CONSTRUCTS OF HOMOSEXUAL IDENTITIES: AN EXPLORATION OF THE NARRATIVES OF SIX WHITE, SOUTH AFRICAN HOMOSEXUAL MEN.

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Abstract. *This qualitative study, informed by narrative and social constructionist theory, aimed to engage with the tensions and complexities emerging from the narratives of six white, South African homosexual men, of two different age-groups (older and younger). The intention was to assess the extent to which time-constrained understandings of homosexuality – as sin, sickness and adaptive choice – have impacted on the lived experience of these homosexuals. It was found that all-independent of era - refer to internalised homophobia. It was discovered, however, that due to freedom of the press, and psychologisation, while the younger participants testify to the complexity of their lived experience, they do have more recourse and agency in constructing and negotiating their sex lives, and their place in their gay communities.*

INTRODUCTION

Homosexual identity/s?

Implicit in Isaacs and McKendrick's (1992) book, Male Homosexuality in South Africa, is the modernist idea that there exists one fixed, stable and predictable 'homosexual identity' across cultures, races, classes and countries. Whilst progressive in other aspects, these authors embrace the essentialist argument which asserts that "there is an essential gay consciousness linking all gay people" (Gevisser, 1995: 16). Such a notion has been challenged in contemporary academics, based on the constructionist conviction that same-sex attraction is imbued with multiple interpretations, and layers of meaning, and that these interpretations are "historically and culturally specific" (Burr, 1995: 3). This historical and cultural specificity dictates that in studying instances of same-sex attraction and its relational derivatives in South Africa, researchers need to be mindful of the multifarious histories and cultural understandings within our boarders. Conceptualisations, and therefore experiences, of homosexuality are numerous, juxtaposed, conflicting, and ultimately complex.

With this as an overarching assumption, the research that informs this paper focused on the life stories of a particular group of South African gay men, listening for their understandings, conceptualisations and experiences of their homosexuality in their specific contexts. These men are white and middle-class, from two differing age groups (older, and younger). The intention in a 'white focus' was not to collude with apartheid-era authorities who defined homosexuality as a phenomenon exclusively of white people (Gevisser, 1995). Nor was it an attempt to scaffold Winnie Mandela's explosive assertion that "homosex is not in black culture" (Gevisser, 1995: 69). The rich experience of homosexual activities and lifestyles in other cultural contexts is acknowledged as a given. Yet, for the purposes of this research, the narratives of white men are considered interesting, since they represent an intersection of the "imperatives of struggle, resistance and social transformation" learnt from our developing country, and the "notions of sexual freedom and gay subculture" adopted from their western counterparts (Gevisser & Cameron, 1995: 3). Of particular interest is the manner in which these men have negotiated their experiences in this interface between western discourses of homosexual pathology, sin and sickness, and the indigenous politics of struggle, resistance and transformation.

Towards research questions.

What this article will ultimately become is a discussion of the core themes that emerged from the six men's narratives. Taking social constructionist theory as key, the use of two different age

groups was intended, through some form of comparison and contrast, to facilitate insight into the complexities around negotiating a life, and a lifestyle, in particular social and political climates. It is understood that liberating legislation (such as the Constitution) does not translate unproblematically into liberal and tolerant social attitudes. It is further acknowledged that in South Africa, some feel that "the country has become more permissive than most of its rather conservative citizens, black or white, find comfortable" (From Calvinism to cruising, 1999: 55). Thus this research was conducted in an effort to evaluate the tensions and complexities between the accounts of the older and younger gay men's narratives. In so doing, an attempt was made at superimposing these emergent tensions onto time-constrained social, cultural and political discourses, in order to assess the extent to which they have been deconstructed, reconstructed, and how they filter down to, and affect homosexual identities.

THE POLITICS OF HOMOSEXUALITY.

Largely due to the legacies of colonialism, apartheid, and the current capitalist socio-economic structure of this country, white South Africans are often significantly influenced by western conceptualisations of homosexuality. Yet, as mentioned previously, these understandings are not isolated from historical, cultural, political and social factors unique to this country. This amalgamation and two-fold influence cannot be overlooked when considering western notions of homosexuality, and discussing the impact of such meta-narratives on individual experiences.

Homosexuality as sin and crime.

The Christian church was, for many centuries the absolute authority on matters of both morality and legislature in the western world. Despite this authority being challenged and largely overcome in the last century, religious teachings are salient. Hergemöller (2001), on sexual theology, explains that in this view, "all men were created the same; they were all equipped with a soul guided by reason and with the same natural inclination and needs" (p. 7). God-given heterosexual attraction had, as a primary function, the arousal of individuals to sexual excitement, causing them to marry and procreate. Such a stance clearly normalises heterosexuality while pathologising same-sex attraction and alternative family structures.

Religious doctrine condemning homosexuality, in an era of religious pre-eminence, resulted in the criminalisation of homosexuality. In South Africa, (predominantly) Afrikaner politicians, historically given to sidelining minority groups, embraced these pathologising and demonising narratives. Under apartheid, the National Party – formed upon 'Christian' ideals – perceived same-

sex involvement as "a threat to white civilisation" (Reid & Dirsuweit, 2002; Gevisser, 1995). du Pisani (2001) explains that Afrikaner masculinity was founded on the tenets of Calvinist authoritarianism, and militarism. Many Afrikaners internalised this doctrine, to the end that homosexuality was viewed as an affront to staunch, patriarchal masculinity and was considered sinful, unnatural and abnormal (du Pisani, 2001). Moreover, it threatened "a patriarchal and racial order that shaped interlocking structures that provided many white Afrikaner males access to power in South Africa during apartheid" (Elder, 1999, as cited in du Pisani, 2002: 169).

