse of the gay community not the bathroom stalls. Gay issues and rights should be talked about in school and there should be a gay friendly staff member who is publically known as a person who is open to talk about sexuality and answer any questions provided. Or have an online version of all the answer to all the gay questions you ever had.

You have been exposed to one of my key texts – The *Rainbow* trilogy, *Yes I Am!*, *Moffie*, or the *Mr Gay SA* pageant. Write your response to this/these texts. Explore what stood out for you and why, especially regarding issues of ‘gay identity’ and belonging. How did this/these texts make you feel?

I was astounded by your Mr Gay SA pageant presentation. It seemed to articulate my thoughts and feelings on many gay issues I have had been contemplating. I was incredibly happy to realise I wasn't the only gay in South Africa interested in these queer issues and what they mean for me and the community.

What stood out for me most was the gay community's idolisation of traditional masculinity and the subsequent lack of intellectual queer awareness of gay men. I am closer to the "fat and fem" category of gay men than I am to a "muscle mary" so I am very aware of the gay hierarchy. Muscular butch men are seen as the most desirable and the feminine over weight men are the untouchables. Somewhat embodied in the contestants of the Mr Gay SA pageant.

Many gay men seem to be on an endless pursuit to find the next hottest thing and are unconcerned about love and romance. They spend their life working on their body and not their character. I mean don't get my wrong, I love muscles as much, if not more, than the next gay person but they are not all I look for in a potential mate. The "cool gay kids" seem to be the most traditionally masculine. This seems to be a result of some sort of internalized homophobia and fear of the feminine. It saddens me that we seem to have hetronormative homosexuals. Being gay is a gift, being gay may have been very difficult growing up but I was able to see the world from the outside in; to analyse societies default settings about gender and sexuality and live independently of these traditional expectations. This doesn't seem to be the case with all gay men. They may even be perpetuating the same cycle they are a victim of.

The South African Gay community seem to be a victim of apartheid too. Where black men are not seen as sexually desirable and mixed race relationship and hook up frowned upon. Which I have noticed is contrary to overseas where black men are seen as the object of affection. You would think that gay men who has faced prejudice for an innate quality would see the irony of racism, but alas many do not. This seems to be reflected in the disproportionate number of white contestants in Mr Gay SA and the past winners. They are not representative of SA in demographic or class.

Your Mr Gay SA insights seem to bring this paradox to light in a concrete way. We have a long way to go as a gay community and I hope more people would be interested in queer theory rather just clubbing topless, maybe then we would be able to work together to formulate a new tolerant inclusive society.

Appendix 5: Scott

What is your definition of 'gay'? What does it *mean* to be gay?

The term 'gay', insofar as it has personal (and not political) significance, refers to guys that are exclusively sexually (and emotionally?) attracted to other guys. The word gay then implies only a sexual desire by men for men.

What labels would you personally apply to describe your sexual identity (for example: gay, straight, bi, pan, omni, queer etc)? What is your definition of this/these label/s that you use?

Gay. I use the term simply to refer to the fact that I am sexually attracted to (only) men and that this attraction sometimes manifests in sex between us. Equally, the term allows for intimate emotional depth and relationships between men.

Are you aware of any stereotypes around the label 'gay'? Are you comfortable with the label gay?

The term has a loaded political history that is simultaneously though paradoxically both inclusive and exclusionary. While the term provides an important space for collective mobilisation and identification, it is also heavily loaded and suggests a number of signifiers that disproportionately displace one's same-sex sexual desire. For example, I find it problematic that the term implies a range of characteristics to which I do not conform. I have been called a "bad gay" by gay male friends for ignorance about inane popular culture references, a lack of interest in fashion, and a general reluctance to engage in promiscuous behaviour while dating someone (open-relationships, cheating). I therefore use the term gay to refer exclusively to my sexual interest in other men and not as a marker of incorporation into some sort of sexual minority culture. Though I insist the term is problematic (as it enforces codes of behaviour in which I have no interest), I also recognise that there are no other terms with which I feel comfortable or better describe my same-sex sexual interest. The term queer, for example, demands a certain political militancy that does not align with my political ontology. This is problematic for me as I am resistant to and sceptical of idea of single-cell identities (whether it is women who define themselves primarily and exclusively as feminists, black consciousness activists who define themselves foremost and fundamentally in racial terms or indeed sexual dissidents who convert the gender of the person that they are attracted to into their defining characteristic and identity-marker) which is embedded within the term queer.

