

An Exploration Of How Zulu Gay Men Negotiate their Christian and Cultural Beliefs
in the Process of Coming Out

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DECLARATION - PLAGIARISM

The research described in this thesis was carried out at the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal – Pietermaritzburg campus under the co-supervision of Dr Sarasvathie Reddy and Prof. Sarojini Nadar.

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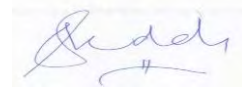


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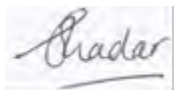


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ABSTRACT

Struggles with sexuality vary from person to person depending on their unique circumstances and experiences, but those who are attracted to people of the same sex, arguably experience greater struggles. These struggles are most visible in the coming-out experiences of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI). Literature especially in the African religious and cultural contexts portrays gay men as victims of discrimination, homophobia and violent crimes. This study aimed to understand the experiences of Zulu gay men in this regard. What were their experiences of discrimination and marginalisation from religion and culture in the process of coming out was an underlying question. The participants of the study were purposefully selected initially and thereafter through a snowballing technique. Phenomenological interviews as well as a focus group discussion were held in private settings. The data was produced and analysed through the lenses of Gender Performativity, Queer theory and Queer Theology.

While the experiences of the participants confirmed the literature in the field regarding the struggles and complexities of the coming-out process faced by gay men, the remarkable agency shown by this group of men also shone through, thereby demonstrating the importance of resilient and taking ownership in creating a conducive and supportive environment for each other. This study showed the power of such resilience and agency in the face of religious and cultural discrimination. Despite the challenges faced by Zulu gay men, participants from the research affirm that negotiating the boundaries of their Christian and cultural identity and their sexuality is possible by re-conceptualizing their sexuality within a religious and cultural context that emphasizes the concepts of love and compassion as characteristics associated with God. Spiritual fulfilment and a relationship with God and the ancestors become more important than adhering to congregational doctrine, conservative biblical interpretation and other rules which exclude homosexuals. Zulu gay men are reclaiming space and visibility by not divorcing their Christian faith and their cultural beliefs but rather they continue to find their own meaningful contribution by reconciling both their religious and cultural beliefs with their sexual identity.

Keywords: Culture, Religion, Gender, Wellbeing, Coming-out, Sexual Identity, Sexuality and Masculinity.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

Gender and sexuality form part of our realities and who we are as human beings. The coming-out experiences of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) vary depending on the environment. Discrimination, social attitudes and taboos about homosexuality especially in the African context play a critical role in influencing the coming-out processes of gay African men. Gay refers to “a man who is attracted to other men emotionally, physically and erotically” (Reddy 2001: 87). While authors like Kopano Ratele (2011) prefer to use „men who love other men“ because of stigmatisation attached to the term „gay“, in this study I will use the term gay to refer to men who self-identify as gay. Many scholars argue that culture and religion form part of gender and sexuality discourses by influencing relations, especially through certain expectations in defining how men, in general, should behave (Chitando and Chirongoma, 2012 and Tamale, 2011).

In this dissertation, I sought to understand the coming-out experiences of gay Christian Zulu men. I was interested in the role of religious beliefs in either affirming or hindering the sense of wellbeing of gay men. In the case of the latter, gay men who experience negativity and discrimination as a result of religious beliefs often end up with conditions such as depression, to the extent where they even attempt or commit suicide. Culture and religion influence gender and sexual relations especially through imposing certain expectations and ideologies which define how men and women, in general, should behave. Homosexuality, or being gay, is often regarded as “unAfrican” and „coming out“ often results in social prejudice, isolation and marginalisation where normative masculinity is shaped and maintained by social, cultural, religious and political ideologies. Many studies (Reddy 2001, Tamale 2011 and Ratele 2011) indicate that men who love other men or who identify with being gay, often experience challenges related to their sexuality, beliefs and spirituality.

This research investigated how the negotiating process of reconciling religious beliefs and spirituality with one’s sexuality, impact, shape and often prevent the coming-out process. Research has shown that religion and/or spirituality can be a source of strength for men who come out. Meanley, S. et al (2016: 37) reveal that “religious beliefs or practices can be integrated as an anchor to a self-amongst gays and bisexual men”. For those who subscribe to

any form of religious or spiritual beliefs; being gay forms part of their identity as it plays a role of spiritual fulfilment.

The report by Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), November 2014 states that despite what many claim, homosexuality has always existed and is not new to the African continent with a specific focus on Sub-Saharan Africa¹. There is documented evidence of same-sex sexual practice and gender transgression around the world. Gathogo, J et al, (2011: 143) reveal that; “research in the African continent has focused on same-sex sexual practices and not sexual orientation and realities”. This statement may further suggest that issues of emotional attachment, lived experiences, orientation identity as a reflection of oneself were not considered in most research on sexuality.

The process of coming out has always been challenging and difficult for LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) to claim and live their lives without fear or as part of enjoying their existence as a form of human rights provision. I find it important to mention that it is difficult to separate LGBTI issues as a queer group. Their lived experiences and challenges related to their identities are similar. However, for the purpose of this study, the main focus was on gay men exploring the specific unique coming-out experiences associated with them. Homosexuality has always been linked to condemnation from the religious viewpoint, accompanied by immensely negative attitudes on the part of societies. Discrimination and negative attitudes are often escalated to targeted violent acts that are erroneously perceived as corrective measures to change LGBTI people to be “normal”. These perceptions continue to undermine the emotional, intellectual and social wellbeing of LGBTI people. “Social prejudice, discriminative and homophobic environments; may constitute being a violation of human rights, safety and security of LGBTI people” (Reddy 2001: 83). The negative impact often results in some individuals manifesting a myriad of symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and substance or drug abuse due to the feelings of rejection and being marginalised and/or negatively impacting on the coming-out process.

In what follows, I will present the purpose and the background of the research, a literature review, the research questions and the objectives of this study.

¹ Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), November 2014. The Rights of LGBTI people in Sub-Saharan Africa

1.2 Background to the Research Problem

The Zulu people in South Africa have various names for the concept of homosexuality. *Izitabane* is the most common Zulu word used to refer to gay people and another one is „*Ongqingili*“, though they are mostly used in a derogatory manner. The process of coming-out in many African societies is often met with challenges such as discrimination, negative representation, homophobic attitudes and exclusion (Lewis 2011, Mkasi 2012). While religious-cultural beliefs play an important role in promoting the well-being of individuals in society, they can also contribute to instances of discrimination against certain groups of people such as sexual minorities.

Although South Africa guarantees the right to non-discrimination on the grounds of gender and sexual orientation (The Constitution of South Africa, Bill of Rights, Section 9 (3)1995) gay men still face challenges with regards to living as openly gay. This experience seems to raise questions of identity-conflict for gay Zulu Christian men when trying to reconcile and negotiate their sexual identity with their Christian and cultural beliefs. Most paramount is the question of, how a Zulu gay man can remain true to his sexual identity and remain accepted in the Christian society that regards him as different.

I am a South African Christian Zulu gay man; who has experienced homosexuality as a taboo and has lived much of my life in silence for fear of the discrimination from my Zulu Christian community. This is despite the progressive nature of the South African Constitution and Bill of Rights that was adopted post-apartheid. I have always felt and took my sexuality as part of who I am. I came out publicly in 2001; it happened accidentally through a public radio talk show while I was working for the Durban Lesbian and Gay Health Centre as a counsellor just after graduating from university. This incident happened a long time after I had already undergone a serious internal struggle of trying to come out or coming to terms and accepting my sexuality at the personal level. The process firstly involved a number of years of fasting as a way of asking God to take away the feeling of being attracted to other men but it never disappeared. It was most difficult especially because I regard myself as a Christian yet many fellow Christians around me and the church were completely against the idea of same-sex attraction or homosexuality. It continued to be a painful journey that was full of depression, rejection, confusion, loneliness, low self-esteem and isolation. During that process of struggling with myself I kept on researching and getting more information on understanding sexuality and matters of homosexuality. One day, I eventually felt as if God answered my

prayers as there was a little internal voice that kept saying, “Them bani just accept yourself the way you are and God still loves you.” I then started to feel good about myself and I was fortunate that my family was supportive when I told them. Initially, it was not easy for them. My family slowly came to terms with my sexuality and were supportive especially my parents and siblings. I then started being involved in activism as a way of contributing to social change of behaviour and attitudes towards LGBTI people, learning more on gender and matters related to sexuality and getting involved in psychological support through counselling other LGBTI who were trying to come to terms with their sexuality. My involvement in community development and activism became a process of liberating myself and continuous building of inner strength to deal with external prejudice and discrimination at different levels of my life as well as assisting other people to be able to reconcile their sexuality and life experiences. Therefore, engaging with the experiences of gay men as a researcher positioned me as an insider in an attempt to explore how Zulu gay men negotiate their religious-cultural beliefs in the process of coming out, with a specific focus on Zulu gay men living in Pretoria.

1.2.1 Regional Advocacy for Human Rights and Recognition of Same-Sex Relationships

Continuous advocacy and lobbying on policy change and attitudes in the region by various organizations working on human rights, gender and sexual and reproductive health and rights remains crucial. Advocacy has contributed to raising awareness on important issues relating to gender and sexuality. For example the passing of the Resolution 275 on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity (SOGI) by the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights in Luanda, Angola (May 2014)². The Resolution hopes to strengthen legislated reference on SOGI and aims to encourage condemnation of passed laws that directly discriminate and fuel violence, attacks and killings of people of different sexual orientations in the region. This resolution set a precedent to address discrimination and promote tolerance towards people of different sexual orientation and gender identities. According to Strommen (1990), in light of overt negative social prejudice against homosexuality, homosexual family members must confront a variety of personal issues both in coming to terms with their own sexual identity and in making their families aware of their feelings. Negotiation of gay identity goes beyond a personal matter or journey but it further constantly includes advocacy at strategic levels specifically for policy change in order to create an enabling environment. International instruments such as SOGI Yogyakarta Principles (2006) are amongst

² Resolution 275 on Sexual Orientation, Gender identity by the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights. www.achpr.org/sessions/55th/resolutions/275/ (Accessed: 30 January 2017)

instruments critical for facilitating advancement of social justice for sexual minorities³. It further contributes to the creation of a body of knowledge based on well-researched realities and experiences of sexual minorities in the society. These instruments can be used as a foundation to facilitate dialogue on these complex issues from personal, social, political, religious, cultural spheres in order to address inequalities and discrimination based on sexual orientation. In the context of South Africa, this is over and above using the Constitution as progressively as it is crafted.

1.3 Preliminary Literature Review

Ratele (2011: 407) argues that “the patriarchal system tends to ignore other male sexualities (such as homosexuality) other than heterosexuality, even though personal testimonies from African men who love other men and that the mere existence of male-to-male African sexuality fears and hates within the dominant sexual system”. The love of a man for other men almost always turns that man into a marginal figure, an outsider, within those societies in which patriarchal heterosexual masculinity is normative. This ideology makes it difficult for gay men to be who they are without having fear for their lives in relation to living their open gay identity. “Men who love other men end up as objects of homophobic rage because such love disturbs the cornerstone of patriarchal heterosexual power in that it shows that men are not of one mind and feeling when it comes to sexuality” (Ratele 2011: 408). In this sense, “a gendered ideology of patriarchal power maintains that hetero-normative masculinity is the only acceptable and recognized form of male masculinity” as Ratele (2011: 408) argues. My analysis of this argument is that it further suggests that other forms of non-heterosexual sexualities such as of gay men are regarded as disruptive to the dominant hetero-masculinity because of deviating to hetero-normative system.

Tamale (2011: 15) illustrates that “factors influencing sexual prejudice include knowledge, beliefs, procreation, sexual orientation and personal and interpersonal relations”. Sexuality may further encompass self-esteem, identity, power, violence, emotions and above all it remains a complex phenomenon to study. The struggle around sexuality is a political struggle aimed at constructed structures of power and social practices. In addition, there are many psychological theories that order men and women’s sexual relations in a hierarchical structure as pointed by Butler (1995). Gay men struggle to fit in the hierarchy of power due to their sexual identity that has no sexual relation with women as part of maintaining a dominant

³ Sexual Orientation, Gender Identities, Yogyakarta Principles (2006) www.yogyakartaprinciples.org (accessed 30 January 2017)

masculinity. Ratele (2011), further argues that “sexuality has to do with men’s power over other men and women” (Ratele, 2011: 416). This suggests that gay men may find it challenging to embrace their sexuality and express it in the open as it threatens the constructed hierarchical structures in a social system. “Men and women who have sexual preferences that are other than heterosexual may develop anxiety and uncertainty in the dominant order” Ratele, 2011: 416). The anxiety and uncertainty may influence LGBTI people to either not come out and/or to reject their sexuality. This is due to forms of discrimination and society’s attitudes towards them. Connell (1995); states that there are categories of subordination and marginalization of LGBTI minorities such as non-recognition in the society and criminalization of homosexuality.