Under apartheid law, "the most extensive powers vested in the police were in their dealings with the crime of sodomy" (Reid & Dirsuweit, 2002: 120). Sodomy was incorporated as a Schedule 1 offence alongside murder, rape and fraud. Police were sanctioned to arrest, without warrant, any suspect of sodomy, and were even authorised to kill should the suspect resist arrest (Reid & Dirsuweit, 2002). Police often frequented 'cruising areas', to lure homosexual men into soliciting. Elder (1999, as cited in du Pisani, 2002) is adamant that this criminalisation of homosexuality was a demonstration of the National Party's protection of the "culture and morality of Afrikanerdom" (p. 169). It is interesting to note the pervasiveness of pathologising and demonising understandings, and the manner in which they are modified to suit the aims of a particular society. Nardi, Sanders and Marmor (1994) suggest that criminalisation can hinder the negotiation of a homosexual identity, preventing disclosure, and short-circuiting the emergence of gay subcultures and identities.

Homosexuality as sickness.

While this argument is significant, the reader should keep cognisance of narratives of resistance, wherein the threat of suppression has a tendency to "galvanise gay subculture, creating community like never before" (Gevisser, 1995: 33). This galvanisation was prospered during World War II, heralded as the most significant catalyst for the emergence of meaningful gay subcultures in the western world (Gevisser, 1995). Military authorities, adhering to the stereotype of homosexuals as effeminate, avoided enlisting recruits with such attributes. Men assumed to be homosexual were therefore assigned similar non-manual, non-violent positions, and this inadvertently encouraged a new cohesion and the beginning of a formalised homosexual subculture amongst those who identified themselves as homosexual (Nardi et al, 1994). Furthermore, due to the magnitude of war crimes, prisons became overcrowded, compelling the military to find another outlet for dealing with gay 'deviants'. This situation, combined with the rise of science, and the decline of the perception of religion as omniscient, resulted in gay men now being referred to *psychiatrists* rather than judges and priests, in an attempt to have their behaviour modified.

Societal conceptualisations of homosexuality are profoundly complex. Bullough (1976, as cited in Conrad and Schneider, 1980) argues that in moving from understanding same-sex attraction as sin, to sickness, "the *form* of judgment had changed; the essential morality had not" (p. 172). In the mid-1950's, the view that homosexuality was psychopathological was formalised, and this phenomenon was included in the American Psychological Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), positioned under the heading 'sociopathic disorders', alongside antisocial and criminal behaviour (Nardi et al, 1994). Because homosexuality was viewed as the pathological outcome of a pathological development, treatment had as a goal the rehabilitation of these men into socially appropriate, heterosexual lifestyles. Thus falling in line with Bullough's (1976) argument, it would appear that nothing had really changed in the reconstruction of understandings of homosexuality.

Homosexuality deemed an adaptable choice.

In 1973, due in part, to increasing politicisation of homosexuals, the American Psychiatric Association took the decision to remove homosexuality from the DSM. On the one hand, this move was resultant of demonstrations of the homosexual community (as evidenced in events like the Stonewall Rebellion of 1969), but this was coupled with the fragmenting approach to the study of homosexuality. It was found that there had been little exploration into the lived experience of homosexuality, and theories were purported by individuals lacking in substantial relevant knowledge (Nardi et al, 1994).

South Africa's social circumstances and policies were complex, and thus this country did not immediately follow suit. 1994 was, however, the watershed year in which decades of freedom fighting culminated in the democratic election, the official overthrow of legislated apartheid and the instatement of the African National Party as government. Shifts in racial and cultural relations had an overflow effect in the country's dealings with homosexuals. Given the tumultuous political history of South Africa, the ANC presented as deeply sensitive to all forms of discrimination, and in 1996 a constitution was adopted that outlawed discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (Brummer, 1996; Reid & Dirsuweit, 2002).

THE WAY FORWARD.

The above discussion is an overview of the course that society's conceptualisations have taken over time. It is necessarily inconsistent and erratic. Of critical importance is an acknowledgement of slips, contradictions and overlaps between a history such as this, and the lived experience of

homosexual people. Several authors have picked up on these complexities. Gidi (1995) speaks to the fact that certain groups did not leave the narrative of homosexuality as sin behind, but to this day view such behaviour as immoral and sinful. The fundamentalist African Christian Democratic Party argued publicly that since homosexuality was an acquired lifestyle (and not innate) it should not be afforded the same privileges as race and gender (Brummer, 1996). The party's member of parliament, Louis Green, has been cited as stating, "we believe the gay community is riding on the back of the liberation movement. It was noble to fight against apartheid. Unfortunately, gay rights activists hijacked this" (Brummer, 1996: 6).

Moreover, despite the removal of homosexuality from the DSM in 1973, Gidi (1995) stresses that in a recent study of the implicit perceptions mental health practitioners hold revealed that a great many therapists "still perceive the mental disorder of a hypothetical ego-syntonic homosexual patient as significantly more severe than that of a heterosexual with the same psychiatric diagnosis" (p. 420). Furthermore, in a similar vein, Reid and Dirsuweit (2002) assert that in spite of the more liberal turn in the last two decades, current research indicates that "homophobic victimisation is endemic in violent, masculine cultures" (p. 99).

In sum.