How did you come to realise your identity? That is, how did you come to associate yourself with this label? (For example, was it a 'lightbulb' moment? Did someone call you a name at school? Was it a slow process? Did you read about it? Did you relate to a film you saw?)

In primary school there were certain boys in whom I was particularly interested. As I developed sexually and started having sexual fantasies, the male characters in my fantasies started featuring more and more than the girls (who were present there as a matter of heteronormative childhood development) until the characters in sexual fantasies became exclusively male. It was only at the age of 13 when I met an openly gay guy and as a result of increasing cultural representations and visibility (Will & Grace, Will Young) that I engaged with the identity marker gay.

Would you describe yourself as 'out'? Who knows about your attraction to the same sex?

100% open about my sexuality (family, friends, work, organisational affiliations)

People refer to your demographic, in part, as 'gay'. In relation to 'gay' identity, what were your experiences at school? (For example: were you 'out' at school? Were you teased at school? If you were teased, how so? Was your school tolerant of sexuality difference? Were you supported at school?)

I came out to some family members when I was 14 (and I recall that I definitely used the term 'gay' in this coming out) and then I came out to my school class in Grade 10 when I was 15 during a Life Skills debate. This information spread rapidly through the school and so I was then out. The school provided me with a session to talk about my feelings and then invited to put together a life skills course on coming out and alternative sexualities. I was not actively teased by other pupils, barring the (somewhat devastating though understated) fact that the rugby jocks wouldn't change into their swimming speedos in front of me during PE anymore. Eventually, the student body voted me in as a head prefect. I note this here because it is an important symbolic gesture about the extent of their acceptance and open-mindedness.

In relation to 'gay' identity, what have been your experiences with family? (For example: do your family know that you are 'gay'? How do different members feel about 'homosexuality'? What have been some reactions to gay people or 'gay culture'? Are you supported by your family?)

Everyone in my family knows. While there were a few that I had not told explicitly, they realised it quickly enough when I brought my long-term boyfriend to family functions. While I have never spoken to my father about it directly or used the term gay or even discussed my sexuality, the

openness of his response can be interpreted by the respectful, inclusive and friendly way that he has engaged with my boyfriend.

Do you feel a sense of connection to other gay people? Do you feel a part of a 'gay culture'? Do you feel a part of a South African gay community?

Despite my resistance to my sexuality becoming a site of minority cultural cohesion and identification, an increasing number of my friends are gay and I have, on occasion, gone to gay clubs. While one instance of this was driven by pure sexual need during a period in which I was single, the few other occasions that I have gone have been with my boyfriend.

How have you been/are you educated about issues facing 'gay' people? Are you aware of gay rights organisations and movements around South Africa and the world?

Sexuality and gender issues are my primary research interest and I monitor international and domestic human rights developments closely. Other than the horrific instances of corrective rape of predominantly black lesbians, sexuality is decreasingly becoming a legitimate site of struggle in South Africa. I am concerned nonetheless by the failure of gay white men to mobilise around the issue of corrective rape more radically.

How important are *gay* rights to you? As far as rights in general go, is it important to emphasise gay rights?

Sexuality should be a space for human rights activism insofar as its free expression is being compromised. In much the same way that poverty, rape, police brutality, lack of healthcare or decent education should be considered human rights issues, so too should efforts to advance people's rights to have (consensual, adult) sex with whomever they like. This right should be considered as importantly as other fundamental rights relating to physiological needs but should not become a separatist political movement that ignores the broader context of the struggle. I am particularly concerned by the way in which western human rights organisations have hijacked this movement in Africa. Encoding the rights for sexual freedom within a discourse of sexual identities has created opposition to same-sex sexualities where previously such resistance had been negligible.

What forms of representations of young, white, gay, urban South African men have been available to you? (For example: magazines, SA novels, films that you have been exposed to) Are these easily accessible?

