Narratives of how young men raised in lesbian and gay families navigate South African Heteronormativities

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Declaration

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: Signed by candidate

Date: 10 February 2022

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Abstract

South Africa is currently the only country in the continent to fully legally recognise same-sex marriage. While this is a post-apartheid nationalism feat that needs and should be celebrated, those who live openly as gay/lesbian continue to be despised by a large portion of the population (Gouws, 2005). There is an overwhelming body of research in the continent, including South Africa, that focuses on the narratives of homophobia and violence experienced by gay/lesbian individuals (*see* Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy & Moletsane, 2010; Judge, 2018). Despite the growing visibility of gay/lesbian headed families in the country, little is known about children raised in such families. Existing literature often focuses on the impact homosexuality has on children from the perspective of the gay/lesbian parents while ignoring the importance of giving a voice to children who come from such families. Using a qualitative approach, this study explored narratives of how young men raised in gay/lesbian families navigate heteronormative communities in South Africa. Queer theory and theory on Radical Democracy were adopted as theoretical frameworks while the data was produced through semi-structured interviews conducted in person and virtually with eight men raised in gay/lesbian families. Themes and sub-themes emerged through a narrative thematic analysis, highlighting the intricacies and tensions in how these men navigate heteronormative environments. Constructing narratives about (counter)heteronormative environments, encounters of disclosure, self-identification narratives, and growing up as a boy/man in counter-heteronormative families were the themes that arose from their narratives. Their narratives revealed that there is no such thing as a universal moment of disclosure and that 'coming out' is a complex family process that sometimes occurs in the context of divorce and parental conflict and that sometimes, 'coming out' was irrelevant for these men because the narrative of disclosure was not allowed. The men learned to represent a positive alternative masculinity that challenges mainstream sexist ideas of women and girls as objects as a result

of growing up in counter-heteronormative families. The research suggests that living 'the laws of democracy' within intimate family settings is a complex and multidetermined business, demanding both continuous vigilance around wide-spread homophobia and attunement to new modes of masculinity formation in the country.

Keywords: *South Africa, gay/lesbian families, heteronormativity, masculinity, queer parents.*

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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

About a few years ago, I was invited to a house-warming party by a gay friend who had just moved into a new place with his new, male partner. His partner was previously in a heterosexual marriage and subsequently had kids. The partner's son was also present at this party and what I found interesting was how comfortable the three of them were around each other. This brought up questions of whether this 'new family setting' had an impact, if any, on the way in which this young man negotiates identity within a family structure, whether his father's sexual orientation and gender identity had an impact, if any, on how he performs his masculinity; and whether this impact affects the way he socialises with others.

When I got back home, I thought more of how diverse family structures within South Africa are, especially with the country's history of apartheid and conservative cultural attitudes towards same-sex relationships and/or the LGBTQIA+[1] community. This is despite sexual orientation rights being afforded protection under the South African Constitution. My interest in how young adults with parents who came out or are openly queer negotiated their own identities was further ignited at another dinner party a few months later. This time it was with another young man who seemed to be of the same social class background as the first young man I had encountered, but this one was of a different race. While we discussed socio-political issues and how parents or schooling never prepared us for social struggles, I mentioned if I were to be a parent as a gay man, I would raise my kids differently to my own upbringing. He outright said, "that would not necessarily be any different." I asked why he sounded so sure and he mentioned his own mother is lesbian, and he did not see or experience his family as any different than those with both heterosexual parents. Without

[1] LGBTQIA+ is an acronym standing for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and the plus (+) signifies that the alphabet is never-ending to make space for inclusivity. One might want to note that the acronym has come under heavy critique by queer activists who are wary of human-rights, identity-based-approaches to social change.

sounding too invasive, I enquired whether his mother's sexual identity was known to him from a young age or later in life. He then explained that his mother came out to him while he was still in high school. This made me even more curious about what it was like being raised in what would commonly be seen as a non-heteronormative family (although for him, this 'non-heteronormativity' did not come across as something of interest), but I decided to change the subject and not pry any further.

Even though I had already made a conscious decision to further my studies and do a master's degree in Gender Studies at the University of Cape Town, I was still unsure which research topic I wanted to tackle. The two events mentioned above, coupled with my own questions about the shifts in family dynamics within contemporary South Africa, led me to the decision to explore this research topic. The direction in which I was to begin tackling this topic was blurred by the fact that I had way too many questions. For example, I initially thought I should perhaps start by looking at how young South African men with gay/lesbian parents constructed their masculinity in relationship to their parents' sexual orientation and gender identity. However, it became clear on consideration that the narratives of these young men would reveal more than just how they construct their own masculinity. Joos and Broad (2007) suggest that personal narratives help us understand how new meanings about gendered and sexual identities and realities are created but that such narratives are unlikely to make simple links between parental influences and the teller's own experiences. I wanted to work with young men (instead of children)[2] who now have a sense of awareness of themselves as human beings with socio-political interactions with others. These interactions become complex since there is not just one single masculinity, but relatively multiple masculinities ranging from dominant to subordinate masculinities (Ratele, 2016), existing within different

[2] I use 'children' here to refer to a child under the age of 18 in line with Section 28 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996.

social contexts. Given the hunch that counter-heteronormative parent identities might create interesting environments for young men, who continue to live in a largely homophobic country, I committed myself to researching their narratives. I also think it would be possible to motivate their narratives through recognition of the fact that the binary between 'heteronormative' and 'counter-heteronormative' space remains very powerful, especially in research on LGBTQIA+ people's own experiences. In reality, of course, there are multiple connections and relationships between these spaces, and we know very little about what it means to have 'grown up' with communities and families hospitable to LGBTQIA+ lives.

According to Ratele (2014, p. 116), "fear of homosexuality, including the fear of being perceived as homosexual, troubles hegemonic African men and masculinities." It is, therefore, with this realisation that I seek to understand how these young men negotiate their own experiences of identity, sexuality and gender with narratives of young masculinities. I was interested in a range of questions such as: is this "fear of homosexuality" true? Ratele's theory assumes homophobia for all young men, and attributes it to multiple sources which include ignorance. What if a young man grows up with lesbian, gay, and/or transgendered parents? For instance, is their parents' sexual orientation creating fear of they themselves being perceived as homosexual? Or does something else happen? Where do they situate themselves in relation to masculinity? Are there any similarities or differences between young men raised by gay parents and those raised by lesbian parents with regards to their narratives around issues of homosexuality and masculinity? Within these young men's family structures, were there any discussions regarding their gay or lesbian parent's sexual orientation and gender identity?[3] If so, how has that changed the way that these young men

[3] In spite of being aware that sexual orientation and gender identity expressions go beyond just gay and lesbian (for example: transgender, bisexual, queer, intersex, asexual, fluid, et cetera), I was purposefully looking for narratives of young men with parent(s) who have disclosed (came out) their identity as gay and lesbian. Although this changed once I began my fieldwork. See Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion regarding this.

see their family and community at large? What about questions about the young men's peer communities (in diverse spaces such as schools, religious or traditional spaces, media-spaces)? What does it mean to grow up 'seen' as a boy with LGBTIA+ caregivers?

These questions were important because they opened up new spaces for understanding relationships between heteronormativity and counter-heteronormativity within South African environments which usually polarise such terrains. While aware that family dynamics differ vastly across South Africa, and that my study could offer only a partial lens into my own interest, I noted literature about queer family structures outside the continent was accessible, but very little South African oriented attention has been given to the kind of research which looks at the lives and narratives of young men such as the ones I met at the parties mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

I approached this research with the hunch that young men with gay and lesbian parents have to 'manage' a shift which could come with their parents' 'coming out'. Specifically, the shift in how the young men speak about their own experiences of identity, sexuality, gender and masculinities after parental disclosure of sexual orientation and gender identity. My interest was on how these young men might 'manage' this shift, and whether the deep heteronormativities of most South African family contexts offer new challenges and opportunities to young men with parents who are 'out'. I realised that this moment would be specific only to particular young men in families with lesbian or gay parents; the majority would have been part of a family structure since babyhood where they knew of their parents' same-sex relationship with one another. I was interested in the challenges of those who lived through a 'shift' in their own heteronormativity, through parental visibility as 'non-heteronormative'. These challenges could be embedded in the process of assuming heteronormativity and, especially situated in the South African context, norms of African

masculinity. However, I approached this research aware that there may be much bigger and more important challenges that have been strong influences on their sense of family, identity, and community. This was compounded by the idea that living as gay or lesbian increases vulnerability, stresses family dynamics, and simultaneously, creates new socio-political worlds, opportunities, and access to happiness; all of which could not only impact upon a parent-child dynamic but also create very particular dynamics within a young man's own socio-political environment.

At the same time, this was not shaped as a psychological study of any kind; I was not interested in the kind of research which seeks to measure the psycho-social 'wellbeing' of people growing up in queer, lesbian or gay families. I was interested in what the narratives of young men who have experienced this process can contribute to ongoing discourses which polarise heteronormativity against all other relationships to gender/sexuality. I saw this as part of understanding what it meant to live in a changing environment, where legislation attempts to protect the rights of lesbian and gay people while dominant swathes of popular and religious culture continue to stigmatise homosexuality.

In summary, I sought to examine how the young men of the study formulate their life stories in relation to their parent sexual orientation, to investigate how they "manage(d)" their parents coming out (they were all initially conceived biologically in heteronormative parental relationships, but one or more parents subsequently came out) and whether that has impacted on their child-parent relationship and finally whether their parents' sexual orientation has had an impact on how they relate to their peers and communities they live in.

1.1 Terminology and concepts

I felt it was important to clarify at the onset the different terms used in the main research question and in various sections of this research to refer to those who engage in same-sex relations. As Msibi (2006, p. 56) notes the term *gay* "…comes from a specific history, with its politics and struggle…", in this study I use the term *gay* to refer to someone who identifies as a man and is sexually attracted to other men. I use the term *lesbian* to refer to someone who identifies as a woman and is sexually attracted to other women. *Queer* is also another term that is often contested, however, for this research I use and mention *queer* to refer to a linguistic device that pushes the boundaries of what is embraced as normative, especially in relation to gender and sexual norms. While I also acknowledge the term *homosexual* has a specific cultural history in different temporalities, I use the term *homosexual* to refer to someone who is mainly attracted to the same sex or gender. Although I would like to point out that I use the term 'gay/lesbian' as a single phenomenon in some sections of this thesis, this is not to dismiss a large scholarly debate about men's or women's engagement with parental work, but to emphasize the parental sexual orientation with which the main research question is concerned. Finally, I would further like to note that though the concept of *gay/lesbian families* and the concept of *queer families* could mean different things for different people, I use these concepts interchangeably to refer to families with a parent or both parents who engage in same-sex relations.

1.2 Outline of chapters

In this chapter I began by providing a preface to this study followed by a discussion on the terminology and concepts used in this dissertation. The following chapter, chapter two, provides an in-depth review of literature relevant to this study. The chapter is broken down into five thematic areas and concludes with the research objectives and research questions for

this study. The first theme explores literature on contemporary legal and socio-cultures of same-sex desires in South Africa. In this theme I looked at sexual minority law such as the Civil Union Act of 2006 which highlight the shifts and challenges in legal interpretations of equal access to marriage for same-sex partners. In the second theme I explore dominant debates on homosexualities in African contexts which tend to view homosexuality as unAfrican, unGodly and unNatural. Violence experienced by gays and lesbians in South Africa is the focus in the third theme. The fourth theme explores theories around the intersection of heteronormativity and masculinities. The final theme explores existing research on children growing up in families with parents who live as gay/lesbian.

Chapter three focuses on the research methodology used in this study. The theoretical and methodological frameworks, approaches, and procedures that were employed to carry out the study are discussed in this chapter. Following that, the analytic methods are presented and discussed together with ethical considerations and limitations in relation to the research study. The chapter concludes by discussing the self-reflexive process undertaken for this research. The analysis for this study is presented across three chapters. Chapter four is the first chapter of analysis and contains material on family environments and disclosure of same-sex desires. Chapter five is the second analysis chapter which present the analysis on constructing the 'self' with(out) family. The last analysis chapter, chapter six, provides a discussion of the study's findings based on material from chapter four and five. The dissertation ends with chapter seven, which addresses the theoretical, methodological, and practical implications of the study's findings. That chapter will conclude with recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to better understand the multi-layered experiences of young men with gay/lesbian parents, I explore existing literature through five key themes that are concerned with *the contemporary legal and socio-cultures of same-sex desire in South Africa*; *debates on homosexualities in African contexts*; *violence experienced by gays and lesbians in South Africa; theories around the intersection of heteronormativity and masculinities*; and *research on children growing up in families with a parent who lives as gay/lesbian*. An in-depth review of this literature highlights gaps in extant literature and gives a nuanced theoretical framing for my research.

2.1 The contemporary legal and socio-cultures of same-sex desires in South Africa

Despite slow but steady shifts in legal and socio-cultural engagement with same-sex desire, it is worth noting that heterosexuality and heteropatriarchy majorly influence not just discourse but people's lived experiences. In this theme I review literature that discuss some of the recent shifts in legal and socio-cultures of same-sex desire. The reason for this review is that such legalisation (a) creates a formal framework for gay/lesbian 'credibility' with regard to citizenship; (b) is constantly under political and cultural attack; (c) has the possibility of same-sex marriage; and (d) impacts the lives of those who 'marry' as gay/lesbian. The literature reviewed contributes to understanding legal debates possibly embedded in the views, experiences and issues faced by this research study's participants.

2.1.1 Historic overview of sexual minority law in South Africa

The very presence of a national family policy hugely affects society, particularly if its objectives are for inclusivity in order to provide individuals a sense of community and cultivate positive family well-being and equitable socio-economic development in the country. Isaack (2003) gives a detailed history of South African law granting rights to sexual

minorities, which highlights the constitution's recognition of real economic opportunities for gay and lesbian individuals and couples. Although the range of positive protections that Isaack (2003) outlines is important, my focus here is mainly the Civil Union Act of 2006 that came into law three years after Isaack's article was published (Civil Union Act, 2006). Several scholars have since explored various concepts introduced by the legislation, such as understanding the different stages in the legal recognition of same-sex marriage in South Africa (De Vos & Barnard, 2007); the connection between same-sex marriage laws and concepts of family in contemporary South Africa (Lubbe-De Beer & Marnell, 2013; Morison, Lynch & Reddy, 2018); and the intersection of same-sex marriage and heteronormativity (Scott, 2019) among others.

The White Paper on families in South Africa notes that "[i]n a different vein, parents and other adult family members generally exert considerable influence as teachers and role models for children through skill building, limit setting or discipline, and as models of healthy and competent behaviour" (Department of Social Development, 2013, p. 6). The Civil Union Act together with family policy ensure queer citizens are afforded the same rights as heterosexual citizens in relation to forming kinships and family. This is the basis of human rights functioning families that promote tolerant views that embrace diversity and reflect the different types of socio-cultures in the country. The passing of the Civil Union Act (Statistics South Africa, 2018) is particularly significant as there is a notable increase in the numbers of same-sex marriages[4] and relationships since the enactment of the act.