Much of the debates on prejudice against homosexual men revolve around debates of men’s gender identities, practices, masculinities, and sexualities in the discourses of gender and sexuality. Interrogating issues of masculinity involves various components of social, political, sexual and biological aspects of what it means to be a man. Being a man is often viewed in the context of hetero-normativity which may include gender attributes such as being strong and powerful through masculine characteristics. It is crucial to note the existence of other forms of masculinities other than those based on heterosexuality as part of acknowledging possibilities of defining masculinity and being a man differently. Chitando et al 2012: 2, talk about an endeavour to “generate masculinities that transform the world into a gender-equitable community”. They initiate a discussion of encouraging positive masculinities including taking cognizance of the role of religion as a way to understand gender relations. These discussions may contribute towards curbing gender- based violence and take seriously the reality of HIV and/or AIDS. This is important in the context of “most societies in sub-Saharan Africa, where hegemonic masculinity has projected men as having power over women and children, which could be influenced by religion and culture”, argues (Chitando, 2012: 261). This argument further suggests that culture and religion are used as a system of regulating behaviour and relations. For gay men, their sexuality is often regarded as deviating from what is regarded as acceptable normative sexuality.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005: 834), point out that “masculinities have hierarchies, as some are dominant and hegemonic while others are subordinated and marginalized”. This statement may suggest that not all men have power and control in the social system. In this context, gay men are seen to have less power than heterosexual men due to their sexuality and deviation from hegemonic masculinity. Part of the cultural discourse about

homosexuality, or being gay, is that it is often regarded as “un-African” as argued by many scholars like Lewis (2011) and Mkasi (2012). Reddy (2001) argues that “homophobic identification of homosexuality by African leaders as „un-African“ conceals a moral bias and causes sex panic as a security emergency” (Reddy, 2001: 83). This argument, together with other influences of culture and religion as described above, continue to result in social prejudice, isolation and marginalization, which makes it very difficult for homosexual men to come out. It further undermines homosexuals lived experiences and realities as part of who they are.

Hence this study aims to contribute to the recent discussions in the scholarship that attempts to explore how religion and cultural traditions influence the debates on homosexuality in Africa. The experiences of Zulu Gay men and how they negotiate between their Christian and cultural beliefs in the process of coming-out was explored in this study. Butler’s “gender performativity” (1993) provided a useful lens for this research since it moves beyond the binary discourse of male, female and homo-heterosexual. This is developed further under the theoretical framework in the next chapter.

1.4 Key Research Question

How do Zulu gay men negotiate their Christian and cultural beliefs in the process of coming-out?

Research Sub-Questions

- (a) How do Zulu gay men understand their Christian and cultural beliefs in relation to their sexual identity?
- (b) How do Zulu gay men negotiate between their Christian and cultural beliefs and their experiences of coming-out?
- (c) Why do Zulu gay men negotiate between their Christian and cultural beliefs and their experiences of coming out in the way that they do?

1.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown the significance of this study in interpreting how religious and cultural traditions influence the debates on homosexuality in Africa. The next chapter will explore and engage how this subject has been studied previously as well as the theoretical frames that have been used to understand the subject.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter the literature and theories that informed the study are discussed. The concepts that were used in the study will also be defined in order to provide a clear discussion of sexuality-related matters. Finally, the lenses through which the data was produced and analysed will be discussed.

The literature review section is divided into emergent themes. The emergent themes are discussed in depth drawing from different literature sources in exploring the research that has been done in the past on the subject.

2.1.0 Literature Review

2.1.1 Intersectionality

Often many struggles and challenges faced by gay men do not only involve coming out experiences but they are related to multiple struggles, such as accepting their sexuality, association of their sexuality to gender, race, culture and religion etc. “The complexities of sexuality not only form part of the hardship realities of human existence and sexual experiences but also forms part of the politics of sexual expression in the quest for attaining sexual liberation at various levels” (Lewis, D et al 2011). These are at the personal levels; associated with how one accepts and acknowledges who they are; social dealing with how one interacts and feels the sense of belonging or not in the family, friendship and religious environment or institutional level; which may be associated with legal or policy provision to address discrimination and prejudice. As such, intersectionality assists us to understand and analyse the complexities of not just gender and sexuality but also the scope and various influences of continuous discrimination, hate speech and oppression amongst gay men especially Black Zulu Christian gay men who were the participants in this particular study. “Same-sex orientation and expression seem to threaten the institution of power such as family and hetero-normative masculinity including sexual preferences or identity for both men and women respectively” Reddy (2001: 83-84).

Sexual preferences and identities that are not seen to be within the parameters of the hetero-norm are not recognised or regarded as natural and equal to those linked to heterosexuality. Gay men face prejudice and hatred for deviating and living their lives against hetero-normative expectations. Reddy (2001: 85) argues that “the struggle for political recognition of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people shows that sexual identities are never experienced in isolation from broader social values, race, class, gender

and location”. It is essential and critical to explore an opportunity to further understand dimensions of the intersections of sexuality. For the purpose of this study, this literature review sought to discuss the intersections of gender, Zulu culture, location, sexuality, ethnicity and religion.

2.2.2 Gender and Sexuality

The post-colonial understanding of gender and sexuality influences how characteristics of men and women in any given nation form part of a gendered interpretation of the politics of masculinity and femininity. Bennet (2011) speaks about attainment of political rights for women through addressing inequalities and organising women to fight violence against women and assertion of sexual freedom. This resonates well with the struggle for attaining sexual freedom of expression, existence and societal recognition of gay men.

It is noted that sexuality and gender go hand in hand; both are creations of culture, religion and society, and play a central and crucial role in maintaining human relations including a political power of identities in the society. Gender provides the critical analytical lens through which any sexuality matters must be understood and conceptualised in order to understand human nature and existence. In understanding sexuality matters as part of human existence and sexual rights issues; individual lived experiences are crucial; though they remain politically complex.

Tamale (2011:13) explains “sexuality as what influences people’s choices of whom they have sex with or how humans relate to each other sexually and how sexuality is reflected in the social norm, identities and attitudes”. In other words, sexuality encompasses various orientations and identities attached to individuals and it forms part of who they are and their most intimate preferences. It is never about orientation only whether one is homosexual or heterosexual as often normally perceived but it’s an integral holistic aspect of an individual. Matebeni (2011: 50) reveals that “the space is integral to many gay people’s lives; where and how you are located as a gay, lesbian or trans person determines how you will be perceived in that particular space and your experience of the space and place”.

In addition, there is the exploration of spaces and efforts to focus on the importance of space in relation to sexual identity; “the importance of focusing exploration of landscapes as a way of negotiating gay identity in relation to space and environment” (Matebeni, 2011: 54). Often negotiating the identities are dependent on the environment and space on whether it is user friendly to allow people to live their true identity and be who they are. Tamale (2011:11)

points out that the “impact on gender relations within the context of sexuality such as race, ethnicity, religion, culture, locality amongst other things influences the sexual lives of men and women”. This means “sexuality is deeply embedded in the meanings and interpretation of gender systems” (Tamale, 2011: 11).

Gay men often find themselves in the situation where they are either expected to qualify or affirm their gender or negotiate their existence within the context of heteronormative cultural settings. This could happen as a way to be afforded acknowledgement and acceptance by society. Undoubtedly, gender and sexuality become a political matter by which the society controls and imposes expectations on what and how individual sexualities and gender should be lived between men and women. Tamale (2011: 11) suggests that “it is a political call to conceptualise sexuality outside the normative social orders and frameworks and view it through binary oppositions and simplistic labels”. Bennet (2011) and Matebeni (2011) state “the importance of gender, sexuality and development in order to avoid clashes and tensions through the provision of safe space and learning on a holistic approach to development”. In this context, they caution African feminist scholars who critically consider various methodologies and careful exploration of sexuality as it is multi-dimensional and complex. Tamale (2001: 11-12) describes these various dimensions of sexuality as elements that include sexual knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes, behaviours, procreation, sexual orientation and personal and interpersonal sexual relations”. These are aspects of realities of both men and women, their lived experiences that form part of their existence.

For the purpose of this research, homosexuality with reference to gay men as an identity is the focus. It is important to note that in this study „Gay“ (which can be used differently depending on contexts and understanding as a form of identity) refers to a man who is attracted to other men emotionally, physically and erotically. The sexual rights and freedom of gay men in this context go beyond the understanding of gender and sexuality but involve the negotiating, occupying and claiming the societal, religious and cultural space for recognition.

Sexual and gender identities influence how people and the society interact and relate back to the individual based on their sexual orientation. Individual lived experiences are unique and represent their realities and influences how they identify themselves. This research allowed gay men to relate their experiences and acknowledge their realities beyond being male but also accepting their sexual desires as being Christian and belonging to a Zulu culture. The

culture of fear regarding sexual expression is influenced by hetero-normative thinking and the patriarchal power that prescribe sexual expectations of men in a particular environment. These expectations often leave out men who may have sexual desire and attraction to same-sex people. The policing of sexuality has exposed people who live their lives through an alternative sexual orientation to public attack and homophobic discrimination.

According to Lewis, “African sexuality is often defined in relation to reproduction and or procreation with an; assumption that Africans may not display homoerotic desires” Lewis, (2011: 208). Zulu gay men continue to experience negative attitudes and discrimination as they are seen as not living up to hetero-normative expectations. In this sense, a gendered ideology of patriarchal power maintains that hetero-normative masculinity is the only acceptable and recognised form of male masculinity. Butler (1990) argues against this notion and further questions learning.

“the belief that certain gendered behaviours are natural, illustrating the ways that ones” learned performance of gendered behaviour (what we commonly associate with femininity and masculinity) is an act of sorts, a performance, one that is imposed upon us by normative heterosexuality in order to believe it as natural and unchangeable” (Butler 1990: 42).

2.3.2 Gender Performance and Sexuality

Gender performance is not something that one is born with or comes naturally; it is learned and controlled (Butler 1990). It further differs with regard to how one behaves in any given circumstance and environment and it also differs with each and every male individual. Colonial perceptions of gender, race and sexuality are constructed through projections of African bodies in the context of the heteronormative (Lewis 2011: 201 and Bennet 2011: 96). Butler (1990: 45) claims that “the seemingly natural division of man/woman is founded on the cultural meta-taboo regarding homosexuality and on the forced and constant regulation of sexuality within the boundaries of heterosexuality”.

Most gay men are forced to conform to the heteronormative way of living life in order to fulfil cultural expectations such as getting married to a woman and have children, which are opposed to their realities. Butler (1990:45) further points out that “performative masculinity and femininity are defined through heterosexual gender and sexuality, and they serve to ratify the alleged "naturalness" of this normative sexuality while marginalizing other options of sexuality, desires, identities and behaviours which are cast outside the boundaries of

normality”. Gender performativity raises cultural expectations of men to fit in within the hetero-normative system of life as to live an acceptable or rather what seems to be an appropriate gender order. The existence of diversity amongst men challenges the cultural and gendered roles and expectations that they can never be fixed even though the hetero-normative system tends to portray it that way.

Gay men often find themselves in such difficult and different situations where they sometimes choose to perform their gender according to what the society expects them to do as men though most of the time it compromises their true identities beyond the hetero-normative context. These circumstances often may perpetuate sexual prejudice and violence, which mostly happen when gay men deviate from what is regarded as a norm in a hetero-normative context.

Realities of sexuality go beyond just a sexual feeling but it further “encompasses self-esteem, identity, power, violence, emotions and above all it remains a complex phenomenon to study” (Tamale 2011:12). It is within this context that this phenomenological study explores the lived experiences and realities of Christian Zulu gay men through their struggles and challenges.

The dynamics of sexuality as political is aimed at maintaining power structures and social practices in communities. In this context, the control of sexuality becomes a social order that is regulated and those found to be deviating from what is regarded as normative are then faced with negative consequences. Policing sexuality undermines reproductive health rights of both men and women. In traditional communities gay men continue to face stigma and discrimination. This has negative impact on their freedom to live openly as gay.

“Historically, Western Calvinistic perspectives viewed the sexualities of Africans as being largely constructed as immoral and primitive” (Tamale 2011: 30). As a result, sexualities are often hidden as something that most people feel embarrassed to embrace as part of their identities and realities. Some people believe that when one is gay, it means they have erectile dysfunction which makes them not attracted to women especially in the Zulu tradition. One is expected to use “traditional herbal medicine (*umvusa nkunzi or induku* – meaning wake up the bull or stick” (Ratele 2011: 416) to remain virile. The previous statement suggests an assumption that gay men have a sexual dysfunction associated with erection hence their lack of sexual interest in women. Herbal medicines are therefore viewed as a remedy that might assist them to experience erections and thus be attracted to women and not to other men. As

a result of these negative perceptions gay men feel ashamed, lose self-esteem and experience other psychological effects.

“The struggle around sexuality is political; aimed at power structures and social practices through which widespread psychological theories that support ordering of men and women’s sexual relations in a hierarchical structure that sexuality has to do with men’s power over other men and women” (Ratele 2011:416). This statement suggests that gay men may find it challenging to embrace their sexuality and express it in the open as it might be seen as a threat to the hierarchical structure in a social system. The negative control of power over gay men and women may contribute to making them feel inferior and powerless to be whom they are without feeling prejudice. Men and women who have a sexual preference that is other than the heterosexual norm may develop anxiety and uncertainty to come out and accept their sexuality due to forms of discrimination and negative attitudes towards them.

The research on prejudice against homosexual men revolves around debates about men’s gender identities, practices, masculinities, and sexualities in the discourses on gender and sexuality (Butler, 1990, Connell, 2005, Tamale, 2011). Interrogating masculinity involves various components of social, political, sexual and biological aspects of what it means to be a man.

The discourse on sexuality influences what becomes acceptable when it comes to relationships between men and women; men with other men and women with other women in any given situation. These arguments suggest that gender and sexuality go hand in hand and plays a critical role in maintaining power relations and relationships in the society. Tamale (2011:13) argues that concepts of “gender and sexuality, are both used normatively, in order to denote power dominance and therefore are useful to speak of gendered sexualities and/or sexualized genders within expected roles.” These approaches allow for in-depth analyses of the intersections of the ideological and historical systems that underpin each of these concepts, and how they shape knowledge production.