Media publications (Exit, Gay Pages), fiction (*Ice in the Lungs*, *Moffie*, *Kings of the Water*)

What/who educated you on what it 'means' to be gay?

The meaning of being gay is produced and enforced by predominantly American popular culture. For me, the most obvious example of this is *Will and Grace*.

Do you feel that you have needed support or information in the past in relation to issues of being gay?

Access to the internet has provided me with constant access to information, ranging from sexual identities and political insights to sexual health concerns and even interesting new sex positions.

Do you feel that there should be more support for your demographic? How could this be provided?

I think that there should be more support for young men who are sexually attracted to other men but do not want to identify as gay (because of the stigma and general concerns over the identity). Recently, a young man that I was helping come to terms with his sexuality was horrified about being gay because that meant people would think he was a "faggot" and a "dancing queen". He feared that having sex with (and dating) men would exclude him from being "one of the guys" (braai, watch rugby, go to non-gay clubs, surf etc). This fear was fundamentally encoded in the term 'gay' and the connotations that people have with the word.

You have been exposed to one of my key texts – The *Rainbow* trilogy, *Yes I Am!*, *Moffie*, or the *Mr Gay SA* pageant. Write your response to this/these texts. Explore what stood out for you and why, especially regarding issues of 'gay identity' and belonging. How did this/these texts make you feel?

Yes I Am! – This is a rather disappointing book that fails to take into account the complexities of sex and relationships between men. I am particularly concerned by the way in which the collection is structured in that narratives are arranged and grouped under certain headings ("Coming Out", "Encounters", "Love", "Hate") as if the experiences of gay men can be summarily grouped. Are there not some (if not many) experiences that traverse these different categories? Are issues of sex, love and hate really that separable? Equally problematic about this text is the way in which many of these narratives are merely extracts from larger texts (Duiker, Kraak, etc). This collection thereby decontextualises these narratives and undermines the depth and complexity with which the gay experiences and characters were originally constructed by the authors.

Moffie – This is an interesting novel that goes straight to the issue of the variable intersections of gay identities and the masculinist heteronormativity of the apartheid era. While the literariness of the book is certainly questionable (given that it is in desperate need of editing, revision and restructuring), it is nonetheless a powerful exploration of a gay man's experiences in the military. It is, nonetheless, a book that I am unable to relate to as its context differs so radically from my own. Similarly, the protagonist's family and military life is something that I can only imagine and the novel is therefore not a representation of gay identities and experiences to which I can relate.

Appendix 6: Patrick

What is your definition of 'gay'? What does it *mean* to be gay?

Gay is being sexually attracted to men only. The greater picture of being gay should be individually defined and each gay man should be his own gay self, however many subscribe to the Hollywood stereotype. I think the lack of self-identity is the reason for this occurrence.

What labels would you personally apply to describe your sexual identity (for example: gay, straight, bi, pan, omni, queer etc)? What is your definition of this/these label/s that you use?

Gay. I like sleeping with men over woman. See above.

Are you aware of any stereotypes around the label 'gay'? Are you comfortable with the label gay?

I am aware of the stereotypes and they can take a hike. However, I am comfortable with being gay, don't wish to be any other way and I don't hide my sexuality.

How did you come to realise your identity? That is, how did you come to associate yourself with this label? (For example, was it a 'lightbulb' moment? Did someone call you a name at school? Was it a slow process? Did you read about it? Did you relate to a film you saw?)

It was a gradual process similar to a worm transforming into a butterfly. As my hormones started taking effect and other boys were gradually realising they likes girls I was gradually realising I liked other boys. In the early days of gay my attraction to men took on the form of idol worship. It did not take long for this idol worship to have a sexual aspect. I played sports so I had lots of access to locker room sneak peeks and hung out with the team socially hence I was involved in the general exploration amongst boys with raging hormones. I think this is where my predatory skills first started being fine tuned. The friends went on to find girlfriends but I still only wanted to play with them that's when I realised something about me was different. The experience of the male body was more fulfilling to me than that of a woman. Also, having the local dominee's daughter sit on my face to help me get it up and all I can think about is that I still have to go wash my car, pretty much drives home the point that this is not for me.