[4] According to Statistics South Africa (STATSSA), the number of civil unions registered in South Africa increased by 21,6% from 1 357 in 2017 to 1 650 in 2018.

With regard to marriage between same-sex partners, Van Zyl (2009) suggests ambivalence with what is officially written in the Constitution and what marriage between same-sex partners entails in their real-life experiences. For instance, the 'escape' clause in the Civil Union Act of 2006 afforded state-employed marriage officers the right not to solemnise same-sex marriages based on conscientious reasons (Scott, 2019; Van Zyl, 2009). This in essence meant they were allowed to unfairly discriminate against same-sex couples based on their own personal convictions; however, this was later found to contravene the Constitution in that it permitted discrimination based on sexual orientation. Thus, in 2018 the Civil Union Amendment Bill was passed in parliament to repeal the escape clause, and in July 2020 the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) approved the Bill, which was signed into law on October 2020 by President Cyril Ramaphosa (DeBarros, 2020; Mtshali, 2020). DeBarros (2020) has since stated that same-sex partners will no longer be subjected to "humiliation and discriminatory inconvenience of potentially being turned away by homophobic officials." Shifts such as the above in legal interpretations of equal access to marriage show that although same-sex partners have the right to marry in South Africa, they in fact still face challenges in accessing marriage.

What is also worth looking at is the rights of gay and lesbian individuals in relation to adoption and Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs). Sanger and Sanger (2013, p. 58) posit that "[t]raditionally, the law has been a key tool in facilitating and legitimising heteronormativity" and this has an impact on gay and lesbian individuals who wish to adopt or conceive through ARTs. As will be discussed in the next theme, homosexuality is often deemed unnatural and dangerous, particularly to children, where the law is put in place as a measure to 'protect' children. In studies conducted by Lubbe-De Beer (2013) as well as by Swain and Frizelle (2013) which looked at the decision-making process of lesbian couples to

have children through ARTs found that although this process was complex, it was also guided by legislative reforms such as the changes to the Human Tissue Amendment Act of 1989. This legislation now recognises the right of single women (irrespective of sexual orientation) to undergo donor insemination and this has made it possible for lesbian couples to create families (Human Tissue Amendment Act, 1989). In terms of adoption, Louw (2005) notes the amendment made in the Constitution from the 1983 Child Care Act to the Children's Act of 2005 allows same-sex couples to now jointly adopt.

2.1.2 Reasons for considering same-sex marriage

In South Africa, a couple can legalise their marriage by one of three marriage laws. They can either use the Marriage Act 1961, the Recognition of Customary Marriage Act 1998, or the Civil Union Act 2006; while there is also an ongoing debate regarding a legislative framework governing religious marriages, such as Muslim Marriages. There is sufficient reason to conclude that there is broad tolerance for heteronormative attitudes to marriage and reproduction in all but the Civil Union Act 2006. While rituals and belief systems are broadly diverse, amid the seeming flexibility of some post-1994 laws, there is national consensus.

Marriage means different things for various same-sex partners (even for heterosexual partners) and each provide different reasons for getting married. Yarbrough (2018) contends that black gay and lesbian South Africans in particular are inspired by ideologies of romantic love and dyadic understandings of marriage when considering same-sex marriage, and that these become significant resources in gaining recognition from their families of origin and their broader communities when it comes to such marriages. For example, participants in a study conducted by Jessica Scott (2018) looking at marriage and family formations for lesbians in South Africa revealed that some participants (especially younger lesbians) linked getting married with desires of having children and forming a family. While those who were

previously in heterosexual marriages (often women who came of age) and had children, now considered marriage based on romantic love. One participant in Scott's (2018) study expressed that "the decision to get married came about by answering that it was because she wanted to have children" and that "there are other specific things that make the process of family formation 'simpler', such as changing surnames, which in turn makes the family unit more recognisable" (p. 128). Traditional practices such as *lobola*[5] or 'bride wealth' add another complex layer to marriage, especially for black same-sex partners who want to embrace this cultural practice, as it involves the joining and integration of two families and is an aspect of marriage negotiation (Pakade, 2018). Not only is marriage given legitimacy through legal underpinnings, but kinships formed through marriage also point to its social recognition. This is true especially for those who seek a great sense of belonging as a result of getting married (Van Zyl, 2009).

The desire to legitimate marriage through legal and family bonds has received much criticism in the Recognition of Customary Marriage Act (RCMA) of 1998 and has been highly problematic. For example, a customary marriage and a civil marriage are both types of legal marriages. Any of these could be registered with Home Affairs. A civil marriage is defined as a marriage conducted between two persons under the Marriage Act 1961. A customary marriage, on the other hand, is legally defined as a marriage performed in accordance with customary law, or the conventions and usages that have traditionally been followed among the indigenous African peoples of South Africa and are part of their culture. Couples can select between traditional customary law and civil law while registering their marriage, but not both. What is important is that the union ought to be registered with Home Affairs. A study conducted by Moore and Himonga (2016) revealed that, in practice, the RMCA law is

[5] *Lobola* is a Zulu word that describes "the provision of gifts to the parents of a bride, usually in the form of cash or livestock, [and] is an entrenched part of marriage in parts of South Africa" (Ansell, 2001, p.1).

very difficult to implement due to cultural and structural barriers. The partial or full payment of *lobola*, for instance, is a condition for the completion of a legitimate customary union, while the arrangement to pay is appropriate in other situations. There is often no evidence in any of these situations that a legitimate union exists, since the couple do not register their marriage with Home Affairs in most cases. However, due to the heteronormative nature of traditional customary marriages, same-sex couples cannot opt to get married through the RMCA law, but only through the Civil Union Act.

2.1.3 Societal attitudes towards same-sex desires

The challenges faced by same-sex couples can be explored and interpreted in many ways and one way of critically doing this is by looking at societal perceptions of queer sexualities. It was noted in a report, from the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions (NANRI) and the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) in-country meeting on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression held in November 2017, that "[t]he violation of the constitutional right to equality, which prohibits discrimination on the listed grounds of gender, sex and sexual orientation, comprises the highest proportion of complaints reported to the SAHRC" (South African Human Rights Commission, 2017, p. 18). Studies on societal tolerance of gay and lesbian individuals in South Africa reveal that despite acceptance or tolerance of the LGBTQIA+ community, many South Africans do not accept 'homosexuality' (Home Office, 2017) and even consider sex between two men or two women as 'always wrong' (Roberts & Reddy, 2008) or 'morally wrong' (Sutherland, Roberts, Gabriel, Struwig & Gordon, 2016). However, it is important to keep in mind that societal attitudes vary by geographical locations where rural areas and townships are reportedly less tolerant of LGBTQIA+ individuals compared to the cosmopolitan cities (Home Office, 2017). Moreover, survey studies by Roberts and Reddy (2008), and by Sutherland et al (2016) note that attributes of intolerance towards homosexuality can include

age, gender, education, religious variables and population group, in addition to geographic location.

In most cases, intolerance towards homosexuality can lead to homophobia, not only towards gay and lesbian parents but towards their children as well (Joos & Broad, 2007; Goldberg, 2007; Goldberg, 2007a; Fairtlough, 2008). Ratele (2014) distinguishes between two types of homophobic discourses prevalent in Southern Africa, namely, vertical homophobia and horizontal homophobia. He maintains that vertical homophobia entails "heterosexist discourses emanating from socio-political structures and institutions, including but not limited to constitutions, penal codes, laws, and government policies." While horizontal homophobia refers to "the penetration of everyday, interpersonal, and psychological life by anti-homosexual discourse" (Ratele, 2014, p. 119). My interest for this research is therefore to uncover what type of homophobia, if any, the young men in my study experience in their everyday lives.

In order to fully grasp the socio-cultural understanding of what same-sex desire looks like in a South African context, it is worth acknowledging the diversity of the population in the country. Therefore, I found it important to take an intersectional perspective to highlight difference in understanding same-sex desires in the country. As stated in the discussion above, attitudes and tolerance towards gay and lesbian individuals differ, and Roberts and Reddy (2008) further note that although apartheid had a psychological impact to indoctrinate, homosexuality has more to do with openness to differences in South African society. The various divisions of class, race and gender that exist make possible differing understandings of same-sex desires. As demonstrated by a few scholars (*see* Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy & Moletsane, 2010; Gqola, 2015; Judge, 2018) discrimination and violence is experienced differently by some women over others. That is, realities of black lesbians vastly differ from

those of white lesbians, as well as the fact that black lesbians in metropolitan areas experience discrimination and violence differently to those in townships.

Using an anecdote used in a chapter by Thabo Msibi (2018), I wish to illustrate how complex same-sex desires are viewed in South Africa. Msibi (2018) argues homophobic reactions are key indicators of confusion and misinformation when it comes to gender and sexual identity. To explain this confusion and misinformation, he uses an example of a wedding between a black transgender woman and a black cisgender man aired on the South African television show called *Our Perfect Wedding*. The episode was greeted with hostile, or rather homophobic, public reactions and Msibi (2018) further acknowledges the surprisingly homophobic reactions from the gay community itself. According to Msibi (2018), the presenter of the show inaccurately announced this would be the show's first same-sex wedding. This shows us there is misinformation about gender and sexuality, that is, the difference between the definition of transgender and cisgender identities. Cisgender is "[a] term used to describe people whose gender identity is congruent with the sex/gender assigned to them at birth, or non-transgender" (Chiang, 2019, p. 31), while transgender refers to people "whose gender identity or expressions differ from societal expectations based on the sex that [they] were assigned at birth" (Mason & Pellot, 2019, p. 16).

Msibi (2018) also points to the confusion which occurs when the black transgender woman repeatedly noted she was gay while naming herself as a woman. Additionally, this reveals class difference through the homophobic reactions from the gay community as Msibi (2018) notes the rhetoric was "[…]'gay' South Africans are not meant to be poor and from rural areas, how dare the couple embarrass 'us' like this[…]" (p. 154). Another example is of a study done by Salo, Ribas, Lopes and Zamboni (2010) where they highlight the intersection of class, race, space, power and sexuality through a case of Cape Town townships. They note

that sexual minorities living in these locations find themselves at odds with what is considered a 'moral economy' which is based on concepts of heterosexuality. Their analysis relies on secondary ethnographic data which shows that those with subversive gender identities, such as 'moffie' or 'man-vrou' (mannish woman)[6], live their lives vicariously without been seen as a threat to the dominant ideology of heterosexuality evident in township spaces. However, those with discreet gay and lesbian identities often face discrimination because they are seen as a threat to the 'moral economy' and in turn, heterosexuality.

2.2 Debates on homosexualities in African contexts

To contextualise this research, I look at homosexuality as a core zone of meaning with which these young men in my study use to make sense of their experiences. That is, I wanted to review material which could illuminate how these contemporary young men find themselves embedded in contested discourses around homosexuality. I explore this theme of debates on homosexuality in African context using Vincent and Howell's (2014) study as an anchor which identified three discursive analogies used to delegitimise homosexuality in Africa, namely, homosexuality as unAfrican, unGodly, and unNatural. Although their research was in the context of debates surrounding the legalisation of same-sex marriage in South Africa, these three discursive analogies are relevant for this study because they provide a panoramic view of the dominant debates about homosexuality in the continent.

2.2.1 Homosexuality is unAfrican

Looking at homosexuality historically, Dlamini (2006) is one of many scholars who refutes the idea that homosexuality is unAfrican by reviewing critical texts that reveal patterns of homosexuality in Africa. He argues homosexuality existed in pre-colonial traditional religions of Africa where Africans connected homosexuality with spiritual powers. The

[6] "moffie" and "man-vrou" are some of the derogatory terms used to refer to queer people in South Africa.

literature Dlamini (2006) reviewed showed that there was no name indicating a distinct category called 'homosexual[ity]' and that Africans would rather talk about acts and emotions experienced rather than categorising people. That is, the categorisation of individuals' sexuality was rooted in experiences of colonial rule. Similarly, Msibi (2011), referring to the invention of the 'homosexual role', concludes "homosexuality was therefore a term initially introduced in the West to control social relations, while labelling those in same-sex relations as deviant" (p. 56). Dlamini (2006) acknowledges that some early anthropologists have a tendency to dismiss the presence of homosexuality and that "when homosexuality is acknowledged, its meaning and cultural significance is discounted and minimised" (p. 133). Dlamini (2006) goes further to maintain that the condemnation of homosexuality *is* unAfrican.

Notwithstanding, Epprecht (2008) concurs with Dlamini (2006) and argues that social and political changes (for example, migration, religion and culture) influenced the way sexuality, including the meaning of same-sex desire, is viewed today. A few other scholars (Gevisser & Cameron, 1995; Epprecht, 2004, 2013; Van Zyl & Steyn, 2005; Msibi, 2011; Currier, 2012; Vincent & Howell, 2014) explore the claim that homosexuality is unAfrican which in turn lend credence to homophobic discourses surrounding debates about homosexuality in Africa. To characterise homosexuality as unAfrican opens up questions of what is African and what is not. According to Ngwena (2018), "*What is Africanness* is concerned with implicating and contesting discursive constructions of African identities which have succeeded in producing generic Africanness – a nativised Africanness – within discourses that are hostage to the 'logic of identity' in which identity represents saturated and oppositional essences" (p. 5). Thus, this hegemonic Africanness renders anything outside of this view (in this context, homosexuality) as 'Other' or a Western import through a heteronormative lens. Additionally, such a view makes an assumption that there is an indivisible African culture. However, this

would be rather ambitious considering the diversity of histories and people in each country within the continent.

On the other hand, Tamale (2013) is of the opinion that homosexuality is used as a political tool to promote self-serving agendas. According to Tamale (2013), political and religious African leaders abolish the existence of same-sex relations to strengthen their grip on the political and social landscape. Although not an African writer or scholar, Ashley Currier (2012) based in the United States echoes Tamale's (2013) sentiments and maintains that the homosexuality is unAfrican discourse is a consequence of traditional and political leaders reimagining the continent's future and it functions to erase "the possibility of local, indigenous gender and sexual diversity" which existed even before colonialism (p. 122). By tracing LGBT[7] organising in Namibia and South Africa, Currier (2012) contends that LGBT activists used visibility strategies to counteract the discursive notion that homosexuality is unAfrican. Adversely, these strategies utilised identity terminology or language and funding from donors in the global North, which delegitimised homosexuality as African. In this way, language plays an important role in how homosexuality is understood.