Fitting in, performing and living an identity or expressed sexuality may bring about discrimination and marginalisation especially in the context of men who love other men in the African society. In most cases in the South African context; “homophobic attitudes are the common reaction against other sexualities other than heterosexuality influenced by religion, culture and traditional expectations of men” (Reddy 2001: 83). This is irrespective

of the country's perceived progressive Constitution that protects the rights of non-discrimination based on grounds of race, gender and sexual orientation.

Altman et al., (2012) describe homophobia as a term commonly used to cover the full scope of discrimination, negative attitudes, denial, and persecution of people based on their homosexuality. Homophobia is influenced by "maintaining the power of hetero-normative gender and sexuality order in the society by defying homosexuality as another form of acceptable sexual identity" (Reddy 2001: 83). Same-sex desire is seen as a threat to a social order of power and family within the hetero-normative and cultural phenomenon.

According to Butler (2002), the understanding of gender and sexual identities remain fluid depending on individual circumstances and the notion of sexuality. Regulating gender and sexuality into a social and gender order creates what Butler calls "gender performativity" in line with, and in contrast to hetero-normativity and cultural expectations of men and women in the society. Men who love other men may find it difficult to come out in a society with gendered expectations of performing their perceived gender and sexuality in accordance to what society expects.

Social meaning of certain terms referring to identities and sexualities could be demeaning and perpetuating discrimination such as *izitabane* in Zulu. Butler (1993: 63) argues that "categories of normative and defiant sexual behaviour are not biological but rather socially constructed". This then suggests that men who love other men are entitled to express their intimate feelings towards the same gender of their choice. Butler further points out that discrimination against gays are not a function of their sexuality but rather points to a failure to perform according to heterosexual gender norms. The distribution of power to control plays a critical role in the gender and sexuality discourse. African Feminism assists in challenging and interrogating inequalities in respect of gender and sexuality in the African context.

Reddy (2004: 4) argues that "African feminism is a conceptual organising framework that suggests an „intra-continental“ structure which acts as a tool to interrogate issues of inequalities and power dynamics. Furthermore, it acts as a lens to view the unequal distribution of power between genders and sexualities". The unequal distribution of power influences how both men and women relate to each other and how they behave with one another within the context of patriarchal system. "Such schemes (social, political and physical) may then facilitate and reinforce a view of sexualities as political in the model of a

feminist sexual enquiry guiding how men and women should live their lives” Reddy, 2004: 5. It is with this view that sexuality and gender become regulated in a public and private domain. Reddy (2004: 4) points out that “an important feature of African Feminism is the recognition that men (and women) are not an equally homogenous class of people”. The argument here suggests that, men who love men may find themselves in a compromising situation in relation to enjoying and exercising who they are due to limitations and controls rooted in gender and sexual politics. This notion suggests “homosexuality remains a strong political issue within a hetero-normative society controlled by a patriarchal system” (Reddy 2004: 7).

In this case, a gendered ideology of patriarchal power maintains that hetero-normative masculinity is the only acceptable and recognised form of male masculinity. This notion undermines other diverse masculinities that are not within a hetero-normative context as deviant. It is to this discussion on understanding masculinity that the discussion now turns.

2.2.4. Understanding the Politics within Gender, Power and Masculinity

Ratele et al 2011 reveal that debates and research about men’s gender identities, practices, masculinities, and sexualities have a long history in the understanding of discourses on gender and sexuality. When interrogating masculinities, it involves various components of social, political, sexual and biological analysis as part of exploring meanings of masculinities.

Most homosexual men from traditional communities struggle to embrace their identities due to fear of rejection by their family members; social prejudice, being labelled with derogatory names and discrimination in different spheres within the society. Homosexuality challenges how the notion of hegemonic masculinity. It also asserts that men are not a homogenous group. In this context, it seems the existence of homosexuality has been denied in Africa, despite it having been documented in many places by different scholars. This restrictive belief hinders possibilities of living openly as a gay man. In the process; gay men resort to marrying women in order to disguise and conform to societal expectations for men.

Jaspal and Siraj (2011) argue that hetero-normativity influences the construct of heterosexual masculinity as an appropriate male gendered role and acceptable behaviour. In this context, there is an assumption that socialisation plays a critical role in preparing individuals to be part of the social order and live by fulfilling those expectations through socially prescribed identities that define who a Zulu man is and what is expected of him. The politics of

masculinity and gender power will be discussed critically below in order understand identities and the link to gender normative power.

Unpacking diversity in masculinity remains important as part of introducing or paving forward gay liberation to fight discrimination and gender inequalities to those perceived to have different genders or not falling within the gender normative. According to Owino (2012: 2) “existing in structures of gender relations, masculinities are not only embodied in cultures and personal lives of men but are also expressed in religious, class, racial and political understandings of what it means to be a man”. He further points out that, “the understanding of masculinity is not simply a definition in opposition to femininity but is primarily concerned with how men negotiate and make sense of them being men in varied settings” (Owino 2012:17). In many African countries; “patriarchal social pressure to conform is covert and subtle and recent experiences have taken on the form of a direct and often virulent attack on homosexuality” (Reddy 2001: 83). These attacks are constructed as a message that deviation from traditional masculinity and femininity is unacceptable, and therefore affects the coming out experiences of gay people.

2.3. Coming Out

Coming out of the closet, or simply coming out, can be defined as a process for LGBTI peoples’ self-acceptance and self-disclosure of their sexual orientation and/or gender and sexual identity (Reddy, 2011). “Coming out” becomes a liberating process by which the oppression experienced is transformed in a positive light, in that it affirms and strengthens their homosexual identity” Jaspal and Siraj, 2011: 185). This process can be regarded as sexual freedom and celebrating diversity. Arguably, the coming out process in some instances might not be a liberating process depending on different contextual and circumstantial possibilities. In some instances, coming out could open up possibilities for an individual to experience negativity such as discriminative attitudes and rejection from other people who do not support the homosexual identity. In other cases some gay men may experience judgmental actions and possibilities of succumbing to violent behaviour such as being beaten up due to their sexual orientation. Coming out can result or trigger either a positive or a negative outcome. Conversely, LGBTI people who have yet to come out or have opted not to do so are labelled as living in the closet or being in the closet. Disclosing or outing can be a deliberate or accidental disclosure of an LGBTI persons’ sexual orientation or gender identity, without their consent. Outing someone can be dangerous especially to the one who is

outed without their consent because they could receive a negative response to hatred and non-acceptance of their being gay.

In the context of coming out, it is debatable if the process is a private matter or whether it should involve other people as it depends on whether one chooses to come out or who is forced to come out due to a particular influence. Seidman (2005) explains coming out as “a psychological process or journey of making a decision or taking a risk about acknowledging of individual identity”. This process is done in order to embrace personal sexuality so as to deal with personal struggle, feelings of shame and to dealing with social stigma. Seidman (2005) further notes that “it is the power of the closet to shape the core of an individual life that has made homosexuality into a significant personal, social, and political drama in the twentieth century”.

It seems like the coming out process is a critical process that is attached to many dimensions that could be liberating while on the other hand can be destructive. Butler (1991) argues that the process of coming-out does not free gay people from oppression. Although they may feel free to act as themselves, the opacity involved in entering a non-heterosexual territory insinuates judgment upon their identity. In other words, coming out remains a complex process so that many gay people consider it carefully as it may open up various negative and positive reactions. Understanding this “complex process” is largely dependent on the lenses through which we view the phenomenon of coming out. The next section will discuss the theoretical framing that assisted in analysing the data and interpreting the deeper experiences and realities of Zulu gay men who come out.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

2.4.1. Gender Performativity

The most influential work in this field of identity from a feminist perspective is that of Judith Butler. In *Gender Trouble* (1990) she presents a critique of identity-based politics and argues that this is “the method for female emancipation because it would deconstruct the concept of women as a coherent group and thus remove the unwitting regulation and reification of [binary] gender relations” (Butler 1990: 9). Mistry (2000), reports on Butler’s works that “exposes and de-rationalizes the social power systems that construct the norms regarding „natural“ gender identity and the logic of heterosexuality”⁴. In this context, identities of

⁴ Reena Mistry (2000) *Madonna and Gender Trouble*, Essay Edited by David Gauntlett – www.theory.org.uk/madonna/htm

LGBTI are seen to be deviating from the social norm and bring about another alternative expression of sexuality. It also relates appropriately when Zulu gay men acknowledge their identities and live their lives as who they are irrespective of how the society and culture are perceived to be against their sexuality. When Zulu gay men live openly with regard to their sexuality; it challenges what the society might think of its non-existence and then makes it normal. It then demonstrates the existence of gay identities as reality and challenges stereotypes.

Butler adds to the work of other theorists who have explored the assertion that gender is a social construct. She extends their work by writing that there is no specific „gender identity“ behind the performance of a person, that is, behind their expression of gender. She argues that “identity is constituted by a person’s performance and that this performance is the origin of identity, not the cause” (Butler 1990, 22-34). In other words, I am a man, not because of who I am, but because of what I do; because of the ways in which I behave. Therefore, the importance of Judith Butler’s work lies in its critique of identity as being free-floating and not connected to an essence. The substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender performance. My study confirmed that people’s identities are not just representing who they are as though in a performance but they represent their everyday realities of how they see their lives unfolding.

Our gender and sexual identities form part of the self and are performative expressions representing our experiences and realities of our lives. Identity, including gender as a construction based on performance, is one of the key ideas in queer theory. Through our experiences and gendered identities, we do express our realistic inner self but also when circumstances become unfavourable we can perform a particular identity. Butler’s politics of identity and her theory of gender teaches us that gender is fluid and can be learnt or performed by either male or female genders. Butler (1990), in other words, argues that there is no essence of gender identity as fixed or exclusive. She further critically argues that “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender – gender is a performance; it's what one does at particular times, rather than a universal who you are” (Butler 1990:20). In her later work, Butler (2004: 1) explores the idea that gender is being „done“ and that “one does not do ones gender alone.” (Butler 2004: 1). Literally, we are unique, complex human beings and our identity can take many forms depending on the context and the environment in which we find ourselves. “In other words, rather than being a fixed attribute in a person, gender should be seen as a “fluid variable which shifts and changes” Butler 1990:25). This

statement may apply accurately when gay men negotiate their identity in different settings as part of fitting in and calculating the risk of negative reception if they perform openly what I call their „gay male“ identity. So, it means that our identity is not a fixed entity or essence, but a changing form depending on a particular context such as an environment or situation. Our gendered identity is determined by the way we behave, that is, we take on the identity of male or female by performing a certain function in society – in other way our identities are adaptive and fluid in any given environment. Queer theory plays a critical role in investigating marginalization of homosexuality and identity. It is an appropriate theory to analyse the core negotiation processes and tactics of acknowledging sexuality issues as realities of life and lived experiences of Christian Zulu gay men in this context.

2.4.2. Queer Theory

In “Queer Theory”, Butler, (1993) provides a lens for an in-depth and critical understanding of LGBTI people in the specific context of gender studies. Butler (1993: 63) insists that “all sexual behaviours, sexual identities and all categories of normative and deviant sexualities are social constructs which create certain social meaning to those living by their sexualities”. Queer theory emerged through the work of the feminist film critic Teresa de Laurites who introduced the term in 1991 in the *Journal for Feminist Cultural Studies*. She identified it as “a post-structuralist critical theory that includes both queer readings of the texts and the theorization of queerness itself” de Laurites (1991: 3). Queer theory is described as a “diverse range of critical practices and priorities in the reading of the representation of same-sex desire in literary texts, films, music, images; analyses of social and political power relations of sexuality; and critiques of the sex-gender system”(de Laurites, 1991: 5). Furthermore, Tamsin Spargo (1999: 9) believes that, “queer theory is not a singular or systematic conceptual or methodological framework, but a collection of intellectual engagements with relations between sex, gender and sexual desire” (Spargo, 1999: 09). When dealing with issues of sexuality, a deeper and critical understanding of its complexity is important because it touches human sexuality and lives. The intellectual engagement in my view does not only refer to scholars who critically use systematic engagement but is about engaging homosexual people in the conversation to share their realities and consider their lived experiences. De Laurites (1991) explains three crucial aspects of queer theory: “a refusal of heterosexuality as a benchmark for all sexual formations, an attentiveness to gender capability of interrogating the frequent assumption that lesbian and gay studies is a single, homogenous object and an insistence on the multiple ways in which race crucially shapes sexual subjectivity”. A South

African example of the application of queer theory in relation to traditional African culture is that of Mkasi (2012). She uses queer theory “as a deconstruction strategy to challenge hetero-normative understanding of sex, gender, sexuality, sociality and the relation between them in the Zulu culture” (Mkasi 2012: 1440).⁵ This phenomenological study that sought to explore the lived experiences of Christian Zulu gay men also drew from Queer theory in a similar way to Mkasi. The short coming of the use of Queer Theory within the South African context; is that South Africa has strong traditional and religious systems which play a critical role in shaping people’s relations, attitudes and the hetero-normative expectations of men and women in the society. Often, LGBTI faces discrimination, hate crimes and homophobic attitudes due to their sexual orientation which are often embedded in the religious and traditional system. This is despite the progressive laws and rights as enshrined in the Constitution as well as the recognition same-sex relationships realities of discrimination of LGBTI are very high.

2.4.3. Queer Theology

Queer theology has been most incisively described and analysed in the works of Marcella Althaus-Reid (2007) in book entitled *Queer Theology*. The intention of queer theology is to question what has always been considered normal in order to expose the voices of those who have been silenced, or disempowered by the fact that they are not considered normal. Queer theology assists us “in looking deeper into political and sexual queering of theology through understanding the regulation of sexuality in the name of divinity and order of affection” (Althaus-Reid, 2007: 67). As for how gay men who are Christians negotiate their religious and sexual identity it holds as its priority the value of the full humanity of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and intersex people. As is the case in feminist theology, the experience of LGBTI people have been and still is that this value of full humanity is not reflected by social and church structures. “Theology, praxis, spirituality, social practice and governance are critiqued according to this priority, and if the humanity of someone flourishes it is judged to be of God; if it is restricted, it is not of God” (Althaus-Reid 2007: 69).