Would you describe yourself as 'out'? Who knows about your attraction to the same sex?

Yes. People who know: Parents; grandmother(last one standing); everyone in all my business endeavours; all my; friends; cousins; neighbours...

People refer to your demographic, in part, as 'gay'. In relation to 'gay' identity, what were your experiences at school? (For example: were you 'out' at school? Were you teased at school? If you were teased, how so? Was your school tolerant of sexuality difference? Were you supported at school?)

i-Not out at school.

ii-Teased the first year of high school, bully was older. The day after 9/11 hence 12 September 2001 everyone was a bit shocked by what happened the day before. It was first period and the bully bumped me on the way into class. I flipped my lid and ran up to him at full pace and jumped with both my knees into his back as he fell to the floor, I strangled him and hit his face into the floor in the same action. The teacher hated him, because he caused so much unrest in class, that she didn't really stop me and when I finally stopped she merely told me to return to my desk. That was the end of that sod and his posse.

iii-School did not prejudice against sexual preferences. A guy at school was major queen and he enjoyed the same opportunities as the rest of us.

iv-Not supported at school as I "was not gay then".

In relation to 'gay' identity, what have been your experiences with family? (For example: do your family know that you are 'gay'? How do different members feel about 'homosexuality'? What have been some reactions to gay people or 'gay culture'? Are you supported by your family?)

i-My family don't really seem to care except for my one uncle who is very outspoken about being gay, but I think he is a raging homo himself. I don't pay much attention to his BS anymore as I live my life with a free spirit and can love whomever I want. I don't have to hide my true self. (Do I need to mention he is not on my Hanukah mailing list and I am not on his Christmas mailing list?) Besides him most of the family cannot wait to meet a boyfriend, which is not happening anytime soon, but that is a whole 'nother questionnaire.

ii-I hate gay culture. It's based in fake pretence and weak characters with sharp mouths trying to over compensate for insecurities. Gay people who have their lives together and live, speak and know who they truly are can be lots of fun and are always welcome at my door, and if there is chemistry, to my bed chamber

iii-I have never really sought support from my family regarding my sexuality, even when I came out I pretty much told them this is the deal and they piss off or accept it. But my parents are cool with it and my mother thinks I should stop being a playboy and find myself a good man, again, a whole 'nother questionnaire!

Do you feel a sense of connection to other gay people? Do you feel a part of a 'gay culture'? Do you feel a part of a South African gay community?

No. NO! No. I connect with people on things of life, not based on sexuality. If they happened to share same sexual orientation then cool but generally I don't connect with gay people because I don't keep my mouth shut to bullshit. I don't feel part of gay culture as I don't participate in anything which would be considered "gay scene", besides sleeping with men. Gay SA is a characterless humdrum of self important queens who seek affirmation from other men to feed their egos to justify in their minds that their insecurities are unfounded. We are too isolated and removed from a geographical perspective to truly develop any Mzansi Gay community. Much like Australia and America is isolated from influence other than their own.

How have you been/are you educated about issues facing 'gay' people? Are you aware of gay rights organisations and movements around South Africa and the world?

I am not educated about issues facing gays in SA. Am also not aware of gay organisation or movements in SA or the world beside Falcon Studios.

How important are *gay* rights to you? As far as rights in general go, is it important to emphasise gay rights?

Gay rights should not be called "gay rights" but just the same rights for all. There should be no distinguishing between gay and straight rights.

What forms of representations of young, white, gay, urban South African men have been available to you? (For example: magazines, SA novels, films that you have been exposed to) Are these easily accessible?

The internet is my main connection to other urban gays. Access to gay mags, novels and films is limited.

What/who educated you on what it 'means' to be gay?

I learned what it means to be gay from the same source as straight people learn what it means to be straight, the school of life. Each person should interpret what gay means to them in their own way which ties in with my comment in point 1. Hence my deep disdain for wanting to brand all gay men as “them gays”.

Do you feel that you have needed support or information in the past in relation to issues of being gay?

Not really no.

Do you feel that there should be more support for your demographic? How could this be provided?