Currier (2012) further notes that the visibility strategies employed by LGBT activists threatened traditional and political leaders' cultural and political positions in Africa and thereby failing to destabilise the discursive notion that homosexuality is unAfrican. As Vincent and Howell (2014) concluded, "[t]o represent homosexuality as 'unAfrican' is a complex discursive strategy which raises the spectre of colonization and the suppression of African traditions, languages and ways of life under white supremacy" (p. 479). A conversation between Nadia Davids and Zethu Matebeni (2017) discussing queer politics and intersectionality in the context of Cape Town, South Africa, unpacks the complex ways in

[7] Note: I use differing queer acronyms throughout the dissertation based on what the cited authors used.

which LGBTQ activism is informed. Matebeni notes how raced and classed Pride, #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall movements are and reveal exclusion boundaries. She notes how Pride as an activism strategy has moved from being a fight for rights to just being for the sake of being seen; and acknowledges the implications of the location where the Pride parades take place. She further notes what activism movements such as the #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall movements reveal about the way in which intersectionality and queer politics plays out in practice. According to Matebeni these movements were largely about identity politics where those involved wanted to address "coming out issues, reconciling their sexuality, their gender identities with being African, with being at UCT" (p. 166). It thus become apparent that the visibility and acknowledgement of a homosexual identity in an African context is discursively political.

For example, in South Africa the inclusion of the equality clause in the Constitution was a result of LGBT activism during the fight for liberation against the apartheid regime. As Simon Nkoli, one of the most celebrated LGBT activists once expressed, "[i]n South Africa I am oppressed because I am a black man, and I am oppressed because I am gay. So when I fight for my freedom I must fight against both oppressions" (de Waal & Martin, 2007, p. 3). This statement shows that Nkoli found himself between the intersections of being black as well as being gay and as an activist he could not remove his sexuality from his political activism. Characterising homosexuality as unAfrican seeks to exclude LGBT individuals from claiming their African identity. The reimagined African future by African traditional and political leaders, as argued by Currier (2012), can be seen as oppressing African queer individuals through what Vincent and Howell (2014) earlier referred to as the "spectre of colonization" as it suppresses queer individuals from claiming their African identity. It is, however, important to note that the discourse of homosexuality is unAfrican often maintains

momentum in African countries where same-sex desire can be legally acted upon. For example, in countries such as Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya and Zimbabwe to name but a few.

2.2.2 Homosexuality is unGodly and unNatural

The discourse surrounding homosexuality as 'unGodly' (Vincent & Howell, 2014) or 'un-Islamic' (Ndzovu, 2016) is premised on the religious stance of morality (van Klinken & Obadare, 2018) which views homosexuality as a sin (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008). Christianity and Islam are the dominating faiths in the African continent, and it is important to consider their influence in relation to debates on homosexuality. Religious beliefs do not just operate privately but rather converge with politics and govern how individuals live their public life (van Klinken, 2013; Kaoma, 2018). According to the Human Rights Watch (2011), the church operates as an important space for communal life, socialising and where social attitudes are formed. Consequently, it is also a space where a lot of negative attitudes towards homosexuality occur.

Many African political and religious leaders (for example, the late Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe and Former South African President Jacob Zuma) publicly condemned homosexuality in Africa and argued that homosexuality is against Christian teachings and ideologies (*see* Vincent & Howell, 2014; Currier, 2012; Reddy, 2002; Tamale, 2017). Yet, at a conference titled "*Breaking Through the Backlash: Transformative Encounters Between LGBTI People and Churches in Africa"* held in 2019 in Durban, Professor Allen Boesak urged church leaders and Christians at large to endeavour against any form of injustice (Boesak, 2019). In the paper that he presented, he asked "[h]ow could the church that took such a strong stand against apartheid display such blatant hatred and hypocrisy (and) deny for God's LGBTQI children the solidarity we craved for ourselves?" (Boesak, 2019, p. 3). This question is significant in that it suggests the church considers discrimination on the basis of

race more valid than discrimination against homosexuality. This seems incongruous with Christian (and Islamic) principles and values which advocate for love of all human beings, including queer individuals within these faiths. There are religious queer individuals within the continent who desire recognition from their religious community. For example, a sermon delivered by Bishop Dag Heward-Mills at Grace Bible Church in 2017 caused much of a public debate due to its homophobic connotation which caused the well-known choreographer, Somizi Mhlongo, to walk out of the church (Pather, 2017).

These homophobic sentiments are not only echoed within the Christian faith but are also evident in the Muslim community. In the book entitled "*Living out Islam: voices of gay, lesbian, and transgender Muslims"* by Scott Kugle (2014), he reveals the struggle experienced by LGBT Muslim participants from Canada, the Netherlands, the United States, the United Kingdom and South Africa, to reconcile their sexual orientation and gender identity with Islam. The participants in Kugle's (2014) study expressed that "one's innermost feelings of identity and desire lead one to a kind of love which one's family and community deem immoral" (p. 220). Here the premise of morality is evoked in a similar manner as in the context of Christianity. The decision to judge something on whether it is moral or not is based on how individuals interpret their respective religious principles through their texts, in this case, the Qur'an or the Bible. By the same token, Hassan Ndzovu (2016) found it to be the case with the Muslim community in Kenya where homosexuality is considered embarrassing and distasteful to the community, while Muslim jurists are of the opinion that homosexuality should be punishable by stoning to death. Although this punishment is not the same across all the different Muslim schools of thought as some hold that the government should decide on the type of punishment deemed appropriate. Osman and Shaikh (2017) examined the struggle experienced by queer Muslims in Cape Town and they noted that approaches of sexual diversity within the Muslim community were situated on a spectrum.

On the one end of this spectrum are those orthodox Muslim religious leaders and community who are queerphobic. On the other, those who embrace sexual orientation and gender identity minorities.

What these scholars all seem to point to when it comes to the discourse of homosexuality as unGodly or un-Islamic is resisting a monolithic view of religion. This limiting way of interpreting one's religiosity is contradictory to the moral principles of these faiths to accept everyone being made in the image of God and 'loving thy neighbour'. Boesak (2019) argued that churches need to be critical of what they mean by "embracing" their members and let go of the fears and discomfort with queer members as "[t]hat is the meaning of unity, reconciliation and justice" (p. 13). Religion viewed or practised in this way, accepts that although one is created in the image of God, human beings have different lived experiences. Moreover, individuals understand and interpret their religiosity or piety differently as acknowledged by Boesak when he says that "[r]ejection of persons other than heterosexual (means) it is not love of Jesus Christ but heteronormativity that becomes the condition for full and meaningful membership of the church" (p. 11).

Another point to note is that religious discourse is often a discourse about 'the natural' when it comes to homosexuality in Africa. The homosexuality is unNatural discourse is viewed in relation to child-rearing and procreation tenets associated with heterosexuality (Vincent & Howell, 2014). By looking at homosexuality as unNatural, an assumption is made that children only exist in a context of heterosexual relationship and that any other way of conceiving children is unnatural (Ndzovu, 2016). This view tends to neglect the fact that there are individuals, whether homosexual or heterosexual, who are unable to have children due to medical or biological reasons. Those who were opposed to the legalisation of same-sex

marriage in South Africa used this argument to delegitimise homosexuality and argued that marriage is between a man and a woman (Vincent & Howell, 2014).

The court found that characterising same-sex marriage as unnatural marks this type of marriage as possibly 'Other' and therefore a contradiction to equality with the status of South African marriages (Vincent & Howell, 2014). Similarly, Ndzovu (2016) maintains that Kenyan Muslims see homosexuality as "a perversion and reversal of the natural sexual orientation of human beings" (p. 78). Although Ndzovu (2016) found that such views on homosexuality were not always alike when contrasting earlier times (before 1990s) in costal Kenyan Muslim communities to the contemporary Muslim population in the country. Ndzovu (2016) maintains that literature shows the existence of same-sex relations among both men and women populace even though the Kenyan Penal Code considers homosexuality a crime which is seen as an "unnatural offence" (p. 81). The change in how homosexuality is viewed among the Muslim community is believed to be due to the visibility of gay and lesbian organisations. This change in attitude towards homosexuality resemble the discussion on homosexuality as unAfrican, reviewed above, where Currier (2012) argued that the visibility strategies by LGBT organisations and activism are motivating factors linked to the negative attitude towards homosexuality.

It is clear that the visibility of queer people in Africa, through public display of affection, gay and lesbian organising, activism and vocal support of same-sex marriage, poses a threat to the dominant heterosexual standpoint on homosexuality. Debates and negative attitude toward homosexuality in Africa are hugely based on the three discursive analogies discussed above. In spite of this, there is powerful and ongoing work of advocacy NGOs in countering these discourses. Although I am aware that other context-specific discursive analogies exist [for example, rights-based discourse surrounding granting of asylum and immigration of gender

refugees (Camminga, 2016)] , the three discussed above clearly highlight opposing political and social influences which are significant in the ways in which young men with gay/lesbian parents make sense of their lived experiences.

2.3 Violence experienced by gays and lesbians in South Africa

Being visibly queer or coming 'out' as gay/ lesbian leaves an opportunity for homophobia to take place and this homophobia often leads to violence - intangible and tangible types of violence. Mkhize et al (2010) compiled a prominent report that highlighted the importance of looking at gender-based violence in non-heteronormative terms especially considering the violence suffered by black lesbians in South Africa. It has been highlighted by a large number of other scholars that the queer community suffer the most violence compared to their heterosexual counterparts (*see* Gqola, 2015; Judge, 2018; Judge & Nel, 2008; Msibi, 2009, 2011, 2012; Reddy, Potgieter & Mkhize, 2007). For a parent to 'come out' as gay/lesbian leaves them vulnerable and facing possible violence which at times comes in a form of rape or even worse, death.

2.3.1 Homophobic violence

Although state sanctioned homophobia is prohibited in the Constitution, South Africa is still experiencing high levels of homophobic violence (Ireland, 2013; Igual, 2021). The discursive analogies used to delegitimise homosexuality, as discussed in the previous theme, can be attributed to this high level of violence against those with non-normative gender and sexuality. As Reddy, Potgieter and Mkhize (2007) noted regarding 'corrective rape'[8]:

[8] Scholars such as Madhumita Lahiri have critiqued the portion of *corrective* in the term 'corrective rape' as it alludes to 'curing' lesbian women (especially black lesbian women) of their sexual orientation (*see* Lahiri, 2011).

> *They [black lesbians] are told they are unAfrican if they are not living a heterosexual lifestyle. But beyond this prejudice, they are often singled out and targeted by men who use rape as a twisted form of 'therapy'. The term 'corrective rape' has been coined to describe this particular type of hate crime, because the rapists claim that they are acting in the lesbian's interests, by 'teaching her to behave like a woman'* (p. 11).

This example shows the way in which heterosexism and toxic masculinity may normalise violent behaviour towards those perceived as gay/lesbian. Moreover, Msibi (2009) argues that ideas around manhood are still deeply entrenched in South Africa and that an analysis and an understanding of masculinities can provide answers to issues of gendered violence in the country. I discuss in more detail how masculinities and heteronormativity operate in South African in the next theme.

Using Mkhize et al's (2010) discussion on 'citizenship', where 'citizenship' is defined in terms of both a status and a practice or form of agency, one can say that those who become victims of homophobic violence are treated as non-citizens by their perpetrators. In other words, in as much as the relationship between these individual citizens is regulated through rights (status), ideas about rights to participation within social processes such as non-normative gender expression (form of agency) are seen as grounds for exclusion from claiming 'citizenship'. Those who deviate from gender and sexuality norms fear homophobic violence and in turn, this exacerbates fear of 'coming out' for those who wish to come out (Judge & Nel, 2008).

What is also not often talked about is intimate partner violence (IPV) within the gay and lesbian community. Often the violence which seems to be given a spotlight is violence which is perpetuated against the gay and lesbian community by their heterosexual counterparts.

Khan and Moodley (2013) argue that this limiting view in relation to violence needs to be addressed because it means understanding violence only in heteronormative terms. In a conversation between these two authors discussing research done by Moodley into IPV within gay-male relationships, Moodley reveals that violence within these relationships is not always physical but can also manifest as emotional abuse or intimidation. Again, here we see the link between masculinity and violence as Moodley notes what was a common thread in the cases he reviewed and analysed was that "the abuser was constructed as the 'masculine' partner and the abused as the 'feminine' partner, which seemed to replicate gendered power relations" (p. 244). These power relations reveal that violence should not only be understood as occurring externally or publicly, but just as in heterosexual relationships, it could happen in private settings within gay and lesbian relationships. Worth noting for this current research is that not only do lesbian/gay parents face climates of homophobic violence, but should there be domestic violence in the home, research suggests this would be hard to name.

2.3.2 Racialised homophobic violence

What is also interesting to point out is how racialised and classed homophobic violence seems to manifest in South Africa, and this could be because violence is a central feature of post-colonial life (Judge, 2018). This can also be linked to the common notions of homosexuality being associated with 'whiteness' (Matebeni, 2011, p. 52) as alluded to in the section discussing 'homosexuality is unAfrican' earlier. Understanding the history of racialisation or race politics in the country is important because it allows us to understand that violence is not experienced the same by different members of the LGBTQIA+ community. In her book entitled "*Blackwashing Homophobia: violence and the politics of sexuality, gender and race"*, Melanie Judge (2018) notes that " 'the black community' is casually linked with violence such that the doing of violence and those to whom it is done are constructed through a discourse of race" (p. 53).

Moreover, the white and coloured[9] lesbians who participated in focus groups in her study had not simply experienced casual homophobic discrimination. What seems to be odd is the way in which these participants demonstrated racist essentialism that seems to 'Other' those who are racialised as black. As one of the white participants declared, "[t]he black community, they are very very much into violence." This way of viewing the black community is rooted in colonial and apartheid ideologies, and it means that researchers need to be vigilant when working with any conjunctions of 'blackness' with 'violence'.

Such ideologies further create a separation not only through racialisation but also spatially. For example, a 'coloured' man, Marcus Pillay, and his 'white' companion, Pierre de Vos, enjoyed a night out in the gay village of De Waterkant in Cape Town in October 2003, according to an incident relayed by Tucker (2009). During the evening, the two decided to go to *Sliver*, a prominent nightclub in the area. Pillay was turned away by the security staff at the door, whereas de Vos was permitted in. The security staff stated that Pillay was dressed inappropriately at the time, but that accusation was ultimately disregarded. Matebeni (2019) argues that we need to expose the 'whitewashing' of gender and sexual diversity, especially in spaces like Cape Town which is dubbed as 'Africa's gay capital'. Viewing the city this way has implications in how violence is experienced by gay and lesbian individuals on the racial margins. In South Africa, everyone experiences racialisation, and most racism, of diverse genres and impacts. For a parent to 'come out' as gay or lesbian means possibly being confronted with violence, or even worse, death, and the meaning of this is embedded within a racialised context.

[9] In South Africa, the term 'coloured' is a racial identity that was imposed by the system of apartheid racial classification. This system discriminated and categorised people according to their race. The coloured racial identity refers to people of mixed racial origins.

2.4 Theories around the intersection of heteronormativity and masculinities

While being cognisant of the locatedness with which my research finds itself, that is in Africa, the three discursive drivers discussed in the second theme impose powerful societal impacts that can be challenging for young men with gay/lesbian parents. Throughout literature on masculinities in South Africa runs an argument that hegemonic masculinities celebrate overt and 'successful' heterosexuality. In this section, I review more closely the links between masculinities, heteronormativity and homophobia, through key studies.