By way of introduction to the research proper, what this discussion has attempted to do is to situate the research participants into a very particular social, cultural and political context that can be referred to when confronting their narratives. Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992, as cited in Kohler-Riessman, 1993) assert that "studying narratives is useful for what they reveal about social life – culture 'speaks itself' through an individual's story (p. 5). Sclater (2003) concurs, arguing that narratives "illuminate not only individual lives, but also broader social processes" (p. 20). Thus the 'culture' and 'social processes' constructed by, and referred to by the research participants in interaction with South African society is of primary interest to this paper.

METHODOLOGY.

Research participants.

Participants were drawn from two differing age groups. Concerned that I may have difficulty in acquiring participants at all, given the sensitive and time-consuming nature of their contribution, my goal was simply to find three of the oldest, and three of the youngest agreeable gay men. The manager of the Durban Lesbian and Gay Community and Health Centre referred five of the six participants to me. My older group consisted of Jeremy, a retired principal in his sixties, William, a

single lecturer in his late fifties, and Evan, also employed in the field of education, and in his fifties. My younger group included Jack, a man in his early twenties, Tim, a nineteen-year old student, and Brandon, a twenty-two year old law student at a local university to whom I am vaguely acquainted. Pseudonyms were used.

Data collection.

Personal narratives were collected during two, hour-long, unstructured conversations with each participant, over the space of two weeks (Sclater, 2003). The first of the two interviews began with an open-ended invitation to recall their first awareness of same-sex attraction (not necessarily identification with homosexuality, per se) and recount the details from then, as they remember them. The second interview was an opportunity for each participant to restructure, refute, problematise or confirm their life story, as they had presented it. Interviews were audio-taped, with the consent of each narrator, and later transcribed by myself.

Data analysis.

As detected by Sclater (2003) in her own work with narrative, "there is no recipe book for narrative data analysis" (p. 14). Yet there are guidelines, and a reading of various research endeavours offered invaluable assistance. Squire (2003) noted, "the stories are constantly re-invented as I listen to them in different ways" (p. 4). Kohler-Riessman (1993) concurs, arguing for close and repeated listenings. What these insights reveal is the multi-layered dimension of personal narratives – the reality that these are not necessarily 'true' accounts of peoples' lived experiences, or accurate representations of their memories. Rather, narratives are ways "of generating knowledge that disrupt old certainties and allow us to glimpse something of the complexities of human lives, selves and endeavours" (Squire, 2003: 20).

All these stances converge upon the 'voice-centered relational method' of qualitative analysis proposed by Mauthner and Daucet (1998), which I subsequently utilised. This model is derived from clinical and literary theory, hermeneutic traditions and relational theory (Mauthner & Daucet, 1998). At its core is the notion of 'relational ontology'. The developers explain that this model goes against the grain of analysis that assumes "separate, self-sufficient, independent, rational individuals" (p. 125). Rather, the center of this model is the notion of "selves-in-relation" (p. 125). This is particularly significant for this research that addresses a social phenomenon that has been religiously condemned, psychopathologised, and now vindicated. My interest is in the relation and

impact that such societal conceptualisations have had on the development and sense of self of my participants.

This model calls for four separate readings of the transcripts. The first involves "reading for the plot, and for our responses" to the narratives (Mauthner & Daucet, 1998: 127). Herein the text is scanned for the general plot. The analyst should also, at this point, be aware of his/her personal reactions to the text, and the subtext, to the end that bias and prejudice be considered when formulating hypotheses.

The second reading was remarkably helpful in my analysis. This involves "reading for the voice of the 'I'" (Mauthner & Daucet, 1998: 130). This involves becoming purposely aware of the speaker's use of personal pronouns, as this highlights subtle nuances and the comfort or discomfort that is felt in narrating particular stories. Mauthner and Daucet (1998) explain that by attending to shifts between 'we's', 'you's' and 'I's', it becomes more evident where "the respondent may be emotionally or intellectually struggling to say something" (p. 130). The authors assert that this reading is significant for psychologists, as insight is offered into how individuals experience themselves in greater social institutions and discourses.

The third reading focuses on how relationships with significant others are experienced, as well as how broader social networks are activated and utilised (Mauthner & Daucet, 1998). The forth reading is concerned more specifically with the narrator's treatment of cultural contexts and social structures. The final stage of this model involves a thematic breakdown, wherein information and insights gleaned from the readings are organised into coherent emergent themes which inform the write-up of the analysis.

Myself in relation.

Researchers, and their methodologies, are undoubtedly "entangled within the politics of the social world they study" (Holliday, 2002: 146). Mauthner and Daucet (1998) are adamant that as researchers we need to reflect upon and understand how our personal, political and intellectual autobiographies hook onto and feed into our interpretations and analyses. To these authors, "reflexivity means acknowledging the critical role we play in creating, interpreting and theorising research data" (Mauthner & Daucet, 1998: 121).

I am a twenty-three year old white heterosexual South African woman, liberal in terms of the politicisation and cause of homosexuality in South Africa; yet feel that problematising aspects of a homosexual culture is not tantamount to homophobia or discrimination. To corroborate and clarify my meaning, Ricci (1995) purported that "there are disturbing indications, admittedly by no means comparable in magnitude to the excesses of existing tyranny, that the New South Africa may enter the world of the Politically Correct" (p. 311). Ricci (1995) continues, arguing the potential to move from one oppressive system to a "trendy new" one, wherein the democratic prerequisites of freedom of speech and thought, and sexual freedom have no place. Without real engagement with the issues at hand, truly democratic, liberal views are impossible. I am very aware of the fear in latter-day academics to keep well within the left-hand lane of research endeavors, when that may in fact mean ignoring real data for the purpose of not having to publish a seemingly 'un-PC' paper. As a researcher, therefore, I wish, with Ricci (1995), to resist the pressure to whitewash my data and present 'squeaky-clean' interpretations. Due, largely, to the manner that heterosexual society has dealt with homosexuals, there are problems inherent to the lived experience of those engaged in an alternative lifestyle. I desire that these problems come to the fore in my work, to the end that they be acknowledged and addressed.