I don't necessarily think more support should be available as this will serve as a feeding pipe to mould confused minds into the plastic culture currently being spewed by identityless men who see the gay scene as the gospel of pink and all gays who do not subscribe to this gospel is seen as backwards. What I would like to see is less suppression from parents onto their kids so their gay kids can speak to them about how they feel and form their own opinions. Who knows kids better than their parents?

You have been exposed to one of my key texts – The *Rainbow* trilogy, *Yes I Am!*, *Moffie*, or the *Mr Gay SA* pageant. Write your response to this/these texts. Explore what stood out for you and why, especially regarding issues of ‘gay identity’ and belonging. How did this/these texts make you feel?

These were my first thought to each of those phrases

- 1- Oh lord the Bronx queens are in their underwear on a float marching through the streets again.
- 2- Did not have a gay connotation.
- 3- Felt like giving someone a pk.
- 4- Insecure ego queens who willingly to make themselves open to manipulation to the bigger plans of others. Pointless, stupid and pathetic!

Appendix 7: Ken

What is your definition of 'gay'? What does it *mean* to be gay?

My definition of 'gay' is someone who is attracted to a member of the same sex. In my particular case I am a man who is physically attracted to other men. My own definition of 'gay' is a male being attracted to another male. Despite this, I find it difficult to define what it means to be gay. A part of me believes that I share some degree of deeper understanding with other gay men; however, this is only as far as sexuality is concerned. I have learned that as far as the rest of my life is concerned, I don't share any more with other *gays* than I do with other *straights*. Gays commonly have a reputation for being creative, organised, obsessed with physical appearance and often *bitchy*.

What labels would you personally apply to describe your sexual identity (for example: gay, straight, bi, pan, omni, queer etc)? What is your definition of this/these label/s that you use?

As far as my own sexual identity is concerned I would describe myself as gay. Though in the past I have considered myself as both straight and bisexual. My definition of the above labels is fairly simple. Straight refers to someone who is attracted to someone of the opposite sex while bisexuality is when someone is attracted to both other men and women.

Are you aware of any stereotypes around the label 'gay'? Are you comfortable with the label gay?

I am aware of stereotypes around the label 'gay'. A common understanding among most South African communities that being 'gay' means that a man is effeminate and camp and often bitchy. There is also a stigma of promiscuity commonly attached to being gay.

How did you come to realise your identity? That is, how did you come to associate yourself with this label? (For example, was it a 'lightbulb' moment? Did someone call you a name at school? Was it a slow process? Did you read about it? Did you relate to a film you saw?)

From a young age I seemed to feel different to other children at school, and in particular different to other boys. I socialised more easily with girls most of the time although I did have some close boy friends too. When I reached puberty things started to make more sense in my head about why I had a shy interest in some other boys at school. I realised I was physically attracted to these boys and I began to feel even more different than I had before. I immediately felt that I had to hide these feelings, perhaps this was linked to the fact that I had no apparent role models who were gay. Because of this I denied these feelings but now and then they would surface and I would feel

insecure and scared. I never really understood why, but there was something about my behaviour that made people call me 'fag' or 'gay' and on more than one occasion ask me if I was gay. Eventually, after battling with denial for around 6 years, and after experimenting with a guy I was friends with at school, I felt it was time for me to open myself up to the feelings I had been fighting for so long. It was really only on the day that I met my current partner of over 5 years, that I knew for sure that I am gay. I had thought about the consequences of admitting I am gay many times, it was something I thought one cannot go back on. But I felt I needed to explore my feelings.

Would you describe yourself as 'out'? Who knows about your attraction to the same sex?

I would describe myself as 'out', I have my relationship status on Facebook as well as a link to his profile. I never actively hide my relationship on a social or work-related platform. I have also told those closest to me who I felt should know about my relationship, i.e. family, friends.

People refer to your demographic, in part, as 'gay'. In relation to 'gay' identity, what were your experiences at school? (For example: were you 'out' at school? Were you teased at school? If you were teased, how so? Was your school tolerant of sexuality difference? Were you supported at school?)