2.4.1 Heteronormativity in context

Swain and Frizelle (2013) argue that individuals are forced to identify themselves in the strict binary of heterosexuality as the norm or homosexuality as abnormal or perverted due to hegemonic discourses. Fundamentally, hegemonic discourses function in society to accomplish and sustain social order "through resources such as the media, public policy and legal and health systems as well as through dominant religious social institutions" (p. 190). Adversely, the dominance and privileging of heterosexuality ensures that social order is enforced and maintained in heteronormative terms. In addition, resources that are used to maintain this social order are controlled by those in power, such as media practitioners, government officials and policy makers.

Formerly, discussing social order in relation to 'doing gender', West and Zimmerman (1987) noted that institutional arrangements in society could be viewed as a response to difference where social order is a powerful tool to validate and legitimate hierarchal arrangements. For instance, hierarchal arrangements such as men 'doing' dominance while women are 'doing' difference/subordination. These hierarchal arrangements are realised in many ways or through resources such as those highlighted by Swain and Frizelle (2013). The education system has been researched as essential here (*see* Francis & Msibi, 2011; Msibi, 2012;

DePalma & Francis, 2014 among others). DePalma and Francis' (2014) study point to the imbalance found by Life Orientation (LO)[10] teachers in the Free State province in terms of teaching about sexuality diversity in theory versus in practice. Their findings showed that the LO curriculum was highly influenced by institutional (hierarchal) arrangements. Religious discourses, policy, science and human rights framework are among some of the influences which impact on how heterosexuality is normalised while institutional arrangements and social order are maintained. My earlier discussion on homosexuality as unGodly highlighted how religion is used to delegitimise homosexuality. Thus, although the South African Constitution has a human rights framework that is theoretically inclusive, the dominance of heteronormative discourse over homosexuality still remain a reality. Education about sexuality diversity has an impact on how people understand homosexuality in its pluralistic form, especially for young men who find themselves in a richly diverse location such as South Africa.

It is also vital to keep in mind that homophobia exists in tandem with heteronormativity. Herz and Johansson (2015) argue that "heteronormativity not only aims at changing conditions for homosexuals but also targets the whole societal and cultural institution of heterosexuality" (p. 1012). At its best, heteronormativity ensures the privileging and normalising of heterosexuality. This view of heterosexuality as the norm and homosexuality as 'Other' is what subsequently generates a shift in which the young men in my study would need to 'manage'. That is, the struggle between conflicting subcultural identities of self, family and community which they inhabit. Sociology scholar Lwando Scott (2019) concurs with this in his study where he argues that same-sex marriage is embedded in heteronormativity. I also

[10] Life orientation is a fairly recent subject field of the South African curriculum, adopted in 1997 as part of the Outcome-Based Education (OBE). It is intended to take a comprehensive approach to the learners' personal, social, emotional, and physical growth, and has replaced prior, non-examinable subjects such as Guidance, Religious and Bible Studies, and Civic, Health, and Physical Education.

elaborate further on this notion of heteronormativity normalising heterosexuality in the next section where I discuss the film titled *Inxeba*.

2.4.2 Masculinities at play

Homosexuality and heteronormativity play a pivotal role in how masculinity plays out. Masculinity in its essence involves human beings who constantly interacting with one another socially. Studies on masculinity reveal that masculinity often involves a collective approach to gender identity and is not something that we are innately born with and it is constantly changing and socially constructed (*see* Connell, 1995, 2005; Morrell, 1998; Ratele, 2016). This is not to say, however, that masculinity cannot be individualised. Research has demonstrated that there is not a single generally recognised masculinity, but rather a range of differing masculinities (Connell, 1995, 2005; Morrell, 1998; Ratele, 2016).

Heteronormative discourses within resources such as the school system and the media assume a sense of hegemonic masculinity (Morrell, 1998; Ratele, 2016). According to Hamlall (2018), the concept of hegemonic masculinity refers to how specific groups of men hold positions of power in society. However, Morrell (1998) distinguishes between two dominant types of masculinities (White and African) within South African groups of men. While black masculinity could be seen as a subculture that falls under the broader African masculinity (Matabane, 2019). Of interest for this research is debates in African masculinities as they seem to assume that masculinities engage heterosexuality. This could be due to the fact that young men's identities and behaviour are shaped by dominant or hegemonic discourses of heterosexuality.

Take for instance a study conducted by Vijay Hamlall (2018) which looked at how young black men construct masculinity at a South African university. Hamlall (2018) found that these young men constantly had to prove their heterosexual masculinity by engaging in

romantic relationships with girls in fear of being perceived as homosexuals and in turn establishing heteronormativity. Similarly, participants in Malose Langa's (2020) longitudinal study of how young black men from Alexandra township in Johannesburg negotiate manhood and masculinity, also expressed fears of being considered gay. However, both Langa (2020) and Hamlall (2018) found that their participants inhabited a subjective stance that supported as well as refuted hegemonic conceptions of masculinity.

In his wonderfully written book entitled *Liberating Masculinities,* Kopano Ratele (2016) notes that in South Africa, young black men often have no social power and wealth, and therefore fit the criteria of subordinate or marginalised masculinities. Ratele (2016) further acknowledges that South African research on masculinities has historically tended to pathologies black men while constructing them as inherently problematic. In contrast, Sakhumzi Mfecane (2008), Tamara Shefer, Garth Stevens and Lindsey Clowes (2010) as well as Malose Langa (2020) are some of the scholars who are very critical of such reductive narratives and invite researchers to acknowledge the challenging complexities that are faced by black men in South Africa. Ratele (2016) is in support of this view and contends that "black men can and must create new self-definitions of masculinity, especially in light of the fact that political freedom from racial oppression has not eliminated the need for struggle from gender, class and sexual troubles" (p. 150-151).

The view of a hegemonic masculinity within the media also ensures that other forms of masculinities, particularly those not represented in the media, are subordinated and silenced. For instance, through my previous research study (Matabane, 2019) looking at representation of masculinity in newspaper media, I became aware of the normalisation of the discourse around heterosexuality while homosexuality is viewed as 'Other', 'unNatural' and 'unAfrican'. The study specifically looked at discourse surrounding the release of the film

Inxeba (Trengove, 2017) in the *Mail & Guardian* newspaper. Much of the discourse featured in the newspaper articles highlighted comments from groups such as the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (Contralesa) and the Man and Boy Foundation who seemed to present themselves as gatekeepers of tradition, *Xhosa* culture and African masculinity[11]. Circulation of such comments within the media are important outlets for understanding how individuals make sense of their world and as Luyt (2012, p. 36) notes, "media are argued to act as an important cultural process through which a particular version of masculinity achieves as well as maintains hegemony."

There seems to be a lack of positive representations of homosexuality or queer role models in media and when homosexuality does appear in media, its sheer visibility gets challenged as demonstrated with the backlash which followed the release of the film *Inxeba* (Trengove, 2017). The ways in which contemporary popular culture in South Africa attempts to 'include' gay iconography is what, I think, lies beyond the intersection of heteronormativity and masculinity. As discussed earlier, Swain and Frizelle (2013) argue that individuals are forced to identify themselves through resources such as the media, we ought to interrogate how the inclusion or visibility of gay icons in media that is dominated by heteronormative discourse influence the way that young men negotiate their identity, specifically their masculinity identity.

The visibility of gay icons in popular culture work as resistance towards a hegemonic discourse of heteronormativity and masculinity by normalising how homosexuals are viewed in the public. However, there is a vociferous scholarly debate about whether the visibility of gay icons project what Joshi (2012) refers to as 'respectable queerness' which Herz and

[11] Both groups were very vocal in the banning of the film as they believed the film was a misrepresentation of the *Xhosa* male circumcision culture by having homosexual characters [*see* Collison, C. (2018, February 2-6). 'Inxeba wounds our cultural practice'. *Mail and Guardian*. Retrieved from https://mg.co.za/article/2018-02-02-00-inxeba-wounds-our-cultural-practice/].

Johansson (2015) argue contributes to the reinforcement of heteronormative structures in society. To illustrate, the late Xhosa gospel singer, Lundi Tyamara, was described in the media as having found courage to come out as gay after going through what is traditionally and culturally perceived as a heteronormative Xhosa men's rite of passage from boyhood to manhood (Qambela, 2017; Livermon, 2015). Suggesting a gay masculinity to a culturally heteronormative experience through a popular icon such as Tyamara can be seen as resistance to a hegemonic masculinity. However, when we look at the reaction from the public in relation to the media coverage of the film *Inxeba*, the point of Joshi's (2012) 'respectable queerness' becomes apparent if we look at the backlash faced by Nakhane Touré, an openly queer middle-class Xhosa man, who was in the public eye as a musician and the author of the novel titled *Piggy Boy's Blues* before playing one of the main characters in the film (Collison, 2017). The article by Collison (2017) highlights how he received threatening messages where he was called names like "fucking faggot", "stabane"[12], "moffie ndini [goddamn moffie]" because of playing a gay character in the film. Although he was openly gay before the release of the film where one could conclude that his queerness was seen as respectable, his involvement in the film deemed his queerness disreputable. This is the opposite to the affirming experience encountered by Lundi Tyamara. In other words, Tyamara's coming out was celebrated and not met with threatening messages even though it centred around heteronormative discourse of Xhosa men's rite of passage.

From the discussion above, one can see there is a need for understanding the intersections of heteronormativity and masculinities to make sense of the influences of how young men negotiate their identity. Conflicting messages in media portrayal or representation of queerness are therefore important factors in understanding how the young men in my study -

[12] "Stabane" / "isiStabane" is a derogatory isiZulu term used in vernacular language to refer to a queer person.

moved into recognition of homosexuality as normative through their parents same-sex desire - engage the processes of becoming masculine. Existing literature on heteronormativity and masculinities shows parental sexual orientation influence the way with which young men would navigate issues of identity, but it does not explain how to manage or overcome daily challenges. There is a dearth of literature on how concepts of heteronormativity and masculinity help young men with gay/lesbian parents to resist hegemonic discourses of heteronormativity as well as which masculinities these young men identify with in relation to their parents' sexuality.

2.5 Research on children growing up in families with a parent who live as gay/lesbian

In studies that have touched on children with gay and lesbian parents, I found that there is a significant gap in existing literature and research based on narratives of young men with gay and lesbian parents within South Africa. Similar to this study, existing research in South African mostly focuses on views of gay and lesbian parents (*see* Lynch & Murray, 2000; Rothmann, 2011; Lynch & Morison, 2016), queer family structures (*see* Lubbe-De Beer & Marnell, 2013; Morison, Lynch & Reddy, 2018) and how children of gay/lesbian parents manage communication about their parents' in relation to others outside their family (*see* Breshears & Diverniero, 2015).

Although Lubbe (2008) conducted a study on experiences of children with only lesbian parent(s) and excluded those with gay parents, her research focused on both girls and boys (four boys and four girls) who were between the ages of nine and 19 (seven children were still in school, with just one having recently completed her high school education). Her study has limitations in the sense that the participants (children) had lack of awareness with regard to socio-political interactions and as Garner (2004) notes that children, in contrast to adults, might be self-conscious of their responses in fear of implicating their parents. There is

paucity of research which focuses on adult children of gay and lesbian parents who are physically and economically independent of their parents within the South African context.

On the other hand, there is a vast amount of research focusing on how parental sexual orientation impacts on adult children from countries such as United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia. A few of these studies explore issues of disclosure in relation to parent's sexual orientation (*see* Goldberg, 2007a; Tasker, Barrett & De Simone, 2010); identification of the children with gay and lesbian parents in relation to LGBTQIA+ community (*see* Goldberg, Kinkler, Richardson & Downing, 2012); and others focus more broadly on the impact of parents' sexual orientation on children (*see* Lynch & Murray, 2000; Breshears, 2011). A few of these studies will be further elaborated upon and discussed below. Lastly, my interest is in explicating further on Lubbe's (2008) study by including adult children with gay parents in order to have a nuanced understand of the ways they navigate heteronormative communities in South Africa through their narratives. This study, therefore, hoped to contribute knowledge about the experiences of adult children with gay/lesbian parents.

While trying to understand how young men with gay and lesbian parents navigate heteronormative communities in South Africa, I wondered whether their narratives would bring to the fore issues related to gender-based violence, which seem to be prevalent in South Africa[13]. As Abbie Goldberg's (2007) study in the United States revealed that young adults who grew up in or were raised by lesbian, gay and bisexual parented families are more tolerant and open to complex issues related to gender and sexuality. She explains that looking

[13] The rape and murder of women such as Karabo Mokoena and Uyinene Mrwetyana are a few of many gruesome cases which take place in South Africa: Tanaka, S. (2019). MEN ARE TRASH. *Sister Namibia*, *31*(3), 26+. Retrieved from https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/doc/A612121012/AONE?u=unict&sid=AONE&xid=34eebc4

at narratives of young adults in lesbian, gay and bisexual parented families is important because:

> *(a)* "it may uncover yet-undocumented areas of perceived influence; (b) it permits individuals to speak in their own words about how they feel they are (and are not) different from their counterparts raised in traditional households; (c) by asking adults about their experiences and perceptions, the tendency for defensiveness is reduced whereas in contrast to children, who may feel more self-conscious about the potential implications of their response, such as criticism of their parents" (Goldberg, 2007, p. 550-551).

Goldberg's study became a launch pad for me to understand whether narratives of young men in South Africa, with different intersecting socio-political positions of race and class, would elucidate different perceptions. That is, perceptions of their role in challenging gender-based violence and homophobia, for example, which could come with the 'coming out' of their parents (Tasker & Golombok, 1997).

2.5.1 Disclosure practices of homosexual identity

With the assumption that young men with gay and lesbian parents encounter a shift when their parents 'come out', something which may turn out to be less influential than I currently think, I found it noteworthy to explore existing literature on the complex ways in which children become aware or are told of their parent's homosexuality. In a study conducted by Tasker, Barrett and De Simone (2010) in the United Kingdom on how adult children found out about their father who identified as gay, their findings revealed that the father's sexual identity was not always explicitly addressed and rather understood gradually and through direct discussion. Understandably, discussing sexuality with children can induce a lot of anxiety for parents, especially the topic of homosexuality. A few scholars have noted that parent's decision to come out to their children is usually motivated by how children would be

affected and for children to understand their personal and social environment (Bozett, 1980; Lynch & Murray, 2000; Goldberg, 2007a).