Feminist theology, while taking its cue from the political feminist movement, also employs the tools of liberation theology to argue from the point of women’s experiences of oppression and marginalisation. In its development, feminist theology has exposed the androcentric and

⁵ Mkasi, Lindiwe P., “A Threat to Zulu Patriarchy and the Continuation of Community”: Traditional Healing as Sacred Safe Space for Female Sangomas in Same-Sex Relationships. *A Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* Vol. 18 no. 2 Special Issue (Dec. 2012)

patriarchal context in which the Bible and the Christian churches have been conceptualised, to the detriment of women. Similarly, Queer theology seeks to expose the dominance of heterosexism and the normalcy to look for the voices that have been hidden or lost because of being marginalized. The intention of queer theory is to question what has always been considered normal in order to expose the voices of those who have been silenced, or disempowered by the fact that they are not „normal.“ Queer theology in the context of liberation holds as its priority the value of the full humanity and recognition of the LGBTI community. As is the case in feminist theology, the experience of LGBTI people has been and still is that this value of full humanity is not reflected by social and ecclesiastical structures due to discrimination and marginalization. The LGBTI community continues to face discriminative attitudes and often faces very harsh condemnation on living their lives which are often referred to as being more sinful and immoral than those of other human beings.

As a phenomenological study, the theories selected assisted in exploring, understanding and analysing critically the lived coming out experiences of Zulu Christian gay men in relation to their sexuality. The theory on „gender performativity“ assisted to theorise the underpinning meaning of different identities confirmed by participants including critical analysis of influences of religion and culture in behaving in a particular way. Queer theory and queer theology assisted in placing the lenses of analysis through experiences of a marginalised group based on their experiences and sexual identities within the hetero-normative context.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented how different scholars have discussed and contributed on matters of sexuality and religion as part of producing knowledge in the gender discourse. The literature review assisted to understand concepts, discussion and theories that were applicable to understand the lived experiences and realities of Zulu Christian gay men and how they are negotiating them in the process of coming out. The next chapter will focus on the Research Methodology and Design of the study.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Design

3.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the research paradigm and design of this study. It explains the sampling strategy and the data production techniques. An overview of how the data was analysed follows. Due to the sensitive nature of the study which dealt with the lived experiences of Zulu Christian gay men, the ethical considerations as well as issues of validity and reliability of the study are outlined. In some instances and environments, raises emotions that are crucial when exploring lived experiences of a specific sector of the population or group in a particular environment. It is as a result of this explanation that I chose to utilise the phenomenological approach due to its relevance and being appropriate for acquiring not just important information from Zulu Christian gay men but also to explore and understand their lived experiences and how they relate and negotiate their space.

3.1.1. Research Paradigm and Design

This phenomenological study was located in a qualitative research paradigm and explored the lived experiences of Zulu Christian gay men. Phenomenological research refers “to gathering information from a person’s perception of an event, as opposed to the event as it may exist external to the person” (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005). Most researchers employing the phenomenological approach have had personal experience with the phenomenon in question and hope to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of others (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005). The use of a qualitative design was prompted by my contention that there is inadequate documentation of the experiences of Zulu Christian gay men in relation to their sexualities and in relation to the potential intersections of their Christian and cultural beliefs. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) argue that there is a need for more qualitative ethnic minority studies in order to understand phenomena from different cultural perspectives. In most cases, issues of homosexuality have been perceived and regarded as taboo and are often generally regarded as non-existent in African communities and is thus not an issue to be researched. “The issues of sexualities are often wrapped with silences, taboos and privacies and are invisible in Africa” reveals Tamale, (2011: 12).

This study explored the lived experiences of Zulu Christian gay men in the coming out process as well as how they negotiated between religious and cultural beliefs in the process of coming out. I chose to locate the study in a qualitative paradigm because of its personal nature that allows participants to share their realities and experiences as opposed to a

quantitative study which is more useful for statistics (Dawson, 2007: 114). Literature indicates that most scholars use qualitative methods in exploratory studies for its efficacy in seeking the essence of individual experiences when studying factors like gender, religion and ethnicity that are not so easily quantifiable (Natasha Mack, et al (2005:1).

Exploring lived experiences and realities of gender and sexualities remain complex, sensitive and political. These matters continue to have a stigma attached to them as they are regarded as taboo in spite of South Africa's progressive Constitution that promotes equality. This study sought to produce data about the experiences of Zulu Christian gay men and how they negotiated their cultural and Christian beliefs in the context of gender, religion and sexuality discourses. How the participants who were willing to share these experiences were identified and selected is discussed below.

3.1.2. Sampling

The sampling technique employed in this study was purposive sampling followed by snowball sampling. Purposive sampling can be defined; "as a sampling strategy guided by preselected criteria relevant to a particular research question" Mack et al, (2005: 6). I chose purposive sampling initially as I envisaged difficulty in recruiting participants as a result of the stigma attached to the sensitive nature of sharing experiences of coming out. Hence, I approached and recruited two self-disclosed Zulu Christian gay men whom I knew personally; eliminating the need for a key informant as often is the case in other qualitative studies (Dawson, 2007, Rugg & Petre, 2007).

Thereafter a snowball sampling strategy was adopted to further recruit six other participants. Snowball sampling is a technique used to identify potential participants where one person refers one to the next especially in cases where there may be difficulty in finding participants (Neumann, 1997). It could have been difficult to find potential participants who were willing to share their lived experiences, given the sensitivity of issues relating to sexuality and coming out, hence snowball sampling was useful.

3.1.3. Selection Criteria

The criteria that I used to identify the participants were as follows:

1. Participants had to identify as being ethnically Zulu and gay
2. They had to be between the ages of 25 and 40
3. Participants had to subscribe to either Christian faith or not (but identify as Zulu) and be residing in the Pretoria metropolitan area.

4. Participants had to be willing to participate in the study and sign informed consent to be interviewed or part of the focus group.

3.1.4. Number of participants

For the first part of the research, eight Zulu gay men were interviewed. The second part of the research involved a focus group study with the same six (6) participants. However two participants withdrew from the focus group thus the focus group discussion comprised of six participants. Refer to section 3.2 on data production for further discussion on the feasibility of a focus group discussion with six participants. Coincidentally, the study was conducted with largely educated middle class men living in an urban environment, though this was not an intentional criteria.

3.1.5. Location of the Study

The study was located in the Pretoria metropolitan area. This was convenient since the participants and I resided in the same area. The interviews and the focus group discussion were held in this location.

3.1.6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was granted for the study by the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. On receipt of the Ethical Clearance Certificate (Appendix A), all participants were provided with an information sheet that explained the nature and purpose of the study. Participation was voluntary and all participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time during the process of the research at no disadvantage to them. Informed consent for the study was received from all participants before the interviews and subsequently the focus group discussions were conducted.

Confidentiality and anonymity were addressed by assigning pseudonyms to all participants throughout the research process, except for my own personal record. On the day of the interview for each participant including the focus group meeting, I asked participants before starting the interview or focus group meeting if they were comfortable to use their real names throughout the process or to choose a pseudonym to be used for identification purposes. All participants agreed voluntarily to use pseudonyms except one participant who consented to use his real name throughout the process. Participants were granted their wishes and interviews were conducted smoothly including the focus group meeting. As part of a support system for participants who may have required therapy as a result of potential

emotional setbacks following the interview, I made arrangements for pastoral care and therapy via Out-Wellbeing (LGBTI Health Care Centre in Pretoria). However, none of the participants reported a need to use the services provided. Participants were given a choice to select a venue that was most suitable to them for the interview. For the first part of the study, six participants chose to do the interview at my home as they trusted the environment to be safe and enabling to be who they are. An exception was made for two participants who requested to respond by e-mail as a result of their busy schedules. Refer to subsection 3.1.7 (page: 32 on Trustworthiness below) for further discussion on this. For the second part of the study, the focus group was also conducted at my home. Participants requested to meet at my home instead of the boardroom workplace that I initially organized for the meeting. The choice of my home was due to the fact that safety and privacy was guaranteed as the environment was comfortable for them to participate. It was also easily accessible and convenient as most of them knew my home.

Participants were given a choice of language with which they were most comfortable in expressing themselves. After the interviews were conducted, participants had access to their transcripts to verify that they were transcribed and represented correctly.

The research data will be stored electronically at the School of Religion Philosophy and Classics at UKZN for a period of five years, after which the department will dispose of the data through relevant means.

3.1.7. Trustworthiness

In qualitative studies like this, trustworthiness calls for a certain level of credibility and reliability (Shenton, 2004). Qualitative research seldom yields similar results due to differing theoretical framings. This requires uniformity in the data production process that will allow the study to be repeated in a manner that will yield similar results (Brink and Van Der Walt et al 2006). In this study, I ensured consistency throughout the process by having a semi-structured interview schedule used for all participants, by allocating one interviewer, myself, for all participants and by creating a safe space for participants to freely express themselves. As far as possible I ensured that all participants were treated equally and respectfully during the research process.

While all participants are bilingual, the interviews were conducted primarily in English though participants occasionally made use of certain Zulu expressions during the interviews. These terms were subsequently translated into English to ensure their voices were

not lost. Participants felt convenient and chose to express themselves in English in most cases.

3.2. Data Production Strategy

Phenomenological interviews were conducted followed by a focus group discussion, both of which were guided by an interview schedule and a focus group discussion schedule (Appendix C and Appendix D).

In-depth interviews help to understand lived experiences from a participant's perspective (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005). It further allows reflection and integration of the meaning of the lived experience (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005). In this research, the methodology was useful as it allowed participants to express themselves and share their experiences of coming out. The interview schedules for both the individual interviews (Appendix C) and the focus group (Appendix D) were semi-structured containing open-ended questions to allow for both uniformity and the ability to engage further where necessary.

For the purpose of the study six interviews were conducted face-to-face. As mentioned above, the remaining two participants responded via e-mail as a result of busy work schedules. Each face-to-face interview lasted between 45mins to an hour for all participants. For the focus group session, the second part of the study, two participants withdrew resulting in a group of six participants. Focus groups generally have between eight and ten participants brought together purposefully to discuss a particular phenomenon (Dawson, 2007). I chose to continue with the focus group even though there were six participants using the rationale that "focus groups make some people more uncomfortable than doing individual interviews" (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005). The group had an interesting and informative discussion, lasting approximately two hours, with contribution from all participants who engaged fully.

3.2.1. Research Instruments

During the semi-structured interviews, the approved interview schedule was used to lead the conversation and the open-ended questions allowed participants to expand on any information that gave richness to the study. This was to acknowledge that participants had unique and special stories to share and unique experiences that were influenced by different circumstances and backgrounds. The recorded data was transcribed verbatim.

3.3. Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is a “reflective and personal process of analysing data” (Shenton, 2004: 63). It requires a “critical mind to effectively analyse data using a specific tool” (Dawson, 2007: 118). Data was analysed by employing thematic and content analysis. Thematic analysis is the “inductive type of analysis which uses emerging common themes, concepts, categories which the research does not impose as they appear on their own during the interviews” (Dawson, 2007: 120; Rugg and Petre, 2007: 153 -154), whilst content analysis “requires a systematic and mechanical process of transcript coding of specific characteristics within the text” (Dawson, 2007: 122). I chose these two methods of analysis as they were most appropriate in exploring the coming out experiences of Zulu gay men. Thorough content and thematic analysis were conducted using the gender performative theoretical lens for analysis and interpretation of the data produced.

3.3.1. Reflexivity

Cohen and Crabtree (2006), define reflexivity “as an attitude of attending systematically to the context of knowledge construction, especially to the effect of the researcher, at every step of the research process”⁶. Qualitative analysis; “requires researchers to understand the data without imposing pre-existing ideas of the phenomenon” Tonon 2015:06).

As a researcher who is attached to the study on a personal level, I had to be always conscious of my limitation and bias. I attempted to locate myself by always being conscious of my interconnection to the study. My exploratory interest remained entirely within the assigned phenomenological research process all the time being aware of my ontological positioning. “Reflexivity in social science research has contributed towards demystification and greater understanding of theoretically and empirically based knowledge construction processes” Doucette and Mauthner 2003: 416). I have tried not to use my influence in the research study but my experiences helped me to understand more about the realities that Zulu Christian gay men experience in their journey. Participants managed to express themselves freely and constructively without me having to push them.

3.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I explained the methodology that was used during the study process and how lived experiences of Zulu Christian gay men assisted to produce data. The chapter further outlined and presented how I dealt with reflexivity and my location within the study

⁶ Cohen D, Crabtree B. „Qualitative Research Guidelines Project“ July 2006.
<http://www.qualres.org/HomeSemi-3629.html>

process without having to influence the outcomes of this research process. The next chapter will look at the interpretation and the analysis of the data produced from the research study.

Chapter 4: Findings and Data Analysis

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the data that was produced through the phenomenological interviews and focus group discussions. The analysis process started with the transcription after all interviews and focus groups were conducted. The process of producing data from the written transcripts assisted in identifying key themes. Taking into account that all participants were bilingual, where Zulu expressions were used, English translation was provided (Refer to Chapter 3 (3.1.7)).

The themes derived from the qualitative interviews are presented through representing verbatim narration on the part of the participants. Rugg and Petre (2007: 153), state “the importance of analysing data thoroughly and systematically is to avoid possible bias in interpretation, incomplete and inconsistent data”. This research as a phenomenological study, accurately and critically considered the realities and lived experiences of Zulu Christian gay men to understand their experiences (Refer to 3.1.1, as discussed briefly).