EMERGENT THEMES.

THE RAVAGES AND COMPLEXITIES OF INTERNALISED HOMOPHOBIA.

Problematising internalised homophobia.

Kitzinger (1999) cites Macdonald (1976) as defining *homophobia* as "an irrational persistent fear or dread of homosexuals" (p. 57). Kitzinger perceives the assumption of individualism to be the fundamental error of such constructs as homophobia. Instead of acknowledging such discrimination and antisocial behaviour on a societal level, from where change can be implemented, the term 'homophobia' "imputes sickness to specific individuals who supposedly deviate from the rest of society in being prejudiced against lesbians and gay men" (p. 58). Even more furiously than in her constuctionist critique of homophobia, Kitzinger (1999) seems irate at the individualised notion of *internalised* homophobia, presumed by the mental health fraternity to have a "deleterious and pathogenic impact on developmental events in gay people and their psychological functioning, causing everything from generalized misery to impaired sexual performance" (Shidlo, 1994, as cited in Kitzinger, 1999: 58). Kitzinger's (1999) argument against internalised homophobia is that in diagnosing such pathology, "the focus is shifted away from the oppressor and back onto the victims of oppression" (p. 58). Kitzinger does, however, acknowledge

the *reality* of internalised homophobia for the individual, but argues that instead of it being academically conceptualised at the level of the individual psyche, the socio-political dimension should be highlighted.

Evidence of internalised homophobia, sometimes partially resolved, seemed to be a central organising construct in all of my respondents' narratives. This emerged through Mauthner and Daucet's (1998) reading for the plot, as well as reading for the voice of the 'I'. The latter reading, in particular, offered valuable insight into the respondents' perceptions of self. The younger participants, in general, seem to have more recourse to *recognise* and *deal with* this phenomenon in their lives, but nonetheless have experienced it with no less veracity than my older participants. This recourse will be returned to later in a subsequent emergent theme.

Take the story of Jeremy, a man in his early sixties. When about sixteen years of age, a neighbour's tenant had invited him to go to the drive-in, which he did. Nothing sexual transpired between them, but this tenant was subsequently arrested on being found by the police having sex in a bush with another man. Jeremy illustrates his complex and confusing reaction as follows:

"And I remember feeling terribly guilty, and my parents asked, 'he didn't trouble you anywhere, did he?' And I said no. It was something that made me feel awful and dirty, the fact that they thought, you know... Maybe now they would know my secret as well..."

Taylor (2002) speaks of the psychological and emotional problems experienced by some homosexuals, derivative of the manner in which their sexual identities have been "discursively constructed through the introjection of culturally dominant, historically precedented values" (p. 155). In this vein, Jeremy continued, reflecting,

"I was not in the gay world then, and I thought, they're going to think this of me... I had been on a 'date' with him, in their eyes".

It is significant that in most of my collected narratives, early same-sex involvements – child's play, mutual masturbation, etcetera - was not accompanied by this guilt, which only developed later, when the respondents became aware that greater society was less than enamored by that which had previously seemed natural and normal to them.

Jack, one of my younger respondents, explains it thus:

"The thing that confused me the most was that before I could label myself, everyone around me already had... So that put pressure on me perhaps to fight against it, rather than go with it naturally... In other words, I didn't want to become that, because there was already name-calling and people teasing me, so that made me want to fight it even more".

It appears that at some stage, homosexual men dealing with their same-sex attraction have to concur, and align themselves, with the negative that is being hurled at them from the heteronormative world. Albeit in an American study, Rivers (2002) found that gay men are fourteen times more likely to engage in suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts, than 'straight' men. Very similar to Jack, Brandon, a younger participant, touches on the difficult negotiation of his sexual identity:

"You have a whole lot of people recognising something in me that I didn't like in myself... So there was a lot of repressing of it. It was something that I saw as being horrible and not what I wanted to be. You know, I repressed it because I didn't want to deal with it".

Brandon's experience speaks quite powerfully to Taylor's (2002) assertion that a potential area of difficulty in several gay cultures is the internalisation of homosexuality as tragic, hopeless and doomed. Yet this internalisation of society's intolerance and disdain has more entrenched repercussions, not only affecting decisions that need to be made with regards to sexual orientation, and whether or not to 'come out'. William, a respondent in his fifties, explains that:

"For a long time I have only had black boyfriends or partners. And I'm not sure why. If I'm honest, I'm not sure that it's not sometimes a whole power-play thing, and I think, if I had to analyse myself... Not trying to be derogatory, but I think there's a bit of a power play thing, from the point of view that I've never really come to terms with who I am..."