On the other hand, Apperson, Blincoe and Sudlow (2015) explored children's attitudes toward parental disclosure of gay identity through a quantitative study and found that children self-reported positive attitudes as well as acceptance toward parent's disclosure of gay identity. Interestingly, Apperson and colleagues (2015) acknowledge that "attitudes were significantly more positive toward mothers than fathers, and toward a gay or lesbian parent than a transgender parent" (p. 492). A handful of studies reveal that children's trust is harmed when parents choose to conceal their gay identity (*see* Goldberg, 2007a; Breshears & Lubbe-De Beer, 2014). In the study carried out by Breshears and Lubbe-De Beer (2014) on adult children's advice for parents coming out to their children, the participants offered suggestions for parents before, during, and after disclosure. The participants recommended that before 'coming out', parents should respect the child's viewpoint, give the child credit where it is due, be comfortable with their own sexuality, teach the child to embrace difference, tell children earlier, and not to wait for them to ask. The participants further suggested that parents should be open and honest during the 'coming out' conversation, expect or accept any reaction, anticipate questions, affirm the child, and only communicate what they are willing to share. Finally, the participants recommended parents allow their children time after 'coming out', to be gradual in their disclosure, and to provide stability for the child.

Disclosure of sexual identity between children and their gay and lesbian parents is a complex process which requires careful consideration. In addition to being aware or told of their parent's homosexuality, children also have to consider disclosing their parent's sexual identity to others. Breshears (2010, 2011) examines communication which takes place between lesbian parents and their children regarding outsider discourse about their family

identity. Breshears (2011) maintains that communication between the parents and their children is necessary in order to prepare them for potential prejudice against their peers and other members of society, and that family communication plays an important role in the identity development of children raised in gay and lesbian families. Likewise, Lubbe's (2008) study of children reared by lesbian parents in South Africa revealed that the children in the study understood that their family identity could yield reactions from individuals ranging from complete acceptance to strong antagonism. One of the biggest fears for children after the parents come out to them is how their peers would react (Lynch & Murray, 2000; Breshears, 2011).

2.5.2 Identity development of children with gay and lesbian parents

As this study is concerned with adult children with gay and lesbian parents, literature that focus on identity development of such children is vital in understanding how parental sexual orientation affects this. According to Goldberg (2007), "adults felt that they were more tolerant and open minded and had more flexible ideas about gender and sexuality as a function of growing up with LGB parents" (p. 550). This open-mindedness, however, could be misconstrued at times and the children's own sexuality called into question (Tasker & Golombok, 1997; Fairtlough, 2008). Scholars like Hicks (2005) oppose the idea of gender and sexual identity viewed as fixed entities and contend that they should rather be seen and understood as complex and socially constructed. He further notes that gay and lesbian sexual identity is not something that can distinctly be passed on to children.

This negative outsider discourse on the influence of parents' sexual identity in relation to their children, in the context of South Africa, is something which Breshears and Le Roux (2013) attribute to the lack of societal acceptance of homosexuality. Goldberg (2007) argues that from a social-constructionist perspective, "having an LGB parent may indeed influence

one's adult identity, values, and behaviors, in that parents may construct as acceptable a wider range of sexual attractions and gender-related behaviors" (p. 552). Nonetheless, there is lack of research in South Africa about experiences of young adults with gay and lesbian parents, and the way in which they negotiate their identities, especially with often conflicting outsider discourses.

Another factor which is influenced by outsider discourses is the concept of family, especially when it comes to queer-headed families. Research on queer-headed families is slowly gaining attention in South Africa (for example, books by Lubbe-De Beer & Marnell, 2013 and Morison, Lynch & Reddy, 2018) and as much as this is important, it is predominantly focused on parents' experiences and not on the children. While my research is focused on adult children's perspectives on how they negotiate identity, it is also worth exploring how family identity is conceptualised and formed. Lewis (2018) acknowledges that "from the perspective of queer, feminist and constructivist thought, families can be viewed as sites of oppression and surveillance" (p. 33). Morison and Reddy (2013) suggest that some even view same-gendered families as unconventional or 'alternative' and thereby presuming them flawed, limited and destructive, and damaging to children.

According to Gillies (2011), family plays a central role in meanings of personal, social and political life. Morison et al (2018) make a distinction between 'families we live by' and 'families we live with' where the former refers to "the ideological and discursive- or the performative- dimension of families", while the latter refers to "actual daily experiences, the performance of 'doing' of family, involving the micro-politics of intimate relationships" (p. 2). In other words, how these representations of 'family' are realised is through the way with which 'family' as a concept is seen through a private or public lens. For example, government often, through a national family policy, treats family as public in order to ensure

the protection of children's best interests as stipulated by the Constitution through the Bill of Rights. Conversely, the private lens may concern itself more with how a parent's sexual identity in cases of the 'best interests' of the child in relation to family matters, such as in divorce and custody cases, is evoked.

Distiller (2013, p. 214) postulates that "[t]he meaning of post-apartheid South Africa should by definition include re-conceiving, re-making, re-conceptualising" when it comes to the concept of family. This is especially true when looking at the diversity of family types in South Africa as highlighted by some scholars who acknowledge that some families are headed by single parents (Rabe & Naidoo, 2015), a head of extended family such as an uncle or grandfather (Richter & Morrell, 2006; Lubbe-De Beer, 2013) and at times by social fathers (Malherbe & Kaminer, 2020; Clowes, Ratele & Shefer, 2013). Despite this, Bartoszuk and Pittman (2010) argue that coming from or living in a non-nuclear family does not necessarily affect identity development negatively. It is therefore important to keep this in mind when trying to understand how young men experience family when developing and negotiating their identity.

2.6 Literature review summary

The five themes that I have explored give us a broad understanding of the socio-cultural context which children with gay/lesbian parents navigate. On the one hand, this context includes the challenges of sanctioned homophobia in religious and educational settings; on the other, growing opportunities to live openly as gay or lesbian entail the possibility of innovative relationships to becoming gendered. The literature review began by exploring contemporary legal and socio-cultures of same-sex desires in South Africa. In this theme I looked at sexual minority law such as the Civil Union Act of 2006 which highlight the shifts and challenges in legal interpretations of equal access to marriage for same-sex partners. This

highlighted the fact that not only is marriage given legitimacy through legal underpinnings, but also through its social recognition. Societal attitudes towards same-sex desires, however, are characterised by different views on how we understand gender and sexuality in South Africa based on various divisions of class, race and geographical locations. In the second theme I explored dominant debates on homosexualities in African contexts which tend to view homosexuality as unAfrican, unGodly and unNatural. These discourses around homosexuality in Africa influence how children in gay and lesbian headed families navigate their everyday lives. Highlighted in this theme was how these discursive analogies make an assumption that there is a monolithic African identity and unfortunately, this is view is based on heteronormative understandings of homosexuality. What this does is fail to acknowledge that the African continent and its people, have different histories and fluid identities which are not rigid. Embracing difference in Africa makes it possible to understand how these contemporary young men in my research become embedded in disputed discourses around homosexuality. Violence experienced by gays and lesbians in South Africa was the focus in the third theme. The aim here was to highlight the violence (intangible and/or tangible violence) which could come with disclosure of gay/lesbian identity within heteronormative communities like those in South Africa. Additionally, the literature reviewed highlighted how this violence is often embedded within gendered, classed and racialised contexts. That is, individuals experience violence the differently depending on their gender, class and race. The fourth theme explored theories around the intersection of heteronormativity and masculinities. Here existing Northern literature revealed that a society that operates based on heteronormative and monolithic views of masculinity offer complex questions for children in queer-headed families. Debates in African masculinities are relevant when they tend to assume that masculinities engage heterosexuality and, to a degree, understanding the intersections of heteronormativity and masculinity allows one to consider the influences of

how young men navigate heteronormative environments. The final theme explored existing research on children growing up in families with parents who live as gay/lesbian. The literature revealed that issues of parent's sexual identity disclosure have an impact on the parent-child dynamic, and that family identity may have an effect on how children who grew up with lesbian and gay parents traverse their heteronormative environments.

2.7 Research purpose, aims and objectives

The purpose of this research study was to explore narratives of how young men raised in gay and lesbian families navigate heteronormative communities in South Africa. The aim was to investigate what it means to have a gay/lesbian parent for young men living in South Africa. The objectives of this research were: (1) to examine how these young men formulate their life stories in relation to their parents' sexual orientation, and (2) to investigate how they 'manage(d)' their parents' coming out and whether that has had any impact in their child-parent relationship, and lastly, (3) to investigate whether their parents' sexual orientation has had an impact on how they relate to their peers and communities they live in.

2.8 Research questions

2.8.1 Main Research Question

How do young men raised in lesbian and gay families navigate South African heteronormativities?

2.8.2 Research Sub-questions

1. How do young men with a gay/lesbian parent negotiate the intersection of family, identity and community?
2. How do these young men negotiate social and sexual masculinity in their lives?
3. Why do sons of gay/lesbian parents navigate their own masculinity in the way that they do?

Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the research methodology adopted in this study. I begin this chapter by providing a theoretical framework used as the background to the study together with details of the qualitative research design, the research sample and sampling strategy. I then present the methodological framework employed in order to answer the research questions presented at the end of the previous chapter while discussing the data collection and data analysis procedures. This is followed by a discussion on ethical considerations and limitations in relation to the research study. Finally, I conclude by discussing the self-reflexive process undertaken in this research.

3.2 Theoretical framework

3.2.1 Intersectionality as theoretical framework

I used intersectionality as feminist theoretical framework to explore how young men raised in queer families navigate South African heteronormativities. I used an intersectional feminist approach because it acknowledges the multiple and overlapping intersecting identities of an individual's lived experience (Nash, 2008). Intersectionality as a term was first explored by the American legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to highlight the multidimensionality of the lives of marginalised and oppressed subjects. This was especially important when studying those located in South Africa with its diversity and colonial as well as apartheid histories.

The literature explored in the previous chapter showed that young men and their gay/lesbian parents may be confronted by discrimination while navigating heteronormative environments in South Africa. Intersectionality became an important theoretical tool to use because it

acknowledges that individuals are shaped by the ways in which their social identities intersect with one another and thereby able to inform how they navigate different environments, in this case, heteronormative environments. In addition, intersectionality identifies the multiple social power structures that exist between different social contexts (Moolman, 2013), and it recognises the nuances of social identity. For this reason, social identities such as race, class, sexuality and gender are not explored in isolation. Rather, intersectionality recognises these social identities constitute one another. Despite the fact that the gender category of 'man' was part of the main research question, I felt it important to address the various overlapping experiences that these men would bring to the research process. This method was especially useful in this study since it ensured that a diverse group of men from various socio-political backgrounds were represented.

3.2.2 Queer theory as theoretical framework

This study also used queer theory as an epistemological lens to expound the complexity of heteronormativities in South Africa. This was because the study and its research methodology and overall approach, focused on some of the core principles of queer theory as articulated by Jagose (1996), Butler (1990, 2005) as well as Browne and Nash (2016). Queer theory is not understood in one specific methodology but rather as an epistemological framework. The reason behind this is because it goes against normative frameworks which tend to restrict people in binary categories such as heterosexual-homosexual and woman-man.

Pereira (2019, p. 47) further notes that "[I]n multiple journeys, and in intense movements of theories and people, queer theory encounters decolonial thinking, which is a critical perspective on the 'coloniality of power'; in other words, a conceptual, political, ethical, and productive construct of the social spheres forged in Europe during the early centuries of colonization." The gay and lesbian identities of the parents of the young men my study was

interested in could be seen as being constituted within this construction of social spheres, while being located in South Africa. This form of theorisation was important for this study because it not only served as the research's ethical objective, but also recognised that the young men's own experiences were constituted within their parents' gender and sexuality identities. Queer theory allowed for me to understand how the young men described their experiences not only in the binary of heteronormative and counter-heteronormative understanding, but also in other possible ways which did not fit this binary. Taken with this approach, research circumvents engagements that are essentialist in nature with research participants and rather honours their agency. Keeping in mind that Browne and Nash (2016) acknowledge that those who are researched are constantly influenced by the ever-changing social contexts they find themselves in, and these social contexts differ in each research subject's lived experience.

3.2.3 Radical democracy as theoretical framework

As this research study was situated in a political/legal context where access to 'who has rights' is very unstable, I found it best to adopt a multipurpose theoretical perspective. The basic theoretical approach used in the study was based on some of Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 2001) as well as Butler's (1993, 2011) key principles of Radical Democratic Theory. Radical democracy first gained prominence through the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985). This theory seeks to reinforce the central nature of citizenship: an identity that in liberal and Marxist theory is believed to be weakened or excluded by limiting political relations to the economic realm, which ultimately reduces citizenship to ineffective flag-waving (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001).

As noted by Gouws (2005) citizenship in South Africa under the apartheid government was mainly a history of racial exclusion – especially of those racialised as black. The 1994

election, which initiated full democracy for the first time in South Africa gave credence to tenets of citizenship such as civil and political rights to all South Africans (Gouws, 2005). One of the fundamentals of citizenship can be linked to the highly progressive Bill of Rights which protects socio-economic rights and "provides for an equality clause that includes seventeen grounds on which no discrimination may take place" (Gouws, 2005, p. 8). The very progressive Bill of Rights, which protects socio-economic rights and "provides for an equality clause that includes seventeen grounds on which no discrimination may take place," is one of the pillars of citizenship (Gouws, 2005, p. 8). This provision also encourages past disadvantages to be remedied and thereby opens the door to affirmative action, which would also favour marginalised groups such as queer families.

Radical democratic theory was useful because it recognises the relationship between a movement onto 'democracy' in a state such as South Africa and the flow of the new post-1994 laws which address questions of historical discrimination such as those of gender, race, sexual orientation, access to land and healthcare. This theory puts in play a very specific set of legal versus social tensions experienced as 'post-colonial'. Rasmussen and Brown (2002) argue that radical democracy attempts to bring forward a vision of democracy as a way of life in order to extend the value of citizenship, a persistent dedication not to a community or state, but also to the democratic idea conceived as a continual challenge to the boundaries of politics. In other words, radical democracy embraces the idea that democracy is an incomplete, egalitarian, ongoing and reflexive process. The purpose of radical democratic ideology is to establish an anti-essentialist politics that actively tries to redefine itself in order to prevent the exclusion of individuals or classes from social order formations. McEwan (2000) acknowledges that "feminists have demonstrated that universal inclusion does not exist because, in reality, citizenship is based on power, which is exercised through social,

economic and political structures that perpetuate the exclusion of certain social groups" (p. 632). It was, therefore, worth taking an epistemological framework which recognises the volatility of a post-flag democratic state when attempting to theorise citizenship in contexts of queer families in South Africa.

3.3 Qualitative research design

3.3.1 Context of the study

In this section I reflect on how my own experience(s) shape the focus of my study. This provides background to my work thereby showing how my ideas were moulded and what life experiences influenced this process. To begin, I would like to note that this was the first time that I conducted formal research on this specific topic, however, I had previously conducted qualitative research work for my Gender and Transformation Honours degree. Although this was the first time conducting qualitative research involving interviews as a data collection method, it was a valuable learning experience. Furthermore, this was the first-time conducting research in a global pandemic such as the current COVID-19 pandemic which has impacted lives of so many people world-wide.