The themes represent key ideas which the participants presented about their coming-out experiences such as understanding identities (my identity, my reality), understanding gender and sexuality, gender power and masculinity, coming out, enabling environment, and advocacy and human rights.

The critical research questions were used to guide the presentation of the findings in this chapter and the next. As referred to in Chapter Three on Research Methodology (under 3.1.6. Ethical Consideration), pseudonyms marked with a hash (#) are used to represent participants’ voices so that confidentiality is maintained.

(a) How do Zulu Gay men understand their Christian and cultural beliefs in relation to their sexual identity?

4.1.1. My Identity, My Reality

The participants admitted and acknowledged the challenges in the journey of embracing their sexualities. It came out clearly from the focus group discussion and interviews conducted that people were at different levels of understanding and accepting who they are. These levels are influenced, by, among other things, their own self-actualisation, internalised homophobia,

culture, social settings, religion and environment. While the participants expressed similar views to each other related to experiences and challenges. It is important to note that gay men are not a monolithic group, their experiences and everyday realities shape who they are in any given environment and circumstance. One of the participants said the following about his identity:

As much as I understand and accept that I'm gay, I do not identify myself as gay. I'm a man that has feelings for another man. As much as I'm comfortable with being myself and having the same sex feelings, I know that I'm a man. (#Nkosingiphile, 39).

Another responded relatively similarly to #Nkosingiphile:

I identify myself as a man, who happened to be attracted to the same sex. It does not make me any less of a man by feeling the way I feel. A lot of the times it is people who have ideas and notions of how we should behave. (#Nkululeko, 34).

It appears that some gay men do not want to label themselves as “gay” but accept being gay as an identity. In some instances, the term „gay“ is attached with stigma and a perception of being “less than a man”. This could be influenced by the element of discrimination that gay people still face in communities. By aligning themselves with hetero-normative labels of “being a man” the two participants above were able to conform to already existing expectations of what it means to be a man within a Zulu hetero-normative context (*Indoda kumele kube yindoda – meaning a man must be a man*). During the interviews six participants, responded by acknowledging openly that they are “gay men” meaning they are attracted to other men. In other words they identify as having a same-sex orientation. Identities are important and mostly form part of who we are as they describe our existence as humans. Labelling might represent what we are without taking into account our uniqueness and differences. One needs to acknowledge and respect that unique experiences and realities of Zulu gay men represent the journeys they encounter every day in understanding and accepting who they are. It appeared that individual experiences are critical as they make meaning of them and also exist within the broad social settings and environment. So, these men needed to understand themselves culturally (as Zulu men) and sexually (as gay men). However, they were adamant that they would not give in to people’s negativity about either of these identities:

...don't insult me because who I am, [is a reflection of] my own reality and my life experiences. I don't like people who judge me based on their own limitation of what they know or based on their own realities. Whether you are gay, straight, yellow, brown, lesbian it is your own life, experiences, uniqueness. It is my journey. I sometimes know how to face it though sometimes, I may not know how due to life restriction of what is a man. Mina [Me], I'm gay end of story and I can't hide it. I might have been ashamed of myself and full of hatred because that's what the society makes us feel. But I have made peace with myself as I can't change my realities, my experiences and my being just to accommodate others. (Participant: #Eugene, 29).

#Eugene's experience was shared by the other participants too who's lived realities suggested that they were becoming more comfortable and willing to embrace their identity as "men". The participants were clear that while as Zulu men they are expected to live according to cultural norms of being "*indoda*" (a man), they also insisted that their culture should accept the diverse masculinities which they offer too. Seven out of the eight participants affirmed that they were confident in their identity as Zulu gay men despite the challenges posed by religion and culture. Only one participant acknowledged that he struggled to negotiate the challenges when he is around family and church members and was not ready to come out as gay. During the focus group discussion, one of the participants used the Zulu proverb which said "*Kulikhuni ukuba yindoda*" (meaning, it's tough to be a man). This proverb was shared by many participants as they recounted their challenges and experiences as Christian gay men, that it is not an easy journey. Participants revealed that sometimes there are perceptions that gay people have two private parts and this influences people in the community to think that gay men "*bathambile or osisi-bhuti*" (meaning they are soft and sissy-boy). In her study of lesbian *sangomas*, Mkasi 2012: 145 reveals that "many individuals have no knowledge whether others of differing sexual orientations even exist within their society because open discussion remains forbidden and a taboo". In the case of participants during the study, they felt its total ignorance and promotion of prejudice within a religiously and culturally heteronormative context which does not acknowledge other identities.

4.1.2. Understanding Gender and Sexuality

Participants understood their gender and sexuality differently as some were comfortable to say they are gay and male while others were using being attracted to other men in relation to affirm their same-sex desire as natural. One participant described sexuality as:

“I personally think that sexuality is something that is from a deeper place beyond just heterosexual experiences it goes deeper to the core of who you are. It comes from a deeper spiritual experience in terms of what you need to do in this lifetime and part of who you are. People tend to pretend and perform “straight acting” due to the environment. Some of us we don’t make a choice by waking up in the morning, putting on a lipstick, a wig or just decide to get attracted to people of the same-sex. It is my reality; it is my or our sexualities embedded in me as a spiritual, emotional and a right identity”. (#Eugene, 29)

#Eugene was making the point that for him, sexuality is deeper than what people may see especially more than what we know as either heterosexual or homosexual. It requires a lived experience and reality, instead of “straight acting” in order for individuals to acknowledge and appreciate who they are as their right. The narration by #Eugene resonates and affirms that gender performativity is never just about performance of gender but it involves real experiences and everyday realities of individuals.

4.1.3. Being a Man and the Power of Masculinity

Connell (2000) points out that within masculinities there are hierarchies, as some are dominant and hegemonic while others are subordinated, marginalised or complicit. This view may point to the assumption that men who love men may be regarded as less of a man than heterosexual men due to their sexuality being seen as a deviation from hegemonic masculinity. In this case, participants showed confidence in responding to the question on how they identify themselves. One could discern from their voices as they were responding that they were commanding and affirming their masculinity with confidence and power. This is contrary to the common perception that gay men portray feminine characteristics. These are some of the responses from participants:

I identify myself as a gay man, who happens to be interested in another man. Simple and straight forward (#Sipho, 40).

I am just a gay proud man who is out and does not have anything to hide (#Lionel, 35).

I am gay, which falls under homosexuality, so I’m gay with no compromise (#Sfiso, 28)

I’m a gay man. I date guys only (#Linda, 37).

I'm gay, but I do not identify myself as gay. I'm a man that has feelings for another man. As much as I'm comfortable with being myself and having the same sex feelings, I know that I'm a man (#Nkosingiphile, 39)

I identify myself as a man, who happened to be attracted to the same sex. It does not make me any less of a man by feeling the way I feel (#Nkululeko, 34).

As noted earlier, most of the participants were comfortable in their gay identity, while others preferred not to use the label gay, but instead to describe themselves as simply “a man who is attracted to other men”. These identifications may have different meanings in relation to coming out and security about one’s self. The responses from participants affirm complexities that exist amongst gays. Each person is unique in their own special way and as an individual, irrespective of their gender and sexuality. The shared experiences from participants reflected the existence of diverse masculinities that are not exclusively associated with the hetero-norm. The definition of what constitutes being a man is beyond what is referred to in Zulu as “indoda, yindoda” (meaning a man is a man). This statement is often undergirded by a hegemonic tone. In this context, gay men were able to affirm their own meaning of being a man as an identity.

(b). How do Zulu Gay men negotiate between their Christian and cultural beliefs and their experiences of coming out?

4.1.4. Enabling and Safe Environment

Participants were all concerned about the importance of an enabling environment which they described as safe and healthy, to be who they are, and to be free from fear of being judged, discrimination, hate crimes, exclusion and being looked down upon. Some participants reported that the continuous discrimination and negative attitudes by some family members, communities and churches towards gay people make the environment dangerous and unsafe to come out. Participants were relating the environment to their experiences of the process of coming out. One participant said:

...understand me, allow me to be who I want, that will be an enabling environment for me because if you would want me to be like you, that will not be enabling to me or with myself. I don't need validation, let's just be civil – (do what suits you) – don't impose on others, allow me to be myself) coz when u start imposing yourself, that will be war. Once you start to tell me I should live like this, I will start to be rebellious, then I will fight. (#Lionel, age 34 – 2016)

While #Lionel's statement above shows the importance of an enabling and safe environment, the previous statements by the participants also demonstrates that they clearly felt that this "safe and enabling" environment has to be created by the gay person himself, through an acceptance of his identity first and foremost. It is only when that identity (not necessarily as a label) is accepted and embraced that one can deal with external negativity or phobia.

4.1.5. Coming Out

The understanding and the experience of coming out varies from one individual to another due to various reasons such as individual choice, unique background and circumstances. During the interviews and the discussion with participants, it was apparent that not all of them believe that coming out was important or was necessary. One participant said:

I think that if (someone has peace within themselves and are ready) they can disclose. You start with the family like maybe your mother or father and you inform them about your sexual preference. And then from there you gain that confidence you can even tell another person... this is my life, this is my sexual orientation. It is more around the peace of a person and being ready and yeah. And well prepared for that (#Sipho, 40).

#Sipho again confirms the importance of internal acceptance before dealing with any external forces such as religion and culture which do not accept gay identities or consider a gay identity to be lacking in "real manhood." Hence, the act of coming out was not as important as the process of self-acceptance, according to some participants:

For me, let me give you an answer. I live a normal life and because under a normal life, there is no coming in and out. So mina ngingu Linda, (I as Linda) I don't need to come out, it's just my life. People make it complicated wena Thembani because if uzothi to come out, come out to who? I am born like this and I can't change or go to people and say I'm gay because for me it's just standard normal life that I'm living and I do not know about other life. For me, ayikho enye impilo engiyaziyo ngaphandle kwale engiyiphilayo (meaning – I do not know any life, other than the one am living). There is no way where I need to go to people and say I'm gay for what? (#Linda, 36)

The feeling and responses from participants during the focus group discussion and the individual interviews revealed that the coming out process is optional and a matter of choice depending on the individual. There was an argument that straight (heterosexual people) do not have to come out to anyone or go out telling people that they are straight, hence this should not be a requirement for gay people either. Another participant said this about coming out:

I honestly don't think that people need to come out. I never had to come out. I just had to be myself. People were asking, you come across as gay, and yes I am gay. It is as good as any other heterosexual person. They do not necessarily have to say I am heterosexual. Why should gay people have to do that? There is no need for us to say things of that nature just to make statements in the society. Though, I believe that when you are asked about the person that you are, it's of value to explain yourself, not only to demystify misunderstanding but as part of actually educating people. It is okay to be who you are without really having to walk around and say that you are a gay person. (#Lionel, 34).

#Lionel highlights the importance of educating people about gay identity only and if the need arises. The process requires individuals to calculate the risks and benefits involved when deciding to come out. In most instances, when coming-out, one has to deal with contained possible psychological effects that may emerge from the experience especially in relation to how loved ones such as family and friends will react after knowing. Negative reaction varies from fear, shock, rejection, and being judgmental; while positive reaction could be supportive, embracing diversity and being non-judgemental. One participant had the following to say about coming out:

Nowadays, the media like the soapie Generations and the show The Queen portray gay characters, it brings about exposure. I know my family always watch it and I observe how they take it and see what their reaction is and stuff and some of the things that they say and some of the things that they do. I have noticed that they are still uncomfortable with gay characters. So, I haven't come out to them yet. (#Nkosingiphile – 2016)

For me, when coming out one must be strong because you might lose a lot of people around you and may distance themselves from you. It's important to stick to people who support and accept you. (#Madoda, 33).

One participant responded as below in relation to negotiating his sexuality with his family as he comes from a very traditional Zulu family:

As much as I'm living my life as a gay man I am not "out" in the family because I am protecting some people like my auntie not to be hurt since I do not have parents anymore. My aunt regards me as a man as I do so many traditional things at home. If she finds out, I will need to find a way to make her understand. But I do not care about those who are not close in my life. (#Mpilo, 30)

People like #Mpilo will always find it difficult to either choose to come out or not due to being inclined to consider family expectations and are forced to live a hidden life in the name of protecting family members and cultural beliefs. In such cases, negotiating one's sexuality is not only complicated but it compromises the individual's autonomy over their lives. It is about protecting culture and religion including family over individual lived realities. Participants shared these realities they are faced with are at different levels for the rest of their lives.

4.1.6. Religious and Cultural beliefs

In general, most participants felt religion and culture to be significant and important, with the exception of one participant who indicated that he did not believe or belong to any religion or culture. He believed that he lives life naturally and does not subscribe to a particular culture or religion. Consistent with the literature, most participants seemed to have experienced negativity from their religious and cultural settings due to their sexual orientation. One participant who considered himself as Christian said:

Yes, I am a Christian, I am a believer; though coming out at church would be problematic. The pastor sometimes preaches about homosexuality as sinful and bad. It makes me angry and sad knowing there is nothing wrong with me but I can't defend it in such an environment. So gays are not accepted. The pastor does not bless homosexual marriage should one wants to get married. (#Sfiso, 28)

For me, coming out in public will be an issue especially with regard to my Christian belief. I do not want to be disowned by my Christian family. I am an active member in my church and I do not want to lose the church and my fellowship with other

Christians. So I am still grappling to reconcile my spirituality with my sexuality”.
(#Nkosingiphile, 39)

Both #Sifiso and #Nkosingiphile are happy to live their gay identities in secret and away from the judgemental attitudes of the church. They feel that they do not need to negotiate their identities with this constituency – they can simply be there without being overt about their identities. One of the main reasons cited for this clandestine behaviour is that Christian leaders and their followers use various texts in the Bible to either oppress or discriminate against women and other marginalized groups such as homosexuals as part of promoting hetero-normativity. These interpretations have contributed to a justification of discrimination and violence against women and LGBTI. Homophobic attitudes such as corrective rape of lesbians can be seen as a way of reinforcing hetero-normativity.