I was not at all out at school, despite knowing the feelings I had and my interest in other boys, I actually made great effort to *not* come across as 'gay'. On the occasions when I was called 'gay' or it was implied through someone's actions it affected me deeply and caused deep insecurity and anxiety. I am unsure of how I would have been supported had I come out at school; however I certainly did not feel that it was even an option. I did have teachers who I felt would support me but as the school was Christian based there was never any mention of homosexuality.

In relation to 'gay' identity, what have been your experiences with family? (For example: do your family know that you are 'gay'? How do different members feel about 'homosexuality'? What have been some reactions to gay people or 'gay culture'? Are you supported by your family?)

My family does know I am gay, and although at first my mother had difficulty coming to terms with it, she now supports me fully. Initially she thought she had failed as a parent and that my homosexuality was in some way the fault of her and my father. I know that she was also very concerned for my safety; being a gay man within our society. She is now completely supportive of me and my relationship. At first I did not tell my father as I was unsure how he would react. We are not that close which perhaps is the reason why I did not feel comfortable telling him. Even today he doesn't discuss it with me in detail but he does ask after my partner. I am not completely sure

whether I feel this is as a result of him being so far removed from the gay community that he is unsure of how to handle any form of discussion on the subject. I have experienced homophobic abuse from my brother on more than one occasion and it is the primary reason behind why we are out of communication. My extended family are also completely aware that I am gay and I have not felt any discomfort because of this. In relation to a gay identity and gay culture, I do not feel that me coming out has triggered a sudden inclusion of gay culture to my family. I am definitely aware that gay themes, or rather same-sex themes, are accepted however my family does tend to frown upon camp behaviour. The idea of queer behaviour is not a point of discussion.

Do you feel a sense of connection to other gay people? Do you feel a part of a 'gay culture'? Do you feel a part of a South African gay community?

I feel a slight connection to other gay people, but only on bigger issues such as Gay Rights. And in that instance the commonality between us is really that we all suffer prejudice based on who we are. Locally, in Durban, I do not share a sense of community with other gays at all. The most awkward I have felt in social spaces in Durban has been amongst the gay community at social events or spaces due to gossiping and bitchy and judgmental people. This is, to a large degree, why I and my partner no longer go to the only gay club in Durban.

How have you been/are you educated about issues facing 'gay' people? Are you aware of gay rights organisations and movements around South Africa and the world? I am aware of gay rights organisations and gay news particularly through the site Pinkpaper.com. I have never really been educated on anything to do with gay rights or LGBT organisations for that matter. Certainly not at school (which is where I needed it most) and I have very little knowledge of gay rights groups active in South Africa. Any education I have gained on gay rights has been achieved through an active search for such education. This is of course in comparison to other human rights groups that I frequently see advertised in public spaces and I can recall them being present at high school to educate young people. To me there is a distinct absence of Gay support information on mainstream media, as though us gays don't make up the general public.

How important are gay rights to you? As far as rights in general go, is it important to emphasise gay rights?

Gay rights are important to me, it is important to me to know that I have the same rights afforded to me that my straight friends. I think that the notion that I should not receive equal rights to someone else in my community based upon my sexuality is utterly ridiculous. I feel that if I

contribute to society in the same way as everyone else why should I not be treated with equal consideration? I think it is important to emphasise gay rights because I feel at this stage, certainly in South Africa, gay rights does not have a noticeable presence within our community.

What forms of representations of young, white, gay, urban South African men have been available to you? (For example: magazines, SA novels, films that you have been exposed to) Are these easily accessible?

I don't think I am aware of any representations of young, white, gay, urban South African males easily available today. The only representations of this demographic that I can think of exist in US or British television, like *Glee* and magazines. Most television representations gay white males even in US and UK based television tend to be aged around middle aged (*Will & Grace*) I have read novels with these characters in them too but they were not South African.

What/who educated you on what it 'means' to be gay?

The majority of my education on what it means to be gay has come from my partner; he plays an important part in all my considerations on gay-ness. The rest of my education has come from my own experiences and from friends I have made.

Do you feel that you have needed support or information in the past in relation to issues of being gay?