Not only in Wuhan, China, where the virus originated, COVID-19 affected the entire world, including the way we conduct research. Given the already existing social challenges, COVID-19 has restricted how studies are conducted by limiting the way researchers engage with their work and their research participants. This pushed me as a researcher, especially a social science researcher, to find alternative and unconventional ways of conducting research and collecting data during the pandemic. An array of behavioural and social changes has been triggered by both the pandemic and the social reaction to it that will linger long after the pandemic, and this had an impact on the willingness to participate in academic research. I

embarked on this research process being aware of the psychosocial impact and health risks of this pandemic on research participants and myself as a researcher.

Even in the face of institutional shutdowns and the call to promote social distancing, I went through this journey with the help of the participants who shared their life stories with me. I created such a research project in the hopes that my dissertation would contribute to a fairly 'new' body of scholarly literature in South Africa. The hostile environment towards LGBTQIA+ rights and communities within South Africa, and throughout this continent, is one that requires increased attention. Much work is left to be done that explores the realities of those who live in non-heteronormative environments in this country. Through consciousness-raising efforts and strategic advocacy campaigns, there is hope that many societies will become more aware of and accepting of non-heteronormative family structures.

The creation of new knowledge that is innovative and transformative is crucial to African feminist scholarship. Transformative research and action emerge through exploring the diverse and complex lived realities of so many individuals who are in non-heteronormative family environments and the institutions of oppression that perpetuate inequality across the continent. This requires a heightened awareness of one's own interactions with the research while completing a more in-depth qualitative investigation. It is through alternative avenues of research and exploring the life stories of men with gay/lesbian parents that my one-on-one relationships with them can produce rich information on diverse family formations in this country.

3.3.2 Qualitative approach

I took a qualitative research approach as this was best to underscore the uniqueness and experiences of this subgroup of men I was interested in studying. Qualitative research focuses on abstract interactionism and qualitative aspects such as meaning, experience and understanding of a particular social situation (Creswell, 2014; Babbie, 2013). Creswell (2014, p. 205) maintains qualitative research is best used when exploring and attempting to explain whether a social or human problem is ascribed to such individuals or communities. The purpose of this study was to explore narratives of how young men with gay/lesbian parents navigate South African heteronormativies. Therefore, a qualitative approach was suitable for this research to experience and understand first-hand emotions and thoughts of the men I interviewed. Though I cannot personally relate to the experience of having a gay/lesbian parent, I attempted to remain impartial throughout the research process. According to Babbie (2013), an explorative research approach is useful when dealing with relatively new research topics. This approach was taken because of the lack of research focusing on children with gay/lesbian parents in South Africa, specifically within heteronormative environments.

3.4 Research sample

3.4.1 Sampling strategy

This research study relied on purposive sampling (also referred to judgmental sampling) which is mostly used in qualitative social science research. According to Babbie (2013), purposeful sampling is a type of non-probability sampling in which the groups to be investigated are chosen based on the researcher's assessment of which groups would be most helpful or representative. The primary characteristic of interest that the young men in my study possessed was having a parent with same-sex desires. In order for me to conduct this study and discuss the research questions, the participants had to fulfil the following inclusion criteria: (1) have a parent who identify as gay/lesbian; (2) identify as male; (3) be over the

age of 18 years at the time of the interview; (4) and have access to internet or be available to meet in person for interviews.

3.4.2 Recruitment

When the idea of conducting this type of research came to mind, I reached out to the young man whom I met during the house-warming party anecdote discussed in the introductory chapter. I asked whether he would be interested in participating in the study to discuss the impact, if any, of having a gay parent, and he responded positively. In the section discussing ethical considerations below, I will discuss the ethical implications involved in having access to research participants before obtaining ethical clearance. To ensure that I had a variety of young men from different socio-economic and demographic backgrounds, I used social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to recruit participants (see attached poster used for recruiting participants – Appendix A).

All men who met the inclusion criteria were told about the study's aim and focus during the recruitment process. All these men were told that the purpose of the study was to explore narratives of how young men raised in gay and lesbian families navigate heteronormativity in society. They were told about the research procedure and ethical considerations such as confidentiality and informed consent (covered later in this chapter). Many of them were interested in participating in this study after hearing these extensive explanations and having their queries answered. However, I encountered a few men who initially showed an interest in participating, and although I assured them that their identity and their parents' identity would be kept anonymous, they were still not convinced and chose not to participate in the study.

During the recruitment phase, I encountered a problem where most of the potential participants who reached out were racially white. This resulted in me having to find alternative ways of ensuring that I had a diverse representative sample with which I could work. To overcome this problem, a second and re-worded recruitment poster was created and distributed across different social media platforms. Below (Figure 1) is a screenshot of one of many social media posts created in an attempt to find participants using the said poster. From the image below, one can see how many times the post was "retweeted" (369 times) and "liked" (103 times) just on Twitter. This second poster was created after I was satisfied with the number of white participants I wanted to include in the study, and this was helpful because I was able to find more "people of colour" to include in the study.

Figure 1: Recruitment poster

3.5 Data collection and procedure

The primary methodology for this research was based on the narratives of participants interviewed through semi-structured interviews. However, due to the current COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent restrictions impeding face-to-face interactions, online interviewing methods were considered. I offered the participants options for conducting online interviews via platforms such as WhatsApp, Microsoft Teams, Skype, Zoom, and other platforms suggested by the participants themselves. However, Zoom as an alternative method of collecting data was the option chosen by those participants who preferred online interviews instead of in-person interviews. I will discuss Zoom as a method of collecting data in detail below, but for now I will unpack the use of semi-structured interviews as a data collection method.

3.5.1 Interviews

Using semi-structured interviews to collect data is helpful when the researcher has "limited knowledge about a topic or wants an insider perspective" (Leech, 2002, p. 655). Additionally, because interviews are flexible, they allow for a conversational dialog where the researcher can ask follow-up questions when they are unsure of the research participant's responses. This is more so when the interview probes use open-ended questions, which are also useful for establishing rapport or even building personal relationships with research participants. The interviews were guided by an interview schedule (*see* Appendix B), audio-recorded, and the conversations were transcribed for analysis and deleted later after the transcription process. I also kept a research diary separate from the audio recorder to reflect on my thoughts, feelings, and views on the interview process before and after each encounter with participants.

Discussed in the previous section are some of the advantages of using interviews as a method of collecting data. However, it is also worth acknowledging the disadvantages of this method of collecting data. For example, McIntosh and Morse (2015) note the following disadvantages of collecting data using interviews: research participants may become guarded or feel uncomfortable when asked to respond to sensitive questions; the appearance or presence of the researcher can also result in dishonest responses from the research participants; and the fact that this method can be costly and time-consuming, thus focusing more on the depth than the breadth of information because the researcher cannot interview a large sample. Such drawbacks were important to consider when deciding to use interviews as a method of collecting data because they posed a challenge for me as a researcher. Moreover, while face-to-face interviews were possible to conduct, the reality of COVID-19 still had an impact on how the interviews were conducted. For example, ensuring that the participant and I were not showing any symptoms, wearing face masks, being in spaces with adequate ventilation, and adhering to physical distancing were some of the factors that needed consideration before each in-person interview was conducted.

3.5.2 In-person versus virtual interviews

As noted by Jowett, Peel and Shaw (2011), the use of online data collection for qualitative research has become more common. Jowett et al (2011) distinguish between two types of online interview methods, namely, synchronous and asynchronous online interviews. The former refers to interviews when the researcher and the research participants are not both online at the same time to conduct the interview (an example of this is email interviews where questions are sent to the participant to answer and send back to the researcher), while the latter refers to when both parties are simultaneously online during the interview process (telephonic interview). To develop a relationship with the participants and minimize the

chance of the dialogue being stalled, I used a synchronous strategy for conducting the online interviews for this study. This also allowed the interviewees an opportunity to ask me questions or to clarify if they did not understand a question posed to them. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its restrictions, for this current study, Zoom was the preferred online interviewing method of collecting data.

There has been an increase in studies that explore the use of Zoom in research (*see* Wahl-Jorgensen, 2021; Archibald et al, 2019; de Villiers et al, 2021). Zoom is a videoconferencing software that has a free basic version that only the researcher needs to download (Archibald et al, 2019). If the participant so desires, they can download the software on their computer or a mobile application on their phone. However, unlike many other videoconferencing platforms, Zoom has a number of extra features that boost its research potential. Zoom's capacity to securely record and retain sessions without the use of third-party software is a major feature and this feature is very important in studies where extremely sensitive data must be protected.

Jowett et al (2011) note that the primary benefit of conducting online interviews is the opportunity to overcome some of the challenges faced by traditional face-to-face interviews, such as geographical distance and the time and expense of traveling to meet participants. Moreover, online interviews also provide a greater degree of privacy for the participants, which can lead to less inhibited responses when discussing sensitive topics and enables those belonging in stigmatised groups to participate (de Villiers et al, 2021).

In spite of this, online interviewing still has major drawbacks. The need for participants to have access to the internet is one downside. There is also a lack of audio-visual elements, such as facial expressions and tone of voice, relative to face-to-face interviews and this can

lead to potential ambiguity and misunderstanding (Jowett et al, 2011). Moreover, the researcher often has little control over, and may not even be aware of, distractions in the participant's environment; and it is common for individuals to engage in multiple WhatsApp conversations simultaneously or multitask at the same time as engaging in conversation. Another disadvantage is that WhatsApp gives participants time to think about and edit their responses before pressing send, unlike a face-to-face interview where they would normally respond out loud without having to think too much about their responses. However, Matutu (2019) notes that having this option of editing their responses, participants maintain a level of control over the interview process and "they are not always at the mercy of the researcher" (p. 44). Below is a table with participants' details and the mode of interview chosen by each participant.

Participant[14]	Age	Interview mode	Interview Location
Nathan	29	Zoom	Online
Michael	37	In-person	Researcher's resident
Kwame	21	In-person	Cafe
Kurt	30	In-person	Researcher's resident
Charlton	24	Zoom	Online
Jabu	27	Zoom	Online
Fezile	28	In-person	Cafe
Sifiso	26	Zoom	Online

Table 1: Participants and Interview platforms

[14] All the names listed are pseudonyms given to participants.

3.6 Data analysis

3.6.1 Transcription and interpretation

In this section, I will discuss how the collected data through the previously discussed methods was analysed. The transcription of the narratives from the interviews was the source of data for this study. Transcribing the audio-recordings into written form formed part of the preliminary stage of the data analysis process. I transcribed the audio-recordings myself and ensured that each conversation was transcribed verbatim. In order to document the paralinguistic attributes of the relationships with the participants, I retained both the content of verbal and non-verbal interactions as well as the nuances between myself and the participants in a journal.

As Polkinghorne (2005, p. 139) notes "[d]espite the problems involved in transforming human life experiences into language, language is our primary access to people's experiences" and as such, it is worth outlining I approached multilingualism in the analyses phase. I encouraged my participants to express themselves in a language that they felt most comfortable with as this captured the richness of their experiences (Polkinghorne, 2005). However, this was if certain things could not be expressed in English. According to Goitom (2020), the use of language is a major outlet for looking at how meaning is made in subjective experiences, not only in spoken or non-verbal language but also language as part of representation as emphasised in queer theory (Pereira, 2019). I approached this stage of analysis with the realisation that engaging in translation would not always result in a single correct translation or interpretation of the spoken words and phrases, but that I would need to embark on a collaborative process with the participants in this process of meaning-making. For example, during the interviews, when participants used words, phrases, and terms that I did not understand, I asked them to explain or clarify what they meant. This was useful because during the transcription phase, both the original words, phrases, and terms used by

the participants were written down, both as how they were initially said and how they were translated.

Some participants viewed me as an insider because of my race/cultural background and language choices, as demonstrated by their language choices during the interview. While the interviews were conducted in English, most of the black participants (except Kwame) language coded between English, isiXhosa, isiZulu, and Sesotho. Because I grew up in a multi-lingual neighbourhood where the latter three languages are spoken every day, and because I speak and understand all three languages, I was able to translate these interviews during the transcription process. In the interviews, language code switching served a variety of purposes. It was used to transmit a specific point in the participants' mother tongues as well as to indicate that I was listening in on whatever they were discussing. This was one of the ways I was regarded as an insider.

3.6.2 Decolonial Intersectional Narrative Analysis (DINA)

As this research relied on personal narratives as units of analysis, I found it fitting to apply a narrative analysis to analyse the data. Riessman (1993) is one of the first social science scholars to make narrative analysis a systematic and useful method that focuses on ‘what’ is said (that is, the content) as well as ‘how’ and ‘why’ it is narrated in that way. She later distinguished between different approaches to narrative analysis that could be used in social science research in relation to meaning making of personal life stories. For example, the structural approach questions how a narrative is composed to accomplish clear communicative objectives; the dialogic approach reflects on the meaning and viewpoint of narratives as being multi-faceted and co-constructed and the visual that binds words and images in a cohesive narrative; and the thematic approach which asks what a story is about

(Riessman, 2008). Boonzaier (2019) picks up from Riessman (2008) and goes a step further by arguing that we need research approaches that counteract the marginalising tendencies of some research approaches. She does this by introducing what she calls a decolonial, intersectional narrative analysis - abbreviated by Matutu (2019) as DINA. Guided by the discussions in the reviewed literature in the previous chapter and the three theoretical frameworks outlined above, a decolonial and an intersectional feminist approach was useful in analysing data collected from the interviews. This approach acknowledged the impact of racialised, classed and gendered histories of how the men in this study told their stories.

DINA as articulated by Boonzaier (2019) develops through four phases. The first phase focused on the content of particular narratives to identify thematic areas that characterise a story. The second phase focused on the multi-layered intersections of narratives, while the third phase focuses on reading against the grain: articulating resistance; and the last phase is crafting plurivocal narratives. I discuss these phases in detail below and how they were applied in analysing data from this study.

Phase one: Identifying common themes

This first phase started by identifying common thematic areas as articulated by Riessman's (2008) thematic narrative analysis to foreground the content of the participants' narratives. That is, what was common within and across the transcribed interviews. This involved closely familiarising myself with the data by reading each transcript multiple times to get a sense of what kinds of different thematic areas that characterise each story are told. For this study, the main question raised in this phase asks: what stories do these young men tell about having a gay/lesbian parent?

Phase two: Attending to the multi-layered intersections of narratives

Once thematic areas were identified in the first phase, the second phase was engrossed with questions of how participants' narratives were shaped by intersecting identities of class, race, gender, sexuality, religion, amongst other identities and what meanings do the narrative hold for the participants. While acknowledging that the narratives identified in the first phase might reveal complex and intersecting points of view, it was also worth asking what they might exclude or obscure. Boonzaier (2019) maintains that this phase also "centers questions of coloniality and an understanding of how oppressive conditions, that may be considered 'contemporary', have long historical roots that demand analysis" (p.477). This was important when producing a contextually sensitive analysis, especially the South African context with its oppressive colonial and apartheid past.