Participants cited the most common Scriptures in the Bible that are often used to condemn homosexuality are Leviticus 18:22 which states

Do not lie with a man as one lies with a women; it is detestable” and Romans 1: 26-27 which says “Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchange natural relations for unnatural one. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were flamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received themselves the due penalty for their perversion. (The HOLY BIBLE, (1973) New International Version)

These verses amongst others hinder the coming out process and further bring about fear and hatred to one’s self acknowledgement of being gay and of relating to others openly as a gay person.

One may argue that when looking at the interpretation or meaning of these verses they are written in the context of hetero-normativity and by undermining feelings, emotions and identities of those with different sexual identities like homosexuals. The verses further contribute to a justification of discrimination, hatred and violence against women and LGBTI people in the society. During the focus group discussion, participants often felt that sometimes the Bible is being portrayed to condemn same-sex relations as more sinful than other sins that are mentioned in the Bible. Homophobic attitudes and hate speech becomes a mechanism of negatively reinforcing hetero-normativity as the natural way of living life. Participants felt that it is unfortunate that they cannot contest and challenge the meaning of

specific Biblical verses during the church service in order to bring the other meaning according to their lived experiences.

It can be argued that the meaning or context of Leviticus 18:22 , simply focus and refer to sexual acts and lust instead of also considering emotions and psychological involvement or attachment between two consensual adults who love each other (Inclusive & Affirming Ministries, 2008: 10). Biblical scholars such as Isherwood and Althaus-Reid (2007) who work in the field of queer hermeneutics have countered these Biblical interpretations in order to show that Jesus always sided with those rejected by mainstream society. Biblical interpretation goes beyond just understanding the meaning of text but is used within the patriarchal system to reinforce the social power of men to control.

The creation narratives were also cited by the participants as texts that are used to bolster the argument against homosexuality. For example:

Genesis 1:28; “God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over fish of the seas and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground”. And Genesis 2:21-24; verse 21: “So the Lord God caused the man to fall asleep; and while he was sleeping he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with fresh. Verse: 22 then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out from a man and then he brought her to the man. Verse: 23: The man said, this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called “woman” for she was taken out of man. V: 24for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be united with his wife and they will become one flesh”. (The HOLY BIBLE (1973), New International Version)

The participants cited these stories as texts that are often used to condemn homosexuality and promote heterosexuality so as to encourage procreation and marriage between people of the opposite sex. The narration of this story leaves out homosexual identity as deviant as there are also expectations of multiplying and ruling over the world. These stories continue to hinder those who might want to come out.

Another participant said:

...when I go to the altar or church, I go as a person who is a man in the family. I do not really think about sexual orientation. So that’s how I consider myself and how I connect with my Christian beliefs. God says, we are all his children. Christian beliefs

and cultural beliefs, it's where I find more strength to face challenges. And it is one of my source of comfort knowing that there is God and I am not alone in this journey. Knowing that my ancestors are around me wherever I go, so yeah, that is where I draw my strengths (#Sipho, 40).

Christian and cultural practices are very important to one's personal growth not only to ones sexuality but to so many other things like a form of black identity and boosting wellbeing. I would like to believe that the very same God who has made you and me, is the very same God that can really let us exercise the freedom of becoming who we are and to boosting our well-being. It is very important to take a personal decision to bring my own understanding of what is the meaning of culture and Christian beliefs in my life in order to embrace what add value in my life. (#Lionel, 34).

#Sipho and #Lionel show clearly that “negotiating” negativity about their identity requires countering that with beliefs about “love” and acceptance. This is how they draw their strength from religion and culture. These contexts require careful and respectful engagement with culture and religion but also affirming alternative important values that shape life positively and constructively. A restored confidence from people like #Lionel allows individuals to critically question the environment if it does not add value to their lives but equally it requires taking responsibility to challenge and make this happen for one's self, positively and constructively. Many church people use biblical texts to condemn same-sex sexuality to endorse their own standpoint, without exploring the texts more deeply. While studies show that many LGBTI people “suffer from emotional stress, low self-esteem and even others commit suicide due to feeling excluded and discriminated” (ASSAf, 2015: 57) based on these beliefs, the participants in the study showed a defiance against these beliefs through self-acceptance of their identities and being confident in them. This is often challenging as one participant expressed:

At church, I used to be more active being part of the worshipping team until when the pastor preached and said he cannot bless homosexual marriages and gay people were sinners. Since then I started withdrawing from attending church. And I am no longer active but I miss praising and fulfilling my spirit. (#Sfiso, 28).

There was one participant with a very different view on both culture and religion when asked about how he negotiated his sexuality and both cultural and Christian beliefs. He said,

Mngani (friend), there is something I'm afraid of. Mina is scared to be bound by things engingayazi imvelaphi yazo (I do not know where they are originated). I don't believe in Jesus Christ. I don't believe God exists and I don't believe even in "amadlozi" (ancestors). I only believe in African philosophies that promote the spirit of Ubuntu and that never judge nor condemn. When I think about religion, it's very discriminative and it make people discriminate each other using it that is why I don't like it. Two: it gives you rules, I hate to live under strict regulations. (#Linda, 36).

#Linda was the only participant who refused to “negotiate” with religion and culture but instead rejected them and the rules. For #Linda belonging to any religion or culture did not serve a purpose of nurturing individuals’ identities and wellbeing.

Apart from #Linda, all the other participants during the focus group discussion and interview sessions, affirmed that their Zulu culture plays an important role not only in giving them a sense of identity and pride but also played a significant role in boosting their wellbeing and courage in respect of their sexuality journeys and in general life. Traditional Zulu culture promotes marriage as a symbol of establishing a relationship between two people but also involving families of those who are getting married especially the desire of the family to continue the lineage. In her study, on lesbian sangoma’s Mkasi pointed out that “it was more likely for Zulu’s to accept same-sex relationships between men, as opposed to lesbian women, because of the issue of procreation” (Mkasi (2012: 152). Mkasi’s findings were corroborated by the participants in my study whose families seemed not that concerned that he would not “procreate”. One participant said:

At home they accepted me and they know that they won't have umakoti (wife) but will have umkhwenyana (husband). (#Sfiso, 28).

In the Zulu culture, marriage has always been seen as a ceremony between a man and a woman. However, in the country the definition of marriage was extended to include two people of the same-sex through the Civil Union Act of 2006. This positive development not only afforded same-sex people an opportunity to affirm their love and commitment to each other legally but it also promoted their right to equality and freedom to choose. During the focus group discussion and interviews, participants were happy that their expression of love could now be recognised as legal. Participants further discussed that reaching a stage of marriage solely depends on the couple and how they want their marriage to unfold, whether to do a traditional and a “white wedding” or to just sign at the Department of Home Affairs; it

remains a choice of the couples and affordability, they said. They further affirmed that they would not accept a culture that refused to accept them, as captured by #Sandile below:

My Zulu culture is important as my identity. As a man, it's good to know that my ancestors are protecting me even if I'm gay. If culture cannot accommodate myself or my lifestyle, it would not be a culture that I would adopt. (#Sandile, 38).

A case study of the Zulu gay wedding titled “**My big fat Zulu gay wedding**” between Thoba Sithole and Cameroon Tshepo Modisane in 2013 which took place in KwaDukuza, KwaZulu-Natal, showed the possibility of reconciling cultural beliefs with gay identities. The important cultural rituals and proceedings were observed and performed with respect in celebration of a same-sex traditional wedding. The couple told the Daily Maverick newspaper during the interview that “we just want to lead happy and productive lives. We are gay but we are still African, we want to live our lives in an African way following our traditions and beliefs”⁷. This wedding challenged stereotypes that gay men cannot marry traditionally or specifically they portrayed the importance of embracing cultural beliefs as a sense of pride and a form of affirming identity irrespective of their sexuality, gender and ethnicity. The wedding further challenged the perception about homosexuality being regarded as “unAfrican” (refer to Chapter 1 under Introduction 1.1 pg: 8). This perception has been challenged in much research which proves the existence of homosexuals in Africa. Ratele (2011) reports about an existence of male to male sexuality in Africa as well as Mkasi (2012) in her „lesbian sangomas” research. As reported in the Daily Maverick (2013), Sithole and Modisane affirmed that being gay is African and homosexuality is a sexual orientation that one should not be ashamed about but people need to embrace within the African culture. Furthermore, it affirms that same-sex partners can commit to each other legally and can even make provision to adopt children as couples and raise them in a warm, safe and comfortable environment or family. Sithole and Modisane mentioned that “part of their reasons to have gotten married is about them starting a family through looking for a surrogate who would conceive their child.” This statement also shows an alternative way of procreation other than using natural process of procreation. There are options that are applicable to be used to starting a family. The case study shows the significance of religion and culture in creating a sense of belonging, identity and pride irrespective of people’s sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, culture and religion.

⁷ <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-04-09-my-big-fat-gay-zulu-wedding/> (Accessed on 7 February 2016)

4.1.7. "My Right to Human Rights"

The South African Constitution is arguably one of the most progressive in the world, and one of the best in Africa, as it gives the right to equality, dignity and privacy. It further provides important rights with regard to non-discrimination on one or more of these grounds gender, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation just to name a few. Yet, many LGBTI people continue to face harsh realities related to fear of living their life openly due to experiences of being subjected to hate crimes, discrimination, called by derogatory names, exclusion in some instances including targeted killings and corrective rape. Most participants echoed a necessity of sexuality and rights education in order to create an enabling environment for LGBTI to live their lives without fear of being discriminated against and being susceptible to negative experiences. One participant expressed concerns about the lack of implementation of human rights policies and specific laws that support and protect LGBTI people from feeling safe wherever they are, be it in the family, community or at work without fear.

even at work you still find some people who have attitudes and discriminate, the policies might be there but are not implemented and my life is still the same and people still want to push their own indoctrination into our lives. They will say, oh no you are too much, how could you do that and be gay? You are just seeking attention but then the reality of the matter is that until you walk in somebody else's shoes, you will never really understand because you do not know what they are going through. (#Lionel, 34).

During the focus group discussion, participants also talked about discrimination and internalised homophobic attitudes that LGBTI people experience amongst themselves as a homosexual community.

We discriminate against each other amongst ourselves as gay people, like people will say you are too much, you are spaghetti gay (a term used by gay people referring to an extreme feminine or flamboyant gay person). Sometimes for the fact that you need to be successful, you gotta be educated, well dressed and be well spoken. Those are an extra burden that you carry as a gay person cause if you don't come across the names I have mentioned, well dressed, well spoken, living in the beautiful house, you kind of get isolated as people will make you feel you do not belong to their class or status. Stress levels become high, followed by depression which can lead to committing suicide. Because now the gay people who are supposed to embrace you they

discriminate against you. Same people and community that you are coming from they don't understand about who you are and move away from you. So you become mystery with a whole notion of living and there is nobody that can live alone. That is why most gay people tend to be more depressed, they cannot really sustain a relationship when looking for love, in most cases they end up doing drugs to numb the pain, abusing alcohol to numb the pain and seek comfort to alcohol. They become a mystery of depression to be better accustomed to being attached to a person and then it becomes a habit, it's a cycle and eventually, they are exposed to living a reckless life with lost hope and mystery of ever living a better life (Summary point from focus group discussion).

Another participant reiterated what seemed like the double experience of discrimination within the gay community and by the external heterosexual community. The discrimination within the gay community themselves, may be caused by identity differences, based on factors such as urban versus rural, feminine versus masculine, age differences, education background and class issues. The participants explained that the judgmental attitudes could be attributed to internalized homophobia.

...why do we discriminate amongst ourselves? It's because of the anger within ourselves, when I see the person who is more gay acting I will not want to be next to them or seen them because people will ask or question on why are you with him if you are not gay. You will get freaked out if you are a person who is still in the closet. But if you are comfortable with yourself, no matter where you are walking on the street anybody who is more feminine or straight looking who look at you or what, you will not have a problem if you are comfortable with yourself you will walk with any particular person. But if you are in the closet you will prefer to go with straight people, or straight-acting people, or straight looking people, there are a lot of categories, I can go on and on (#Madoda, 33).

Participants felt a need for continuous advocacy through education, policy implementation and monitoring in order to create a sustainable conducive environment. Recognising and acknowledging diversity will ensure everyone's contribution to promoting human rights for all and striving for a safe environment where everyone becomes who they are and live their life with the best potential. The involvement of communities at the initial stage of human rights education is important.

One participant said:

.... what is missing from the academic fraternity; the research that is conducted is normally not reaching ordinary communities after completion especially LGBTI people in rural areas they are less involved. And again, there are so many research studies that are conducted but the findings of the researchers are not shared with the relevant people and with the LGBTI community. And so we don't know that these findings are informed with what sort of interventions for the LGBTI support programmes. Maybe just to add, if possible there could be outreach programmes for the LGBTI communities but not just outreach programmes but ways to mobilise resources for them. For example, I am from the rural areas, there might be only one place that a gay man or a lesbian where they are understood it's a primary health clinic but not all. The other institutions are not there for counselling, training and mentorship. Can you imagine you disclosing to a community or they suspect that you are gay and you do not know where to get assistance? So those are the issues that you need to focus more on as a researcher. What interventions or what programmes are developed to assist these gays, especially the young ones. They are exposed to so many things including HIV and AIDS. (#Sipho, 40)

#Sipho has raised a serious concern about research that often gets conducted in different communities by universities and other institutions, saying most of them target township and urban areas and it leaves out rural areas where there is a lack of resources to either access information or centres where life skills programmes are offered.