When I was younger, specifically in high school, I was in desperate need of support and education about being gay and how to deal with it. There was no resource available to me at that time. I did not even know any gay people at the time, nor did I feel that approaching my school counsellor was an option. Despite having 'Life Orientation' classes at school where subjects such as marriage and partnership and family planning were discussed, homosexuality was never mentioned so for years I felt like I was flying completely blind.

Do you feel that there should be more support for your demographic? How could this be provided?

There is definitely room for more support for my demographic. I think schools should be the main target of this support. I think there should be an openly discussed zero-tolerance policy towards homophobic bullying and hand in hand with this should be a management enforced tolerance and acceptance of homosexuality at high schools. There was certainly none of this at my high school.

You have been exposed to one of my key texts – The *Rainbow* trilogy, *Yes I Am!*, *Moffie*, or the *Mr Gay SA* pageant. Write your response to this/these texts. Explore what stood out for you and why, especially regarding issues of ‘gay identity’ and belonging. How did this/these texts make you feel?

Reading the *Rainbow Boys* series was a liberating experience. I had previously not come across a text that so concisely discussed the emotions I dealt with as a teenager at high school. I was able to identify on various levels with many of the characters in some way and the path Alex Sanchez presents in coming to terms with being gay was at times frighteningly accurate and relevant to my own journey. I was able to identify deeply with all of the characters in various ways, although I identified with one character more than the others. Reading the novel did make consider that the anxieties and struggles a boy goes through in realising his sexuality may be common to many guys. I can only wish that I had access to the series as a high school student many years ago. Even if only to lend support to a confused teenager so I didn't feel so lonely. This is an essential series for high school libraries.

Mr Gay South Africa competition – It bothered me that there was such a specific ideal representation of gay men and it ended up making me feel more insecure about my physical appearance. The contestants in the pageant did not seem to represent a variety of diverse members of our demographic; they were all cut from the same cloth really. The tanned shaped bodies, the chiselled facial features; it all seems to exude some sense of exploded masculinity. I wondered why even have a *Mr Gay* pageant when all I really saw was a male beauty pageant, it could easily have been a *Mr South Africa pageant*.

Appendix 8: Daniel

What is your definition of 'gay'? What does it *mean* to be gay?

For me, the definition of gay is being attracted to members of the same sex, and in some way partaking in gay culture and not just engaging in sexual activities with members of the same sex, whether it be male or female. What being gay means is that you choose to accept your own sexual orientation, because it makes you happy, but ultimately its about Loving someone of the same sex.

What labels would you personally apply to describe your sexual identity (for example: gay, straight, bi, pan, omni, queer etc)? What is your definition of this/these label/s that you use?

My own personal label is that I am gay. It means that I like, love and sleep with other men.

Are you aware of any stereotypes around the label 'gay'? Are you comfortable with the label gay?

Gay men have a stereotype within their own gender construct, increasingly in modern society; gay men's bodies are expected to be slender with little muscle definition, gay men are expected to walk like women, have an effeminate posture and always being limp wristed, this ideal has increasingly been brought on by the media, where in sitcoms homosexual men are portrayed as being vain with their bodies in the same way as women are, always conscious of their weight and what they are wearing. Surprisingly I'm not entirely comfortable with the label of gay because I feel that it has negative connotations, and encourages slander and prejudice.

How did you come to realise your identity? That is, how did you come to associate yourself with this label? (For example, was it a 'lightbulb' moment? Did someone call you a name at school? Was it a slow process? Did you read about it? Did you relate to a film you saw?)

For me it was a slow process, I had always felt different as a child and I always felt sexually attracted to other boys my age, I at that stage had labeled it as being "curious" and being a phase that I would eventually grow out of. I dated girls while at high school because at that time it was quite taboo to be gay and I had seen how it had been rejected in some of my peers. When I went to university I was free of all that and I let myself explore my sexuality by experimenting with both men and woman and I found myself having more of an emotional and physical connection with men than I did with woman, and ever since then I have embraced my homosexuality.

Would you describe yourself as 'out'? Who knows about your attraction to the same sex?

I would describe myself as being out as most of my family and friends know that I am gay, however I don't go around advertising it as I do believe that I am a person first, with personality, morals and values before I am gay, I don't think that a persons sexual orientation defines them, or is the most exciting part about them.