Phase three: Reading against the grain – articulating resistance

The third phase was concerned with paying attention to the ways in which participants talked against being positioned as marginalised young men who can only be understood in terms of their supposed peripheral status, in this case being represented only as children of gay/lesbian parents. In this phase of the analysis the attempt was to look closely at the broader importance of participants' narratives on their lives while navigating heteronormative environments as children with gay/lesbian parents. This was with an assumption that having such parents puts them in marginalised positions on the social hierarchy and the associated stigmas imposed on them, and thus asking specifically how their narratives reflected and resisted these - both discursively and materially. Boonzaier (2019) argues that this process of reading against the grain involves further reading and listening to participants' narrations beyond an attempt to find themes.

Phase four: Crafting a plurivocal narrative

The final step of DINA asks researchers to be truthful in weaving together multiple, situated stories that blend reading participants' lives, examining existing scholarship in the field, and taking knowledge and focus to the socio-political and historical context in which we work as researchers. This was achieved by asking myself as a research questions such as what were my research questions? How will my analysis address these questions? during the analysis stage.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Babbie (2013) argues that any social research raises ethical concerns especially when researchers get into direct and often intimate contact with research participants. It was therefore important to consider some of these ethical concerns for this research study. Creswell (2014, p. 92) warns that "[r]esearchers need to protect their research participants; develop a trust with them; promote the integrity of research; guard against institutions; and cope with new, challenging problems." In the same way, Matebeni (2014) states that in the light of the life-changing circumstances of people, ethical issues, aspirations and informed power dynamics within research need to be constantly negotiated.

Because this research was conducted from a feminist perspective and tenants from queer theory, I proceeded with the principles of focusing on the co-creation of material and being sensitive to the meanings of 'the personal'. As noted earlier in the recruitment section, I already had some informal conversations with some of my potential participants for this research. For some, this would even be considered friendship, and for this reason, this could be seen as a cause for ethical dilemmas. Mfecane (2014) believes that it is necessary to consider the boundaries of friendship between researchers and participants because it informs how one approaches ethically difficult moments during the research process. To overcome

these boundaries when it comes to friendship, Matebeni (2014) acknowledges that an informed consent form becomes an important tool in managing the power dynamics between researchers and participants. I made sure to explain to those participants whom I had a close relationship with prior to conducting the interviews that although we had prior relationships, the conversations carried out during the interview process were purely for research purposes and advised that participation was purely voluntary. Similar to Matebeni (2014), I explained the importance of the informed consent form as a tool in ensuring that we kept within the bounds of ethically sound research.

There are different types of informed consent forms that researchers utilise for different research studies, all of which are there to ensure the points discussed by Creswell (2014) early in this section are covered. For this research study, an informed consent form had to be completed by each participant before the interviews commenced. The informed consent form (see Appendix C) was based on general ethical practices of voluntary participation, doing no harm, and justice (Babbie, 2013). This document provided detailed information regarding the nature of the study as well as the rights and responsibilities of both the researcher and participant. Each participant was asked to formalise their consent by signing this document. This served as written evidence of their agreement to take part in the research.

In the case where Zoom as an alternative data collection method was used, although certain aspects did not differ extensively from in-person research methodologies where informed consent is obtained, particular ethical concerns need to be considered. Participants were sent an electronic copy of the informed consent form via email and/or WhatsApp where face-to-face interaction was not possible. Participants were asked to read, complete, and return the forms via the same medium. Due to not being able to physically observe whether the

participants read through the consent forms, the consent forms were revisited before the start of each interview to ensure that the participants understood the information on these forms. Jowett et al. (2011) note that one of the concerns for research conducted online is the risk of data being intercepted by a third party. However, unlike other videoconferencing software, Zoom has built-in end-to-end encryption that safeguards the privacy of its users where interception is concerned (Endeley, 2018; Archibald et al., 2019).

On the other hand, (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2021) alerts researchers about unanswered concerns regarding the public or private domain of online spaces such as Zoom. In other words, researchers need to ensure that what participants say will be contained within the confines of those spaces; that is, no sharing of any recorded material with anyone not involved in the interviews. These concerns are not intended to discourage conducting research online, but rather call for particular care to be taken with regard to doing no harm while protecting sensitive information from the participants (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2021). I conducted my research study with these concerns in mind to ensure that my participants' confidentiality and privacy were protected.

3.8 Reflexivity

Mauthner and Doucet (2003) argue that through the data collection and data analysis process, researchers play an active role in knowledge making. Only through critical self-reflection of the intersections between my own status as an 'outsider' in relation to their own narratives and the 'insider' in terms of meaning making, will I be able to make a positive impact within the research process. Boonzaier and Shefer (2006) note that researchers who use a qualitative approach are encouraged to continuously evaluate how their beliefs and life experiences affect the study process and decisions through the reflexivity process. It is reasonably hard

for a feminist researcher to remove themselves from their research because of the influence they exert on the entire research process. For this reason, as a researcher, I would like to thoroughly reflect on the knowledge of my own role and the ways in which this might have affected the research process and the outcome of the study.

Discussed above is what Bhavnani (1993) refer to as feminist objectivity. That is, the micropolitics of the research encounter where there are relationships of subordination and domination which are negotiated and how these are discussed in this study. For example, to try and not see the participants as helpless and powerless in the heteronormative environment in which they find themselves, but to also highlight how they resist dominant discourses which seek to 'other' these young men because of their parents' sexual orientation and gender expression. Additionally, occupying a role of a researcher who identifies as gay may have had an influence on the ways the research participants responded to me during the interviewing process, especially due to the influence of heterosexism as a social norm as discussed in the literature review chapter. For example, despite the participants having gay/lesbian parents, I approached them without assuming that they themselves might not display homophobic tendencies, either towards me as a researcher or aspects of the research process. This was due to the fact that at times, I personally find interacting with heterosexual men rather emotionally taxing given the prevalence of homophobia. Although I did not encounter any homophobia while conducting the interviews, it was difficult not to assume that this is something which could happen.

As an 'outsider' I also need to acknowledge the fact that I do not have a gay/lesbian parent and therefore did not share certain commonalities with my potential research participants (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). However, being a man who also navigates South African heteronormativities made me an 'insider' who might share certain commonalities with the

participants. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) suggest that shared membership, in this case being a man interviewing other men, automatically offers a degree of confidence and transparency that otherwise possibly would not have been present. These were all factors that I was constantly reflecting during the research process.

I was also acutely aware of how sensitive the subject I was about to discuss with my interlocutors was, and this was something I kept in mind as I negotiated a method and approach for conducting interviews with the participants. For example, before deciding on the mode of the interview with the participants, I wanted to ensure that whatever method they chose, be it in person or virtually, was safe and comfortable enough for them to be able to fully engage with me. Moreover, those who wanted to meet in person understood the implications of meeting in person during these COVID times. Not only was this important for my participants, but also for myself, as I ran the risk of being exposed to the virus. Often, researchers put themselves at risk for the sake of gathering data for their research. In order to avoid this, I made sure that my health came first. When I did not feel well, I reached out to the potential participants to reschedule the interview for another time. This was something I had to keep in mind when my participants could not make the agreed upon interview appointments. An example of this was a potential participant who I had agreed to interview virtually but who could not be reached. After a few unanswered calls, messages, and emails, he responded to my initial message to say that, unfortunately, he would not be participating in the study because his parent passed away due to COVID complications. Because this was towards the end of my data collection process, I did not want to impose and ask to reschedule, but rather offered my sympathies and condolences and moved on. This example shows the impact of the pandemic on the emotional and psychosocial wellbeing of potential participants and how research is conducted during the pandemic.

3.9 Methodology summary

This chapter began by discussing the theoretical framework use in the study. I found it suitable to use intersectionality, queer theory and radical democracy as theoretical frameworks as they all acknowledge the multiple and overlapping identities when it comes to navigating issues around sexuality and gender discourses in a post-flag democratic state. This was followed by a discussion around my theoretical relationship to research itself as well as the meaning of qualitative work, especially in the current COVID-19 environment. I then discussed the research sampling strategy (which consisted of the inclusion and exclusion criteria) and recruitment process (such as utilising existing resources such as Social Media Networks) to reach potential research participants. Next, I outlined the research design which discussed interviews, and Zoom as a data collection method. This was followed by outlining how data collected through the above-mentioned methods will be analysed using Boonzaier's (2019) Decolonial Intersectional Narrative Analysis (DINA) approach. Following that, I drew up ethical considerations that guided me to maintain the trustworthiness of the participants during the research process, and the considered limitations applicable to this study. Finally, the chapter concluded with a brief reflective analysis of my positionality as a researcher throughout this process.

Chapter 4: FAMILY ENVIRONMENTS AND DISCLOSURE

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I make use of quotations and exchanges from the narratives that arose from my interactions with the men I interviewed in order to thematise their material. I have approached this by working with themes relevant to my own question, and most of my analytic approach uses content analysis. For the purpose of this study, I thought it important to protect the voices of the participants and prevent the inclination of researchers who speak on behalf of the participants as if they cannot speak for themselves. This chapter explores two thematic areas of *constructing narratives about (counter)heteronormative family environments* and *encounters of disclosure*, both of which emerged as useful themes through which to work towards addressing my research question.

4.2 Constructing narratives about (counter)heteronormative family environments

I begin a discussion of this theme by mapping with participants how they constructed narratives about their family environments in the interviews. In order to understand how the 'coming out' of a parent with same-sex desire was represented by the men, it is appropriate to first highlight how they described the environments that shaped their experiences. Firstly, I was interested in how they constructed narratives about family environments. Secondly, I was keen to hear their reasons for participation in this study in order to understand whether their motivations were personal and/or politically driven. This allowed me to orient myself as a researcher to the participants' contexts as I encountered them as 'interviewees.' For my part, I have remained cognisant throughout of the fact that these narratives were co-constructed between the participants and myself.

4.2.1 Constructing narratives of family

I first wanted to know the participants better in order to create a comfortable space for them to trust me with their narratives. Each interview began with a variation of the question: "*Can you tell me a little about yourself and where you grew up*?" In response, each man interviewed adopted different tactics to describe the context in which they grew up.

> **KWAME**: There's a lot of contexts. So, I am the second-born of three children. I was born in Toronto, Canada and I moved to South Africa in 2008 when I was 8 years old. I was still very young. When people ask me like what are you? Where are you from? It's a very difficult question for me to answer just because you know at the stage that I moved to now, it's just been a collection of like everything. It's very hard for me to say that I'm Canadian, I'm not South African.

Kwame's self-location begins with his indecisiveness over a particular national identity. When asked about his background, he ruminates on his response to the inquiry 'What are you?' And for Kwame, the 'what' involves nationality. Nationality being a characteristic of citizenship, as discussed previously in the theory section of this thesis, which is linked to his construction of his identity.

These narratives of selfhood were the golden thread connecting the big and small narratives these men made in attempting to make meaning of their experiences and navigating of different environments. The framing each used in responding to the question clearly informed their positioning of themselves as subjects, how they constructed meaning-making frames in the context of the interview, and what they privileged in constructing their narratives of navigating South African heteronormative spaces. Kwame, in his case, continued describing his family within Swain and Frizelle's (2013:204) notion of the broader heteronormative context of the 'nuclear family', as seen below:

BONGANI: And when you moved here though, did you move with both your parents?

KWAME: Yes, they were all together at the time so all five of us we moved here – a house together, living together for a while. My parents split, I don't remember when exactly they split but they officially…okay no, they split 2012, I think, when I was 12 years old and yes that was a lot more changes. Uhm, I was staying between both of my parents after that. My father was staying a little bit further and my mother actually stayed this side, Observatory. That's when I started to stay here.

Kwame's description of his family context prior to his parent's coming out is consistent with the narratives of the other men I interviewed, in that their family constellations shifted overtime. For instance, Nathan responded to the question as follows:

NATHAN: Sure. So, I grew up in Joburg in the 1990s. I'm from a Jewish background. I think, until my parents split up, I had I think quite a conventional South African Jewish upbringing. It was sort of, you know, relatively suburban and happy. My…so the kinds of schools that I went to…so I went to a sort of government primary school in…well, where are you from by the way in South Africa?

Nathan's response is similar to Kwame's in the sense that he also notes a shift in family environment, which entails the separation of parents. This indicates their family dynamic started shifting from that of conventional family household to that of two households between which they moved following their parents' separation. This showed that their representation of family environment privileges tension, that is, tension between parents as well as radical changes in where they live. On the other hand, Jabu narrated his family environment the following way:

JABU: So, I grew up in Johannesburg most of my... well, born and bred in Johannesburg, specifically in Soweto. When I was younger, I was in Soweto with my

> grandmother. My grandmother is the one that used take care of me. When my grandmother passed, then my mother needed to take over. Then I think two years into that, then my dad came into the picture. Surely, I was still in lower primary.

Jabu's family environment highlights the diversity of family contexts in South Africa in which the 'nuclear family' is not the norm; for many children growing up in the country, single parents, absent fathers, social fathers, and grandparent and child headed families feature extensively. What is clear is that while 'the norm' comprises a wide range of family arrangements, participants thought that these linked, albeit in various ways, to heteronormative gender-binaries and heterosexuality between parents as a 'base' within family configurations.

In addition, their responses were woven through intersections of class, religion, culture and race amongst other social categories. For example, Nathan makes it known from the onset the type of environment he grew up in, that is, from a 'Jewish background', from a 'relatively suburban' environment and he went to a 'government school' (class); while Jabu grew up in what is classified as a township (class), Soweto (with a predominantly black population). Not only does Nathan provide all this information about himself, but he tries to place my positionality in relation to his own by asking "*where are you from by the way in South Africa*?" His question could be asked out of curiosity or to get to know me, or to determine whether I understood the multiplicity of his social background. Nonetheless, the participants' different social backgrounds, as well as the interview setting, informed how they framed their responses and what they chose to share with me. For example, during the interview Nathan expressed:

> **NATHAN**: Maybe don't put that one in because I'm still friends with her and she…like if she ever did read your piece and kind of connected the dots, I wouldn't want her to read that. So please don't put that.

In addition to motifs of tension, physical places in flux and complex caretaking arrangements in their presentations of their family contexts, they showed reluctance to go too deeply into sensitive stories.

The participants narrated stories of their environments in ways that highlighted how their environments were not rigid but constantly changing. However, at times it was challenging for these men to recall certain aspects of their lives. To demonstrate, in my conversation with Charlton, he admitted not remembering certain parts of his life.

> **CHARLTON**: And like **I don't remember much about my early childhood experiences**, but I went to school…I went to [name of school] primary school and then went to a school in Constantia called [name of school].

To give another example, see how Nathan attempted to recall what led to him being in a fist fight at school:

> **NATHAN**: He either insulted me for being a Jew or my mom, **I can't remember** what it was. **I don't remember** whether it was because my mom was gay or because we were Jewish, but it was one of those things and it was one of the few times that I've ever punched somebody. But I think the fact that I associate that experience with it is **tainted** for sure.

It is interesting that a few of these participants evoked a kind of 'amnesia' in some contexts; to me it suggests that they are cognisant 'interviewees' who were well aware of the interviewing process.