William's experience here is incredibly complex, and his self-analysis and self-understanding even more so. The implication is that, whereas heterosexuals are afforded the luxury of a sexual identity integrated and amalgamated with their overall lived experiences, homosexuals are forced by society to view their sexual orientation as something of an appendage, almost a faulty component of themselves. And the dynamics of this appendage seem to hook onto their romantic relationships

and have a detrimental impact on their relationships that otherwise wouldn't likely be there (like the power-plays). In a similar vein, Taylor (2002) states that "the conflation of 'true' masculinity with exclusive heterosexuality implies that one cannot be a real man and get 'fucked', that the homosexual must therefore be less than a man, for, in becoming the sexual object, he becomes 'as if a woman'" (p. 155). This is, of course, a blatant instance of the introjection of societal representations, and the subsequent outworking of this in external and interpersonal ways. What William is essentially expressing is that, due to his sexual orientation, society has emasculated him, and, given the politics of colonialism and race relations in South Africa, in engaging sexually and romantically with a *black* man, he perceives himself to be regaining some sense of power and control.

Thus, supporting Kitzinger (1999) in her argument against *uncritically* accepting the notion of internalised homophobia, it is clear that this remains a predominant, and indeed dominating, theme in my participants' accounts, and that its effects on individual lived experience are far-reaching and entrenched. Such internalised homophobia was pervasive across generations in my research. Kitzinger (1999), an *American,* asserted that without social and political change, individuals seeking individualised treatment can do nothing but "wait for the revolution" (p. 59). Yet in many respects, South Africa has experienced a *revolution*, and yet the lived experiences of many of our homosexual populations are still plagued with internalised homophobia. This once again speaks to the slips and tensions between legislature and public policy, and real life on the ground. The former seldom translates unproblematically into the latter.

SILENCE vs. PSYCHOLOGISATION.

Censorship and bibliotherapy.

As explicated above, internalised homophobia seems a common experience among homosexual men across the age spectrum. The author implied, however, that there emerged a marked disparity between the older and younger respondents' *management* of this destructive phenomenon. The older men were socialised in the apartheid era of right-wing narrow-mindedness and discrimination, coupled with the western negotiations of homosexuality as pathology, crime and sin. The younger men carry the legacy of this prejudice, and despite the waves of liberating change, heed is taken of Gidi (1995), Reid and Dirsuweit (2002) and others' assertions that many societal elements with which homosexuals are engaged often are as homophobic, conservative and bigoted as the law and the church ever were. Despite this commonality in lived experience, in reading for the voice of the I, and indeed overall plots, it became lucid that the older men tended to

view their homosexuality as something in which they had little agency: to silently resign oneself to, tolerate quietly, and make the best of. The younger men appeared adamant of the opposite: that they should introspect, conquer their own homophobias and be a force to be reckoned with in their worlds.

Jeremy, an older respondent narrated it thus:

"I was gay and I had to accept it. I remember once thinking, 'you know, if this is what life is, if I'm dead by forty it will probably be a good thing".

Speaking of the terror of being 'outed' to one's family, he continues:

"Friends would often come and let you down... They think your family are stupid or something... You obviously want to keep it a secret and some of them were a bit flamboyant, you know... And I didn't want the family to realise..."

And when referring to the counsel he gave to a 'closeted' cousin on the eve of his marriage:

"'You're gay... Accept the fact that you are gay. Don't try and be anything else... And don't ruin anybody else's life...'"

In engaging with William, another older man, I enquired as to why he had never disclosed his sexual orientation to his parents. Immediately, almost as a reflex, he asked me how old my other research participants were. The implication was that he thought it utterly bizarre that I would even need to question his silence. It seemed preposterous that, in co-constructing his narrative, it would even occur to me to afford him any agency with regards to the social management of his sexuality. Yet the silence, and the diminished ability to possess his sexuality, rather than be possessed by it, in the face of family and community, has caused him notable harm over the years. Speaking of the way society suppressed his desires, he narrated:

"I wanted to dance actually... I was very talented, and I wanted to do it. But my parents didn't want me to. I regret it very much. And that's why I am such an unfulfilled person. I constantly jump from thing to thing, doing this, trying that... I don't get fulfillment from any one of my talents. And I would have through dancing..."

William told of how he had left his parent's town at the age of eighteen, in an attempt to forge for himself some semblance of the life he longed for, yearning for the privilege of anonymity.

"I have lived away all my life... I needed to escape. I wouldn't say I've even come to terms... but I have only really come to terms with my sexuality in Durban, where I could live autonomously, and do whatever I wanted".

Despite their internalised homophobia, my younger participants seemed to have a markedly different understanding of themselves as homosexual people. I can only but refer to them as 'psychologised', and dramatically so. Brandon recounts:

"It took me a while, and I thought a lot about it... Eventually I plucked up the courage to make an appointment with a professional counselor. From that point I started coming to terms with it, and being gay, and coming out..."

With regards to his therapy, he continues:

"The big thing for me was changing the perception I had of myself. I didn't realise that I found myself so repulsive... That was one of my biggest breakthroughs in counseling... that I actually see myself as flawed and defective... So once I got through that, it made it a whole lot easier..."

Jack, in a similar manner, tells of his personal journey in therapy:

"I have been in therapy... Once I found out how those things were affecting my current behaviour and decisions, it sort of facilitated answering questions, so it brought a lot of understanding. It was a very positive experience".

Whilst this paper is not a Foucauldian analysis, it is interesting to note the similarities between the therapeutic relationship, as discussed by the younger participants, and Foucault's notion of the "director and the directed" (Carrette, 2000: 216). Herein, therapy, for young homosexuals, has become the inverse of the condemning priest, wherein acceptance rather than condemnation is offered. The younger participants still need external validation from someone representing a higher order (the therapist/director). This ties back into Bullough's (1976, as cited in Conrad & Schneider,

1980) comment that throughout time, the form of homosexual conceptualisations changes, the essential morality doesn't.