4.2 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings of the interviews and focus group discussions in relation to the research objectives since there were no specific objectives on interviews and focus group. In so doing, a detailed description of how they negotiated their religious and cultural beliefs in the process of coming out was provided. What was evident was that in line with the literature, many participants certainly experienced discrimination and marginalisation based on religious and cultural beliefs of their communities. However, they all indicated that the first and most important requirement for negotiation of negativity is self-acceptance. The agency involved in this process will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 Discussion of the Findings and Conclusion

(a) Why do Zulu Gay men negotiate between their Christian and cultural beliefs and their experiences of coming out in the way that they do?

5.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter presented findings on how Zulu Gay men negotiate their Christian and Cultural beliefs in the process of coming-out. This chapter will theoretically engage with the findings in order to offer explanations for the negotiations and to show the ways in which this study has challenged the literature on gay men as victims of religion and culture, particularly in the African context. Cochrane (2006: 6) has noted “while prejudice in religion and culture towards same-sex orientation may be marginalizing, equally religion and culture may play a critical important role in boosting positive health”. What this study has shown is that contrary to Cochrane and other studies, both prejudice and affirmation is not the sole preserve of religious and cultural beliefs, even though these are important factors. The participants in this study showed instead the importance of their own agency in engaging with both prejudice and affirmation. The importance of being secure in their own identities was foregrounded throughout. The ways in which the participants negotiated their Christian and cultural beliefs in the process of their coming out was surprising to me, and also a departure from much of the literature I reviewed in earlier chapters which seem to portray gay men in Africa as victims of conservative religious and cultural beliefs, which ultimately lead to poor states of well-being.

From the interviews and focus group discussion what was very clear was the agency of participants when they negotiated conservative religious and cultural beliefs. In fact, during our conversations I was surprised at how little the participants focused on the negative aspects of religion and culture towards their identity. Instead of focusing on what religion and culture thought about them, they were more interested in sharing what they thought of themselves. In other words, they highlighted how it is that they accepted their identities and some of them even expressed this in “loud and proud” rhetoric.

5.1.1 My Identity, My Reality

Butler (1990: 8) argues that “we cannot assume a stable subjectivity that goes about performing various gender roles; rather, it is the very act of performing gender that constitutes who we are”. The comfortability associated with being content about our identities represent our realities and who we are as we know it and/or ourselves better.

Identity itself, for Butler, is an impression created by our performances. Participants affirmed their uniqueness associated with their sexuality and gender. In other words, what constitutes the gendered self is more connected with the performativity act that each individual associates with their identity and reality. Religious and cultural sanction and taboos have hindered and continue to hinder performance of other people's realities if they are seen to be deviating from the set norms and standards that are biased towards embracing diversity. However, the participants refused to have their "natural" realities and identities controlled and infringed upon by religion and culture, through a firm acceptance of themselves. The contribution of queer theory in this particular context; it has acted as a deconstruction strategy to challenge hetero-normative in the understanding of sex, gender, sexuality especially in relation to Zulu culture and what is expected of men. Participants challenged the status quo of hetero-normative system through liberating themselves. This was confirmed by affirming their identities as their realities.

Despite their strong affirmation and firm acceptance of identities, the participants identified that it was not only religion and culture that controlled and infringed on their real identities. The challenges of coming out for many gay men was embedded within more than one oppression such as being black, gay, coming from a conservative rural or township area, or being a church member. The importance of recognising the intersectional challenges has been highlighted in the literature regarding gendered identities. "The intersection of race, gender and class constitute the primary structural elements of the experience of many blacks" Crenshaw, (1994: 95). Many gay men find unique individual mechanisms to adapt and deal with struggles associated with their sexuality and others simply conform to already existing expectations of male behaviour.

Salih (2002: 55) uses Butler's work on collapsing the sex/gender distinction in order to argue that "all bodies are gendered from the beginning of their social existence (and there is no existence that is not social), which means that there is no "natural body" that pre-exists its cultural inscription". So, identities of a gay man, is formed and shaped by race, class, gender, ethnicity and religion as intertwining facets of his identity that cannot be ignored when considering the coming out process.

5.1.2. Understanding Gender and Sexuality

Literally, we are unique, complex human beings and our identity can take many forms depending on the context and the environment in which we find ourselves. In other words,

rather than being a fixed attribute in a person, gender should be seen as a “fluid variable which shifts and changes” Butler (1990:25). This statement was true for the participants who negotiated their identity in different settings as part of fitting in and calculating the risk of negative reception if they perform openly their „gay male“ identity. So, it means that our identity is not a fixed entity or essence, but changes depending on a particular context, environment and situation. There are various discussions, debates and research about men’s gender identities, practices, masculinities, and sexualities as part of understanding of discourses on gender and sexuality. Butler (1990) talks about gender fluidity which resonates with what participants reported on various identities that LGBTI people may affirm as their realities apart from gay identity as the focus of the research. These complexities depend on various elements and circumstances of life as per individual uniqueness.

5.1.3. Being a Man and the Power of Masculinity

Acknowledging one’s identity is important and confirms who they are and how they see themselves as individuals and within the bigger group of people. Anderson (2004: 80) uses gender theory to understand “the critical roles in the construction and characterization of masculinity and femininity as they reinforce patriarchal ideology as a lived normative system”. Society has put certain values, norms, and expectations on how gender consider to use “persons” should interact, behave and claim a sense of identity. These expectations are effected within the hetero-normative ideology of what is it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman.

The process of socialisation plays an important role in grooming and instilling values of what is a man and how men should behave. Most of the participants acknowledged being culturally a man first before affirming their sexual identity as gay. It could be due to being secured of who they are as gay men but also it could be the fear of being associated with weak masculine power which is required by the Zulu hetero-normative cultural system.

“When interrogating masculinities, it involves various components of social, political, sexual and biological analysis as part of exploring meanings of masculinities” (Connell, 2005: 70). In other words, masculinities are associated with social, political, sexual and economic power and control in the society. South Africa is recognised as a “highly patriarchal nation, through which the empowerment of women including the recognition of gays and lesbians rights exists. However, masculinity seem to be threatened by these rights” Wells and Polders, (2006: 20). In this context, this tends to lead to anger and negativity towards those men who

are perceived to be less masculine. Participants reported to be aware that their sexuality is seen as a threat hence the environment sometimes is hostile and dangerous for gay men. Participants reported on the experience of being mistaken to want to be women or of being perceived to be abnormal from being “sissy” men. Due to not wanting to date women but being attracted to other men.

5.1.4. Safe and Enabling Environment

As discussed in 4.1.4 in Chapter Four, participants reported the importance of an enabling environment in relation to their lives and especially in being able to experience their lived sexual identities and realities. The Gay and Lesbian Network, describes an enabling environment for LGBTI as “the environment that is safe, supportive, promotes tolerance and embraces diversity and respect for the rights of individuals to have access to freedom and privacy to be who we are without fear of prejudice and discrimination⁸” (Gay and Lesbian Network website: www.gaylesbian.org.za). The Gay and Lesbian Network’s description of what constitutes an enabling environment resonates with what participants were sharing and discussing during the focus group meeting. They reported on an urgent need for an environment that is tolerant, positively transforming, safe to be who they are, that is free from fear of being judged, discriminated, free from hate crimes related to sexuality issues, free from exclusion and homophobic attitudes. Participants further mentioned the importance of accessing services such as health-related information and services, counselling for psycho-social support such as mental health and sexual health. Nell and Shapiro (2011: 13), argue about “negotiating hetero-normative space and being gay in the straight world strongly needs parents to actively and constructively be involved in their children’s life journeys in order to safeguard their journeys”. The important argument emerging from Nell and Shapiro (2011) is that of creating an enabling environment in order to avoid cases of depression, drug and alcohol abuse, suicidal tendencies, self-hurting and homelessness, among others.

In referring to the continuous discrimination and negative attitudes by some family members, communities and churches towards gay people, the participants displayed remarkable resilience in affirming their own positionality and identity. Hence their very strong statements along the lines of “this is who I am, accept me!” As already mentioned, this highlights the need to go beyond the theorising of gay identity as necessarily weak in the light of cultural and religious homophobia. Hence this study contributes to the emerging field of gay agency

⁸ The Gay and Lesbian Network (PMB) www.gaylesbian.org.za

within the African context. For this reason, Van Klinken 2011: 129 argues that “lately, the ground breaking work on homosexuality and Christianity is emerging to become a gender and theological critical discourse in Africa”.

5.1.5. Coming Out

All participants claimed to have been aware of their sexual differences from others, from a very young age even though they only started living a gay life later. The process of coming out happens at different levels and stages as part of the journey of understanding and coming to terms with one’s sexual identity often different from heterosexuality. The coming out process, however, is regarded as a most crucial and significant process of personal identity development and representing the individual sexual identity development. Naidoo, D et al; (2014) pointed out that it is also a complex, personalised, private journey that relates to self-acknowledgement, self-acceptance and self-identity development in various environments. Participants differed in response to how often they disclosed and acknowledged their sexual orientation and in narration of their lived experiences that followed after coming out.

Participants who were teenagers prior to 1994 had different experiences of coming out (this is due to the prohibitive laws that regulated homosexual behaviour at the time) compared to those who became teenagers post 1994, after which South Africa became a democratic state (as the law prohibiting homosexuality changed and the Constitution in 1996 supported the rights to equality and the right to non-discrimination based on sexual orientation). Participants echoed their concerns that even though a lot has been achieved in as far as the LGBTI rights are concerned; (making examples of the right to Civil Union, and the right to adopt children), the everyday challenges surrounding living openly as a gay man still remain a threat and a challenge in some communities which poses a danger to living the life openly. There have been a number of homophobic incidences, attacks, killings and even rape especially of lesbians. So, coming out is a complex process and can indeed bring with it numerous positive and negative feelings and consequences for the individual, including fear, relief, anxiety, deep emotional distress, low self-esteem and a sense of being true to oneself.

5.1.6. Religious and Cultural Beliefs

Out of eight (8) participants that were interviewed only seven (7) who regarded themselves as Christians were concerned about the difficulty of reconciling their sexuality and Christian beliefs and the other two did not identify with any religion but they were Zulu gay men. As a result, most participants chose not to come out at church for the fear of being judged or

excluded from fellowship with other Christian brothers and sisters in Christ. Wilkerson, J. Michael, et al, (2012), argue that when men who love other men get exposed to their congregations' negative views of homosexuality, it then contributes to negativity about the self especially for those who have not yet developed the strength to adapt and deal positively with a hostile environment. The participants challenged the claim made by these scholars as they showed resilience and agency by accepting their gay identities.

Apart from relying on their own confidence in their gay identities the participants were also aware that they could challenge the Christian and cultural beliefs regarding their identities. Some of the authoritative bodies and doctrines of the world largest religions view gay identity negatively and as sinful; they draw on the Bible, sermons and liturgies. Their opposition can range from quiet discouragement, explicitly forbidding same-sex sexual practices or sex/gender reassignment among adherents, actively opposing social acceptance of LGBT identities, to the execution of people engaging in homosexual acts while tolerating sex/gender reassignment in specific cases. The Bible is most commonly used as a point of reference against homosexuality or people of different sexual orientation as being sinners. Participants reported during the discussion that instead of confronting these negative scriptures they normally focus on those that speak positivity and courage as part of negotiating and reconciling their sexuality and Christian beliefs.

Some of the positive verses they draw on are texts such as 1 John 4:8 which says; "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love". This verse preaches about love and affirms that God is love more than anything on this earth. Another one is the commandment which says; John 15:12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I loved you" and 1 Corinthians 13:13 which says; "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love". (The HOLY BIBLE (1973), New International Version)

These verses assist Christian gay men to overcome discriminating environments and help to instil the values of knowing God who does not judge and also make it possible to negotiate their co-existence of their sexualities and embracing their Christian faith and beliefs. Though, it was mentioned that the journey is never easy and smooth for many of them. While the participants may not have been aware of the critical theological scholarship being done in this area, it is important to highlight some of the work here.

Togarassei and Chitando (2011: 120), point out that the Bible plays a major role in influencing attitudes towards a same-sex relationship in Africa in general. It further “enjoys an authoritative status and control in terms of influencing and shaping attitudes towards the phenomenon”. Van der Walt (2013: 88) points out that, “there is an important role for a critical Biblical scholarship to expose the problems with using the Bible against same-sex relationship through condemnation of homosexuality”. Critical engagement in the discourse of sexuality remains crucial in the context of contextual reading and interpretation of the scriptures as part of finding alternative meaning of verses in the Bible. The participants themselves showed agency in finding these alternatives, even when they did not rely on critical biblical scholarship to do so, as mentioned above.

Some liberal and progressive voices and scholars within these settings tend to view LGBT people more positively, and some liberal churches may bless [HYPERLINK "https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Same-sex_marriage"](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Same-sex_marriage) \o "Same-sex marriage" same-sex marriages , as well as accepting and marrying people who are transgender. Historically, some cultures and religions accommodated, institutionalised, or revered same-sex love and sexuality; such [HYPERLINK "https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_themes_in_mythology"](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_themes_in_mythology) \o "LGBT themes in mythology" mythologies and traditions can be found in the world elements of religious and cultural incorporation of non-heterosexual practice can still be identified in traditions that have survived into the modern era.