People refer to your demographic, in part, as 'gay'. In relation to 'gay' identity, what were your experiences at school? (For example: were you 'out' at school? Were you teased at school? If you were teased, how so? Was your school tolerant of sexuality difference? Were you supported at school?)

I wasn't out at school as it was an environment that was quite hostile towards homosexuality in general. I was however teased about being a little different and arty, those being labelled as effeminate.

In relation to 'gay' identity, what have been your experiences with family? (For example: do your family know that you are 'gay'? How do different members feel about 'homosexuality'? What have been some reactions to gay people or 'gay culture'? Are you supported by your family?)

My family do know that I am gay, at first it was met with shock from my mother and a bit of shame because in older generations it was very taboo to be gay as it has always been associated with HIV. My family support me, and have all commented that they all really knew that I was gay from a young child and almost expected it to come out sooner or later.

Do you feel a sense of connection to other gay people? Do you feel a part of a 'gay culture'? Do you feel a part of a South African gay community?

In a sense yes and no, yes because I feel gay people all have a lot in common and live a common lifestyle. I don't especially feel a part of gay culture because I tend to follow general culture, gay culture in my experience can become very sordid and sexual. I do feel part of the SA gay community as I have friends who are gay, I go to gay clubs and I engage in gay activities in South Africa.

How have you been/are you educated about issues facing 'gay' people? Are you aware of gay rights organisations and movements around South Africa and the world?

I am aware of gay rights. Yes I am aware of many issues facing gay people, that of HIV/Aids, gay marriage complications, homophobia and discrimination etc. I am also aware of gay rights organisations around SA and the world.

How important are *gay* rights to you? As far as rights in general go, is it important to emphasise gay rights?

They are very important to me, any rights that liberate a community of people in a moral way are very important to me as it is crucial that society become more tolerant and less prejudicial.

What forms of representations of young, white, gay, urban South African men have been available to you? (For example: magazines, SA novels, films that you have been exposed to) Are these easily accessible?

I haven't really been exposed to any SA representations, as I haven't actively sought them out nor do I think they are easily accessible, however in magazines and the internet the Mr. Gay SA pageant is a form or representation for me.

What/who educated you on what it 'means' to be gay?

The media and society mostly educated me on what it means to be gay, but mostly my course in gender studies helped me shape my perception of what it means to be gay.

Do you feel that you have needed support or information in the past in relation to issues of being gay?

No I haven't really needed support or information because I have had it relatively easy, but I do believe that more support and information needs to be available for other gay people, not everybody is as fortunate to come from a very accepting background.

Do you feel that there should be more support for your demographic? How could this be provided?

I think there should definitely be more support for the demographic in general, I feel that an environment where questions can be asked by individuals and information about our rights etc needs to be provided by some or other organisation.

You have been exposed to one of my key texts – The *Rainbow* trilogy, *Yes I Am!*, *Moffie*, or the *Mr Gay SA* pageant. Write your response to this/these texts. Explore what stood out for you and why, especially regarding issues of 'gay identity' and belonging. How did this/these texts make you feel?

I have been exposed to the Mr. Gay SA pageant, what stood out for me is that finally the gay community is gaining a lot of support by the media and general public, people are embracing and becoming far more tolerant of gay culture in general, especially in SA. What stood out to me is that it is acceptable for young gay men to straighten their hair and colour it while keeping up with the latest trends in fashion, however always abiding by the tough, strong active ideal of masculinity, we can see this balanced ideal mostly in advertisements, where men are clearly looking after their bodies with regard to hair, facial features etc. But are still attached to the "heroism" ideal where men's bodies have highly developed muscle taking on a stance of confidence and virility, the pageant in itself I feel encourages traditional representations of dominant masculinity especially with regards to physique, which I am not sure sends the right message, it makes the "gay identity" seem quite fickle and fleeting which alienates gay men that don't fit that mould, this doesn't encourage acceptance or belonging it just increases a whole lot of self esteem problems. However the embracing of transvestitism and cross-dressing as an art and form of entertainment I feel creates a lot of room for belonging and liberates a great number of people.

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