The recourse offered to young homosexuals today by applied psychology is inextricably linked to the politics of censorship, and the *access* to liberating, normalising and depathologising discourses that freedom of the press affords to gay men. Retief (1995) argues that "one powerful weapon in the state's hands is censorship" (p. 104). Retief asserts that "homophobic censorship hurts gay people because it blocks the influx of liberating and radical ideas into the gay community" (p. 104). This, in turn, stifled debate and "interfered with valuable intellectual growth and consciousness-raising" of South African homosexuals (p. 104). Davidson and Nerio (1995) explained that the censorship directorate under apartheid complained that in homosexual publications such as the magazine Exit, "homosexuality is presented as normal and right. This publication would exceed the tolerance of the average, decent-minded citizen" (p. 227). Yet, in hindsight, these publications may have also done much to normalise their experiences for men grappling with feelings not sanctioned by the heteronormative worlds of which they were part. Such normalising may have facilitated a more healthy, adjusted sense of self, and indeed a decreased sense of alienation from all that was heterosexual and appropriate.

My younger participants made explicit reference to the significant role played by literature in their negotiations and constructions of homosexual identities in heteronormative worlds. Jack, for example, stated,

"You know, one thing that I think is very helpful for any gay person coming out is to read and read and read... And in doing so, you read about the different phases that you go through as a gay person..."

Brandon attributed a significant part of his 'coming out' and self-acceptance to bibliotherapy:

"I bought this book... What he said made a lot of sense... It seemed to make a lot of sense and it seemed to work... It's got a lot of practical exercises, and it changed the way I saw myself, and the way that I lived my life..."

And:

"While I was away I bought the second book... So I read half of it, and then I had to stop. I couldn't read it anymore, because it became so apparent to me that I had to acknowledge I'm gay, or I will never find what I'm looking for in life..."

Thus, in short, readings of my transcripts revealed a greater impression of agency in my younger participants' narratives. There was an increased sense of recourse, and an implicit understanding that it was not the 'gay' in them that they needed to tame and accept, to the end that a *mediocre* life be possible. Rather, it was the homophobe in them that they need to challenge and conquer, to the end that they can appropriate a successful, fruitful and fulfilled lifestyle.

Jack explained it thus:

"If I'm feeling insecure, or find myself in a situation where I think people may be judging me, I tend to ask myself, why do I think that, and then try to address it. And I often find it's my own judgments of myself... So I actively try and address it. Working through all these things does tend to facilitate a more optimal life, if you know what I'm saying... I mean, career, relationships, trying to do the healthy thing..."

The psychologisation of contemporary homosexuals, and the freedom and mental health that normalising discourses such as these purport to bring does raise several questions for me. While certainly more positive than it's predecessor, I feel that to some extent, such management of a homosexual identity and internalised homophobia may simply be a different side of the same coin. With much uncertainty in this assertion, I wonder if a psychological narrative of this kind is not just another form of repression, wherein an external discourse, often embodied in an actual person (i.e. a therapist/director) becomes for the homosexual individual (client/directed) their only hope at a better life, and is thus yielded to and embraced uncritically and unproblematically. How much of the ravages of homophobia, and the confusion and complexity of negotiating a homosexual identity is whitewashed by positive affirmations and liberal rhetoric? This rhetoric often centers on the notion that confessing and disclosing one's orientation automatically yields a better life. This myth flippantly overlooks the tensions and complexities around a disclosed lifestyle. A reply to these issues may only come in future decades, wherein the long-term impact of such a discourse can be evaluated.

THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE 'HOMO-MALE' SEXUAL DRIVE DISCOURSE.

In negotiating *heterosexual* experience, and addressing the politics of gender, Hollway, (as cited in Shefer & Ruiters, 1998) coined the term 'male sexual drive discourse', which contains the notions that "men need sex; are focused on sex; are 'ever ready' to have it; and that it is ultimately a biological urge outside of their control" (p. 41). Despite the fact that this discourse has arisen largely as a *response* to the construction of *women* as centered on love and relationship, and less mesmerised with the sexual act, it is not exclusively the domain of heterosexual relations and gender politics (Shefer & Ruiters, 1998). Rather it seems to be firmly entrenched in the lived experience of male homosexuality, from where it seems to have the *potential* to empty every liaison, and every relationship of everything positive that is traditionally constructed as 'female' – love, intimacy, compassion and concern. This demonstrates that an engagement with a liberating construct such as homosexuality does not automatically make one less privy to what Foucault identifies as the "heterogeneous ensemble" – ideas about the "body, sexual organs, pleasures, kinship relations, interpersonal relations, and so forth" (Foucault, 1980: 216). Foucault's (1980) notion of sexuality being a product of the sexual apparatus is proven true here, in that in their lived experiences, their homosexuality still seems constructed in the presence of a silent woman, along heteronormative lines.

William, an older participant, speaks directly to this, thus:

"You know, I suppose gay people, they say, are a little more promiscuous...that's what they say. But there's a different approach – woman like love... You know, that whole caressing, and foreplay and that... Men do it, and say 'thank you very much, see you tomorrow, precious!', or whatever..."

In a similar vein – removing any hope of androgyny from the equation – William continues:

"Men are like that, women might be different... But you go out, and you get the feeling, and you have sex, and you don't even think of, it's got nothing to do with having a relationship. That's why I say there's a difference between men and women. We don't necessarily make sex to look for love... It's more a biological thing, over and done with..."