Opposition to same-sex relations even more recently same-sex marriage and LGBT rights are a global discourse mostly associated with conservative religious views and intolerant groups or individuals who could be dangerous in perpetuating negative attitudes which might incite violence and discriminative tendencies. As in other cultures, heterosexism (the attitude that views heterosexuality as the only acceptable, normal pattern for human relationships) is yet another characteristic of contemporary South African culture (Hattingh, 2005). It is strongly embedded within the existence of culture and religion which remain influential in shaping people’s behavioural perception, attitudes and action. Homo-prejudice (more commonly known as homophobia), which is the irrational fear, contempt, and hatred of lesbian women and gay men, is another issue that the South African LGBT community has to contend with (Du Plessis, 1999; Hattingh, 2005). The claim of structural and systematic prejudice could be influenced by culture and religion in causing prejudice to the external environment as well as internally. Internalised homo-prejudice (in other words, the internalisation of negative

attitudes and feelings toward homosexuality on the part of gay men and lesbian women) has also been found to be prevalent in many LGBT persons (Isaacs, et al 1992).

Phiri and West (2014: 34) point out that “religion and culture are intertwined and used to maintain the status quo by upholding taboo on what is perceived to be the right form of sexuality”. Both religion and culture influence how society sees and relates to gender and sexuality issues. “The phenomenon of men who love men challenges human sexual relations and power dynamics thereby destabilising the heteronormative (Phiri & West, 2014: 34). Religion may, therefore, contribute to the self-actualization and well-being of homosexual people. William McKinney and Mary A. Tolbert (2005) moots the notion of gay religion and a study of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) religious experiences in the contemporary society. As such this proposal further harnesses an important contribution not only to queer studies but also to the sociological and ethnographic study of religion. Lisa Isherwood & Marcella Althaus-Reid (2007: 3) talk about Queer theology as “a phenomenon that looks at deeper political and sexual queering of theology in order to understand the regulation of sexuality in the name of divinity and order of affection”. Queer theology is “crucial in analysing and understanding queering of God in order to destabilise and question the heterosexual male God in relation to affirming and strengthening a spiritual personal relationship with him (sic)” (Isherwood & Althaus-Reid 2007: 3).

On the cultural side, the notion of gay identity being regarded as un-African is perceived to be part of defending African tradition and masculinity in society. The study revealed through participants’ experiences that being gay is embraced by cultural Zulu gay men as part of who they are in their lives. In other words, according to participants’ views and realities from this study there was no separation between their sexuality, cultural and religious beliefs as it forms part of their identities.

Human rights advocacy may assist to draw and use some legal principles and policies that embrace diversity and promote human rights. The next section will discuss in-depth human rights and advocacy in recognition of same-sex relations.

5.1.7. Advocacy and Access to Human Rights

In Africa, historical accounts of same-sex attraction and/or same-sex acts show that before colonialism, same-sex practices were common and often generally not regarded as taboo in the way that colonialism defined and made them (Reddy, 2013). Continuous stigma, discrimination and violence against LGBTI are a hindrance towards creating an enabling and

safe environment for LGBTI people to acknowledge their realities and enjoy living their lives happily. Therefore, it is important to “advocate for the rights and issues of LGBTI within the human rights framework in order to promote an understanding of homosexuality and gender identities as a natural part of the complex spectrum of human sexuality” (SIDA, 2014:3). Most participants viewed the coming out process as a form or type of political activism in its own right as part of increasing their visibility and accessing their sexual rights as human rights broadly. Sustainable sexuality and human rights education remains crucial in order to advocate for tolerance and the embracing of sexual diversity in society.

The report by SIDA (2014) presents alternative strategies such as specific implementation and monitoring of legislation that promotes the rights for SOGI and putting strict direct measures to dealing with hate crimes perpetuated towards LGBTI. These measures include amongst other things, an effective justice system to deal with cases of discrimination, killings and exclusion of LGBTI, and provision of psycho-social and/or health support services to LGBTI including sexual and reproductive health services. In this instance, the negative impact experienced by gay men such as depression, anxiety, substance-related abuse, psychological and social exclusion needs to be addressed regularly.

5.2 Recommendations

- More research is needed to investigate the use of the term gay in the context of men who identify as men who love other men in order to address the politics of language.
- The reference of lived experiences and realities of gay men needs to be constantly considered as case studies when campaigning on human rights and promotion of sexual rights.
- Educational advocacy and awareness on embracing human diversity needs to continuously take place at different levels such as family, communities, churches and working environment.
- Promotion and encouraging open dialogues with faith and religious institutions on human diversity management issues remain crucial as this will allow challenging perception, stereotypes and addressing ignorance.
- More research on gay agency in cultural and religious settings in Africa is needed to balance the large amounts of research that portray gay people as victims of cultural and religious homophobia.

5.3 Conclusion

The critical lessons from the study spell out the continuous struggle and complexities of the coming-out process faced by gay men. Hate crimes that cost lives due to people's religious and cultural beliefs about what they regard as deviant sexuality expressed by gay men, spell out the need for a community that is resilient and takes ownership in creating a conducive and supportive environment for each other. This study showed the power of such resilience. However, the study was conducted with largely educated middle class men living in an urban environment. It remains uncertain whether such resilience can be found in different settings. Despite the challenges faced by Zulu gay men, participants from the research affirm that negotiating the boundaries of their Christian and cultural identity and their sexuality is possible by re-conceptualizing their sexuality within a religious and cultural context that emphasizes the concepts of love and compassion as characteristics associated with God and the ancestors. Spiritual fulfilment and the relationship with God become more important than adhering to congregational doctrine, conservative biblical interpretations and cultural rules as they exclude homosexuals. The desire to reinterpret the Bible arises from the fact that the interpretation and subsequent discourses have been exclusively undertaken by heterosexual males, thereby creating a hegemonic heterosexual context in analysing Christian discourse around homosexuality.

Despite these views Zulu gay men are reclaiming space and visibility by not divorcing their Christian faith and their cultural beliefs but rather they continue to find their own meaningful contribution by reconciling both their religious and cultural beliefs with their sexual identity. Religion and Culture hindered and created an environment which is not conducive for Black Zulu Christian gay men to come-out.

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Appendix A: Approved Ethical Clearance Certificate



13 September 2016

Mr Thembani B Chamane 204520002
School of Religion, Philosophy & Classics
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Mr Chamane

Protocol reference number: HSS/0984/016M

Project title: An exploration of how Zulu Gay Men negotiate their Christian and Cultural Beliefs in the process of coming out.

Full Approval – Committee Reviewed Protocol

With regards to your response to received 12 September 2016 to our letter of 19 August 2016, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the above mentioned application and the protocol has been granted Full Approval.

Any alterations to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach/Methods must be reviewed and approved through an amendment /modification prior to its implementation. Please quote the above reference number for all queries relating to this study. Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shamila Naidoo (Deputy Chair)

/px

cc Supervisor: Dr S Reddy & Prof S Nadar
cc Academic Leader Research: Prof P Denis
cc School Administrators: Mrs C Murugan

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

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Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000

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Website: www.ukzn.ac.za



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Appendix B: Participant Letter and Informed Consent

PARTICIPANT'S INFORMED CONSENT

18 May 2016

Dear Participant

Participant's Informed Consent

Master's Programme in Gender, Religion and Health

This letter, respectfully, seeks your participation in a Masters Research Project in Gender, Religion and Health. You have been identified as a participant in this Research Project. As a participant in this research project you will be required to participate in interviews that will be conducted at your convenience. In addition, you will be requested to participate in the focus group which will form part of the data production process. The times, dates of interviews and focus group discussions as well as the venues will be at your convenience. Once you have had a chance to examine the nature, objectives and benefits of the Research Project as detailed below, we kindly request your consideration in signing the **Consent to Participation** at the end of this letter, on the attached copy and returning same to me as soon as you possibly can. I wish to draw your attention to the Clause below relating to your right not to participate in this Research Project and will respectfully accept your decision in this regard, if it is such. The following Information Sheet offers a brief background to the Research Project.

Research Project Title An exploration of how Zulu Gay Men Negotiate their Christian and Cultural Beliefs in the Process of Coming Out.

Central Research Question How do Zulu Gay men negotiate their Christian and cultural beliefs in the process of coming out?

Research Aims and Benefits

1. To explore how Zulu Gay men understand the Christian and cultural beliefs in relation to their sexual identity.
2. To explore how Zulu Gay men negotiate between their Christian and cultural beliefs and their experiences of coming out.
3. To understand why Zulu Gay men negotiate their Christian and cultural beliefs and their experiences of coming out in the way they do

Research Project Leader Mr. Thembani B. Chamane

Student: MA in Gender, Religion and Health]

Telephone: 073 1636973
Email: thembani.bright15@gmail.com

Project Location Gauteng, Pretoria.

Alternate Contact Person Supervisor: Dr. Sarasvathie Reddy, PhD
Telephone: 0828268808 / 031 2602325
Email: Reddys15@ukzn.ac.za

School of Religion, Philosophy & Classics Ms. Cathy Murugan
Postgraduate Officer,
Telephone: 033-2605560
Email: Murugunc@ukzn.ac.za

Research Office Ms. P Ximba Administrator
Tel: 031 260 3587
Email: XimbaP@ukzn.ac.za

Participation is Voluntary Participation in this Research Project, through the planned Interviews and focus group discussions, is entirely voluntary; with the right being reserved to the Participant to withdraw participation without experiencing any disadvantage.

Confidentiality & Anonymity Participants are offered the opportunity to elect that their involvement in this Research Project remains confidential and anonymous. A pseudonym of your choice will be allocated to you.

Research Instruments Single Interview lasting 1-Hour will be conducted in Pretoria in an appropriate and safe venue of your choice. A copy of the Interview Schedule is attached. Audio Recording device will be used to record the Interviews. I will request your permission to audio tape the interviews and focus group discussions.

Disposal of Data

The primary data will be stored in the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classic [Gender, Religion and Health Programme] in which the project is based. Data on which any research publication is based will be retained in the School for at least five years after publication. Should the lead-Researcher complete the MA degree with the University, the data will be retained by the University.

We look forward to receiving your responses to this request.

Thank you.

T.B Chamane

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATION IN 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.

ADDITIONAL CONSENT.

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview YES NO

Use of my photographs for research purposes YES NO

NAME OF PARTICIPANT _____

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT _____ DATE _____

Appendix C: Participant Interview Schedule

Student: T.B Chamane.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE:

PARTICIPANT:

INTERVIEWER: _____

PARTICIPANT:

Format: Semi-Structured Interview

Date and Time of Interview:

Location of Interview:

Categories of Enquiry/Questions
1. How would you identify yourself in relation to your sexuality? Describe your understanding of coming out in relation to your sexuality?
2. Do you think the process of coming out is important? If so, why? How is the coming out process in general?
3. What were your experiences of coming out at the personal, family and community level? How were you able to deal with those experiences in this context?
4. How important and significant are your Christian and cultural beliefs in relation to your sexuality? Do you think your coming out experiences were influenced by your Christian and cultural beliefs? If so how? Elaborate?
5. How do you negotiate your sexuality with your Christian belief in relation to coming out?
6. How do you negotiate your sexuality with your cultural belief in relation to coming out?

7. How do your cultural belief contribute to your wellbeing in relation to your sexuality?

8. How do your Christian belief contribute to your wellbeing in relation to your sexuality?

9. Why so you negotiate your Christian belief and the experiences of coming out in the way you do? Elaborate?

10. Why so you negotiate your cultural belief and the experiences of coming out in the way you do? Elaborate?

Appendix D: Focus Group Discussion

Student: T.B Chamane

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION :

FOCUS GROUP:

Format: Group Discussion

Date and Time of the Focus Group:

Location of the Focus Group Discussion:

Categories of Enquiry/Questions
1. What do you understand about issues of sexuality in your context? How would you identify yourself in relation to your sexuality? Describe your understanding of coming out in relation to your sexuality?
2. What do we understand about coming out in relation to sexuality? Do you think the process of coming out is important amongst Zulu gay men? If so, why? How would you describe the coming out process in general and with regard to the Christian, Zulu community you live in?
3. What are the most challenges faced by Zulu gay men in relation to coming out? What are the similar challenges that Zulu gay men share in the community? How would you describe your experiences of coming out at the personal, family and community level? How were you able to deal with those experiences in this context?
4. How important and significant are your Christian and cultural beliefs in relation to your sexuality? Do you think your coming out experiences were influenced by your Christian and cultural beliefs? If so how? Elaborate?
5. How do you negotiate your sexuality with your Christian beliefs in relation to coming out?
6. How do you negotiate your sexuality with your cultural beliefs in relation to coming out?
7. How does your cultural beliefs contribute to your wellbeing in relation to your sexuality?
8. How does your Christian beliefs contribute to your wellbeing in relation to your sexuality?
9. Do you think that your Christian beliefs has had anything to do with your experiences of

coming out? Elaborate?

10. Do you think that your cultural beliefs had anything to do with your experiences of coming out? Elaborate?

Appendix E: Turnitin Report

Turnitin Originality Report

Full dissertation (final) by Thembani Chamane

From Full dissertation (final) (Masters class 2016)

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paper text:

An Exploration Of How Zulu Gay Men Negotiate their Christian and Cultural Beliefs in the Process of Coming Out By Thembani Bright Chamane Student no: 204520002 8A dissertation submitted in partial requirement for the fulfillment of the degree of Master of Arts 8Gender and Religion In the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics in the College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu -Natal, Pietermaritzburg. Supervisors: Professor Sarojini Nadar and Doctor Sarasvathie Reddy February 2017 DECLARATION The research described in this dissertation 6was carried out at the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal – Pietermaritzburg campus under the supervision of Prof. Sarojini Nadar