This sexual discourse seems to have the ability to result in an experience of homosexuality as bitter and brutal. This experience of brutality will be dealt with as a separate theme. Both the older and younger participants spoke of a grand focus on sex in homosexual experience, yet attributed it to

different causes. Jeremy attributed this in his era to the necessity of concealment, and explained how this sanctioned secrecy, like a double-edged sword, added fuel to the fire of lust and unbridled passion:

"With it being a secret lifestyle, people were able to enjoy their fantasies... You know, male-male with a big sex-drive... So you're somewhere secret – you know, you're not in the open, where other people know and it's acceptable... Perhaps if it were we would suddenly fall in love, and it would be like everybody else. But the lifestyle became... because of the secrecy, everything happened behind closed doors and in hidden places, in the bushes, it was always happening somewhere where the police couldn't be and the public weren't. And it probably became part of the fantasy – having sex in the forest, or on the beach..."

The other two older men explained that engagement in a *relationship* bordered on the impossible, and the complexities of dealing with one's own sexuality, coupled with the law, dictated that sexual encounters did not move into the realm of deeper affiliation. Gevisser (1995) speaks to this, asserting that "a significant part of gay life in the 1950's and 1960's was the cruising scene – the place at which closeted homosexuals came into contact with the gay subculture" (p. 25). Retief (1995), and Galli and Rafael (1995) elucidate the notion of 'cottaging', a term used with reference to the procurement of sexual encounters in public toilets, often the only sexual prospect accessible in apartheid South Africa. Jeremy concurs, stating:

"A lot of it, a lot of what I learnt, happened in toilets, where you meet people and things... There wasn't really anywhere that we could go..."

The younger men that were interviewed also had a similar understanding of the construction of sex, yet, once again, demonstrated a greater measure of recourse and agency in dealing with this issue. This issue was subtle in the transcripts, and it was only in reading for the voice of the 'I' that these nuances emerged. In they younger men's' narratives there was far more employment of the personal pronoun when discussing issues of sex and relationships, and it emerged as apparent to them that they held the key to shaping and constructing experiences that they desired – be they many, or monogamous. Once again, these accounts were also more psychologised. Where for the older respondents, gay men simply were forced into having multiple sexual partners, there was a sense in the younger men's' accounts that there are essentially two paths available to them. Brandon explains:

"You go through different stages as a gay person... One of them is called 'crashing out' or 'exploration', and that's basically where the gay man is now comfortable with who he is, and starts trying to make up for lost time...That's where I have been lately, but I think there's a difference between the coming-out promiscuity, and the type that becomes a lifestyle."

And:

"Somebody said to me that when you first come out you must take at least two years to enjoy yourself before you get into a relationship because it's a very lonely life, and I don't know if it's a lonely life for every gay person, or just for people that follow that path..."

Moreover, Jack proposed what Squire (2003) may even refer to as a counter-narrative, by going against the grain and affirming:

"Along the way I met a few people, in a very informal – I won't say promiscuous or one night stands, because that goes against my values..."

The assumptions and implications of this theme are complex. What seems clear, however, is that homosexual men have, to differing extents, embraced the theory of the innate male sex drive. Under apartheid, the extent of this embrace was exacerbated by the reality that there existed few other opportunities, than clandestine, closeted ones. The restrictions of the old regime also seemed to encourage an erotic rebellion against these restrictions. Such a narrative seems to exist amongst the gay youth as well, yet implicit in their accounts is the idea that they have agency – they can choose to engage in risky casual sex, or they can opt to be in committed relationships.

FEAR OF THE CORE: NARRATIVES OF LIVED BRUTALITY.

Taylor (2002) a clinical psychologist, oriented in the paradigm of social constructionism and narrative therapy, asserts that "in forming and making sense of our identities, we draw upon the cultural images, representations and discourses that are available to us" (p. 156). Taylor is interested in the effect that the institution of prevailing cultural discourses of the homosexual as pathologically iniquitous and masochistic has had upon generations of gay men. Amongst many social factors, Taylor notes that even in television, film and literature, representations of the homosexual as self-destructive, homicidal, depraved, and tragically fated are endemic. "Whatever the story, he must always in some sense be the victim of his sexuality" (Taylor, 2002: 162).

Bronski (1998, as cited in Taylor, 2002) comments that since homosexual men have little reproductive value, their societal worth is quantified in accordance with their ability to consume, and thus many gay subcultures prioritise a spirit of consumption and hedonism. "It is community through consumption, emancipation through accumulation, liberation through hedonism, whereby equality is naively equated with spending power, the pursuit of pleasure and sexual plurality" (Taylor, 2002: 166).

Taylor's insights refer to but one of the many discourses and narratives available to white homosexual men in South Africa. Counter-narratives and discourses of resistance exist, yet all of my research subjects, both younger and older, either alluded to, or vehemently affirmed the idea that gay life can be nothing short of brutal, possibly as a derivative of the internalisation of such discourses.

Said Jeremy:

"It's quite brutal in gay life... I think it's because it's undercover, and so men-with-men, and not being accepted... It can be a brutal, brutal thing... And I think as a teenager or a young man you can actually get quite disillusioned by it... You know, it's not always the best environment, you don't always get the caring..."

What Jeremy is hinting at here is a dichotomy that exists in this version of male homosexuality between sex and nurture, and how the latter is often compromised and sacrificed for the former. In an earlier theme (p. 20), risky and polygamous sex was discussed as the fruit of state repression. Yet here we see that it is concomitantly the result of the way white South African homosexual men have engaged with and bought into the more western notions of gay hedonism. Jeremy continues:

"What I'm trying to say is, a young boy like me, meeting somebody who's what we call 'on the scene' who basically goes to a club, meets somebody, they may just have sex with them actually... So if you come across that situation, you can be quite disillusioned quite early... It can become a bit of a meat market if you are not careful..."

The idea of homosexuality being a catch-twenty-two experience was salient in Jeremy's narrative. Continuing on the above theme, he uttered:

"The gay culture – you get sucked into it... That's something that gays have to realise... The culture, it can corrupt people. I think you learn to take the knocks after a while, actually... I think every gay person knows their relationship is not for long..."

It would appear that the older participants have embraced Taylor's (2002) variant of gay subculture. What appears to be significant is the sense that the gay community itself offers many of its own perils, and is therefore not the safe haven from the heterosexual world that many young gay men may initially perceive it to be. Speaking of his own realisation of this, Evan, an older man, narrated:

"I think you become a bit tougher as life goes on... At one stage I thought I'd rather be on my own, I'll never be involved again... That's why I moved in here, a small place, where I can just lock up and go, and it's a bachelor flat... And I broke up with him and thought that's fine – now I'm going to be a bachelor..."

Once again, the younger men seemed to have more of an offensive attitude to this experience of their gay worlds. This more positive, pro-active stance could be attributed to the complexities and naiveties of youth, as much as to a more enlightened, politicised and self-aware generation. This should be considered in engagement with their stories. Brandon, for example, newly 'on the scene', is very aware that there seems to be an unhealthy subtext to what he has chosen as his new context:

"There are stereotypes and patterns that the gay community seem to follow... A large part of that is the way you look, the kind of boyfriend you have – you know, it's very image-driven. There are a lot of people who are not like that, who feel like they have to be like that...The whole image thing, and the promiscuity..."

The implication of this is that, after decades spent grappling with one's sexuality, finally to reach the point of identification with a homosexual lifestyle, acceptance is not necessarily inevitable. It would appear that the rites of the white South African homosexual subculture could be more brutal and terrifying than classroom mockery and familial alienation. Perhaps part of the dilemma is the hope that 'closeted' men and boys project into the 'the other side' - hopes and expectations that this new world cannot conceivably satisfy.

Taylor (2002) is adamant that emotional difficulties experienced by gay men are often the "consequences of participation within a specific subculture and an adherence to its reified expectations, norms and values" (p. 154). Jack speaks to this, asserting that:

"A lot of the guys I've been involved with have had major issues, be it that they're convinced that they're in this gay subculture and therefore need to behave in a certain way – in other words, cheat on you – or take drugs... You know, it's the whole consumption of the gay stereotype that I find very problematic..."

When probed further, Jack continued:

"The stereotype is that you are fast-paced, drunk behaviour, clubbing behaviour, promiscuous sex, vanity... Um, competition, snobbery, bitchiness – a whole lot of negative stuff that I think society has created around homosexuality, and people assume that they need to behave in this way in order to be homosexual..."

Two issues seem significant here, in terms of the greater purpose of this study. Firstly, when applying Mauthner and Daucet's (1998) analytical construct 'reading for the voice of the I'- the manner in which the respondents refer to and situate themselves in their contexts - it is clear that the younger men once again demonstrate more agency, and even insight. Evan and Jeremy speak of themselves as being hurt and blunted by their experience of homosexual life as brutal. Once again, the recourse afforded to the older men seems minimal. Homosexuality, and gay existence is something that acts upon them, rather than the contrary. The younger men, however, seem more *aware* that such a notion of homosex *exists,* but imply a stand against it. There is a sense that they have the resources to keep this, which they perceive to be unhealthy, at arms length, and forge for themselves different experiences. Jack speaks directly to this:

"There are a lot of gay people who are not 'on the scene', as they call it... They prefer to lead their own lives, have social networks that are outside, and it's because they don't want to get caught up in this stereotypical way of living..."

What this may be heralding is the fragmenting of barriers between hetero and homosexual social existence – that due to waves of societal change, the need for homosexual subcultures is not as urgent as before. It is possible that for some men, such a grouping has served its purpose, but is

now stale and therefore given to decay, and indeed is viewed in this unhealthy light. 'The scene', once the only forum of same-sex involvements in this country, is starting to be criticised and shunned by contemporary gay men.

CONCLUSION.

At the outset, this endeavour was interested in the tensions between the narratives of older and younger white, South African homosexual men. The themes that emerged from these narratives seem to confirm much of the literature that problematises the relationship between law, and society, and the impact of this relationship on lived experience. Inherent to each narrative was the sense that the individual is engaged with communities and social networks that are largely unaffected by policy changes and legislation on a macro level. While one could argue that the overarching 'war' for South African homosexuals has been won, embodied in the Constitution, it would appear that individual homosexuals are engaged in derivative battles in their everyday lives, waged against conservatives, perceiving the country to be uncomfortably tolerant, and indeed against the effect that such attitudes have on the construction of their own identities (From Calvinism to cruising, 1999). These 'conservatives' are often their parents, their friends and their colleagues.

Moreover, what emerged is that constructs such as internalised homophobia are pervasive across accounts, and even the younger men have this historical socio-political legacy to bear. Of immense significance, however, was the greater degree of recourse and agency present in the younger men's narratives – the increased freedom afforded to them in their negotiations of their sexual identities and lifestyles. This appears to be the fruit of a more liberating contemporary discourse around homosexuality, as well as their psychologisation, which was problematised. However, the slips and tensions inherent to such victories have to be constantly acknowledged and engaged, lest we whitewash the experiences of individuals who do not interact with documents and legislation, but with people. The complexities around the negotiation of a male homosexual identity were discussed and engaged with, as they emerged from the narratives.

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