However, what the men could recall offered insights into their changing environments, for example, Kwame's family's relocation from Canada to South Africa. Similarly, Kurt said "*I grew up in Durban and in my teenage years in Botswana*", and Sifiso said, "*I was born in Soweto in 95, moved from Soweto in 1989, came to live in Bramley which is situated near Alex north of Sandton*." What came across in Sifiso's response here can be characterised as class, or even social, mobility. That is, moving from a township environment with a majority of people racialised as black and often associated with poverty, to a racially mixed suburb largely populated by the middle-class. I advise the reader to remember that, while these men came from diverse backgrounds, their stories provide a broad perspective and contextualisation of their experiences of having a gay and/or lesbian parent. Viewing their life stories in this multi-dimensional perspective materially contributed to the richness of their narratives.

Although I came into the interview setting knowing that the topic to be discussed involved the sensitive or taboo topic theme of homosexuality, especially in relation to their parents' sexual orientation and gender identity, I was not sure how the interviews would unfold. The ways in which these men told their stories is something worth giving attention to. For instance, even though we had already built a rapport at the beginning of the interview sessions, it was rather difficult for most of these men to open up about some parts of their lives. There were silences in-between phrases and words which allowed these men time to think and speak in the way they knew how. When they did open up, they would narrate something tragic, sad or painful while masking it with either a laughter or joke. For example, "*I mean, my grandmother was someone who knew at the age…when I was like at the age of five, that disi'stabane (I'm gay)* [laugh] *you know*." Here Fezile acknowledged how his grandmother knew from an early age that he was gay, he chose to use a term (*isitabane*)

which is often viewed as derogatory to queer people to refer to himself, followed by laughter to try and ease the awkwardness or lighten the mood. What this shows is Fezile was self-conscious of being 'researched' during the interview context.

4.2.2 Motivation for participating in the study

Having formed an idea of who these men were and what the types of environments they came from, I was curious to know why they chose to participate in the study because my research question entails engagement with 'private lives' and it was important to me to understand something of how my participants imagined the research and their own engagement. Influenced by their differing backgrounds, these men took on different approaches to respond to the question of why they showed up for the interviews. Their motivation for participating in the study varied from altruistic reasons to potentially taking away something from this experience. As Alexander (2010:173) maintains, research participants may experience "therapeutic, cathartic, educational, empowering, altruistic, and social" benefits when participating in research. Below Kwame states his reason for attending the interview:

> **KWAME**: *[…] I guess, I can see that I can potentially give something towards these studies because I think it's a large part of how I've grown up and everything and it's a large part of me as well. You know how that type of thing is influenced by open-mindedness.*

From this response, one can see that his reasons are both altruistic while offering insights to the kind of family he grew up in. By that, I suggest he framed his response to highlight his experience of growing up in a family with a lesbian or gay parent, in the hopes that it would benefit me as a researcher or someone who finds themselves in similar family contexts, be it the parent or a child of that parent. Moreover, he points to 'open-mindedness' without being specific on whether he is the one who is open-minded or whether he is suggesting that

sharing his life story will potentially create open-mindedness in relation to growing up in a family with a lesbian or gay parent in South Africa, or in general.

On the other hand, some participants stated that their reasons for participating in this study were to learn more about others who grow up in families with lesbian or gay parents. See for example how Jabu phrased his response:

> **JABU**: Uhm, so when I saw it, I thought I'd also…basically, I also want to learn about other people's experiences. Uhm, I've been trying to be very open-minded about a lot of things. I mean I've been taught to be very open-minded. So I also just wanted that, somewhat, of that experience. Just know how is it like, and also just to share that. I mean, you know, it's…I don't, in particular, see anything wrong with how my life has turned out.

What is not clear from Jabu's response is how he hoped to learn from other people's experiences by merely participating in the study. However, his response can be linked to educational and empowering benefits as suggested by Alexander (2010). Simply, by having a conversation with me he might learn (educational) something new about others like him and in turn educate (or empower) myself and others that nothing is 'wrong' with coming from such a family. For Charlton this could have been an opportunity for him to earn some money as he explained that he thought there was monetary compensation for participating in the study.

> **CHARLTON**: So, in terms of the interview, like I said in the beginning I first thought, arg, am I possibly going to get money or is this some sort of study that someone's doing? But then I realised that I didn't want to just pull out because I was just also curious to see how, not just about the topic, but just generally how you are going to go about doing it. And it was something that I was kind of nervous for, but I

> wouldn't say entirely nervous you know. I knew that, you know, you've got to sometimes, if you don't do something, sometimes you just want to put yourself in that position and do it and overcome it; and for me, that was about that. I don't really have to do it but let's just do it and see what happens. You're helping someone out as well, which is a nice thing and you're going to learn something out of it. Even if it's something very small, you know.

From the extract above, it appears that Charlton was not entirely sure whether he would gain financially from participating in the study or not. Nonetheless, Charlton's narrative seems to shift from being one with financial gain, to learning, to being empowered to speak, and to being altruistic. It also worth mentioning that before I asked Charlton why he decided to participate in the study, he had said "*[…] so, I'm currently unemployed. I'm not sure if I'm going to study further next year. I'm still trying to look for work, but it's also hard in these COVID times, you know, especially time to look for work within your field."* This response shows that possibly his reasons for assuming or even expecting monetary gain was driven by the fact that he was unemployed at the time of the interview. His answer also points us to already existing socio-economic conditions faced by many young people in the country, which are now more exacerbated by the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on the above discussion, it becomes clear the men arrived at these interviews motivated by a variety of reasons, but the notions of altruism and the importance of knowledge-making were key. Matutu (2019) argues that research participants as well as researchers bring in their own agendas to the research relationship. That is, they each consider what they will achieve from participating in the research process. Having learned how these men constructed narratives about their family environments and their motivations

for participating in the study, often motivations one could term ‘activist’, I now turn to how they discovered their parents’ gay or lesbian sexual orientation.

4.3 Encounters of disclosure

Using material from my literature review on the ways in which heteronormativity may be threatened by the presence of same-sex desire, especially within family and community contexts, I explored the meaning of parents’ ‘disclosure’ of their sexual orientation as gay or lesbian with my participants. I was aware that, in fact, there may not have been any shifts in the family dynamics after ‘disclosure’ and also that perhaps there would be no one ‘disclosure’ moment. I therefore listened with an open mind and explored with participants when they came to discern their parents’ same-sex orientation and what this meant for them. I also discuss how the men disclosed, or chose not to, their parent’s sexual orientation to others outside the family.

4.3.1 Constructing parents’ sexual identity

First, I was interested in participants’ recollections of identity terms their parents used or preferred to describe or define themselves. This subtheme is an important prefix to the successive subtheme that discusses the process of coming out in which different sexual identity labels were used by each participant to describe their parents’ sexual orientation. As noted in the methodology section, although my research question is interested in gay and lesbian parented families, the terms ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ took on very fluid definitions during the interview process. The men I interviewed used terms ranging from ‘gay’, ‘bisexual’, ‘lesbian’ to ‘queer’ to describe their parents’ sexual orientation. As Michael insisted, “*My mother prefers to be called gay. So, we can just stick to that term if you want*”; while Charlton responded with “*my mom identifies as a lesbian and her wife also identifies as*

lesbian"; and Kurt declared "*Uhm, so my father is gay. My mother is straight*." It is interesting to note how both Charlton and Kurt provide their parents' sexual orientation while also highlighting their parents' partners' sexual orientations. That is, Charlton talking about her mother's *lesbian* partner and Kurt talking about his own mother being *straight*.

A few of these men described their parents' sexual identity in layered and complex ways. For example, Fezile described his mother's sexual orientation and gender identity as follows:

> **FEZILE**: We talked a lot of things and then it was just like, Oh, yeah, you know, I've dated women. I was like, oh, okay. And then I asked her, so you've dated women? What does that mean you know? And then she was like she considers herself to be queer and how she looks at her life is that she can end up with a man or a woman, you know, and it would be whatever. In fact, her ideal thing is that she would like to be in a poly-monogamous relationship with both a man and a woman.

Similarly, to highlight how attempts at defining sexual identity could become complex for both the men and their parents, below is an exchange with Kwame recalling how his mother disclosed this information to him:

> **BONGANI:** …what I want to know then is what is your story of having a gay parent? Are both of them gay or lesbian or is just one? How does it work? How do they identify as to you? Has that identity been constant since then or has it changed over time?
>
> **KWAME**: Okay it's just the one and it has changed a lot over time. So right now, I think I just say queer.
>
> **BONGANI**: But then prior to this?

KWAME: Even I remember initially when they came out to me, they kind of just told me like what they are into and then they asked me what I would call it and I said bisexual, but that's not actually like what was communicated to me at the time.

BONGANI: What was communicated to you at the time?

KWAME: Nothing really, that's what I'm saying. [laughs]. What was communicated to me is that 'I'm dating a female'.

BONGANI: Okay, so it was more of a description than an actual term?

KWAME: Yes. Because I think they very much not with the labels too much yeah.

In the excerpt above, Kwame acknowledges his mother's sexual identity changed overtime and notes that he was rather given a description of same-sex desire than an actual identity term when his mother came out to him. He concluded by providing 'queer' as a term he uses to describe his mother's sexual identity, but it is important to note that Kwame explicitly rejects the idea that categorisation matters to her.

4.3.2 Coming out

I was also interested in how the men found out about their parents' sexual orientation. Reviewed literature showed that children with queer parents found out directly or indirectly (*see* Bozett 1980; Tasker, Barrett & De Simone, 2010), with the latter happening either through non-verbal cues such as the parent showing affection to their queer partners in front of their children or not concealing their queer lifestyle. Breshears (2011) also noted that lesbian parents often struggle with the possible negative impact their sexual orientation may have on their children. Highlighted in the previous exchange with Kwame and the excerpt by Fezile above are the ways in which their parents came out to them. Kwame maintains that he had his suspicions about his mother's sexual orientation and these suspicions were confirmed when his mother described their same-sex desire, while Fezile recalls his mother 'coming

out' to him while they were in the kitchen having a casual conversation. This suggests there was no specific moment of disclosure of same-sex desire that was generalisable to the interviewed participants, but that these were intensive family processes that defined non-heteronormative family identity.

It was also clear that some participants had already had their suspicions about their parents' queer sexual identity while for some this new revelation came as a surprise. For example, when I asked Michael whether his mother disclosed her sexual identity to him, he replied:

> **MICHAEL**: I think she did. I think I can remember it. She sat me down and said, "I think we need to have a talk kind of a thing, [name of mother's partner] and I are in a relationship." I was like, "ja, I know you are in a relationship" [laughs], "you've been in the relationship for as long as I can remember." [She asked] "Do you want to talk about it?" and I was like, "no, I don't want to talk about your relationship?"

The above excerpt highlights Michael's rejection of disclosure of his parent's same-sex desire. His narrative speaks to concerns of common shyness between parent and child over a parent's love/sex life and the wish of the child to maintain private boundaries.

In contrast, for Kurt the news of his father coming out as gay came as a surprise and not directly from his father himself:

> **KURT**: I don't think I'm ever going to forget [laughs]. She was dropping me off at a friend's house one evening, and as I was climbing out of the car, she said, "I'm divorcing your dad, he's gay." And she drove off.

The way in which Kurt constructed this narrative suggests the usage of the word 'gay' by his mother signifies homophobia on her part. This is also seen in how she 'outs' his father to him without much consideration to what this information will do to Kurt. Moreover, this

comes across as an attack on his father and aimed at causing shame to his character. In an interview conducted with Sifiso the connection between one parent's sexual identity and his parents' separation was intertwined with tragedy as noted in his response below:

> **SIFISO**: Finding out **dad killed himself because of my mom being lesbian**. You know, it's another cultural thing where *uwumzulu* (you are Zulu) and you can't have *umakoti* (a wife) who's lesbian. And even despite that they wanted to separate, and the separation was basically based on my mom being lesbian, and I think my dad didn't want to **live with that stigma** *ukhuthi* (that) **maybe he wasn't man enough** to continue the relationship or something like that.

Not only does Sifiso's narrative highlight the connections between parents' separation and revelation of same-sex desires, but it also revealed a tragedy which occurred as a result of shame that came with such disclosure. In addition to this, Sifiso also brings up heteronormative cultural understandings of marriage, that is, reducing it to 'a cultural thing' between a man and a woman. What Sifiso articulates here is that his mother's sexual orientation caused a disruption to his father's own masculinity, and that to have your wife come out as lesbian meant he was not 'man enough'. Cultural understandings of homosexuality often fuel homophobia and, in this case, resulted in a tragic suicide.

The connection between divorce and coming out was also highlighted by Charlton below:

> **CHARLTON**: I think I was in Grade 4 or 5 when I first found out and that is around the time my parents were getting a divorce. And my mom told me, "you know, the reason why is because I'm gay", you know, and at that time, at that particular time, I was still like, **I knew what being gay was but I've never met anyone that was gay**, you know.

In contrast to Kurt's narrative above where he found about his dad's sexual orientation identity through his mother, Charlton found out about his mother's sexual orientation identity directly from his mother. What is similar is how he frames his response, that is, saying that his mother expressed the reason behind her divorcing his dad was due to her being gay. What is interesting to note from Charlton's response here is, although in the previous section he told me that his mother identifies as lesbian, here he says his mother said she was divorcing his dad because she is 'gay'. This shows how the participants parents' sexual identity markers often changed during the interviewing process. The responses from the participants revealed that the process of coming out is often not clear cut or linear but rather context-specific, complex, embedded in serious conflict between parents, and may even result in tragedy.

4.3.3 Now I know, what now?

In this section I wanted to highlight reactions, feelings and what knowing their parents' sexual orientation meant for the men I interviewed. I found this as an important aspect especially considering the different context with which each participant came to find out about their parents' sexual orientation (i.e. in connection to disclosure of parents' divorce, directly or indirectly, etc). Based on the participants' responses, it seemed that despite the fact that finding out about their parents' sexual orientation confirmed their pre-existing suspicions or came as a surprise, some feelings were evoked by this new revelation. For example, Kwame noted:

> **KWAME**: […]it didn't really mean anything to me to be honest because there'd been so much else and like the context of finding out kind of, I guess, during their marriage, that wasn't the surprising part about it […] I just know it was so long overdue that it felt like a joke at that time [laughs]. It felt like a joke at that time, but like I get that uhm…I get that it was still an important thing to actually like have a

> conversation about it a little bit. To actually formally say it, but like I mean we'd moved into a house where like they were staying with their partner, so I mean none of it was a surprise at all.

Here Kwame notes that having waited for so long to have this conversation with his mother, being actually told felt like a joke to him. His response to finding out about his mother's sexuality comes across as dismissive of his mother's efforts to engage him on this topic. He does not discuss how being told earlier would have affected him, but he does acknowledge that he felt respected by finally being told: "*I guess I felt more respected by actually being told, I guess*."

Similarly, for most of the other men I interviewed, they seemed to express that learning about their parents did not have any major shifts or invoke any kind of feeling towards them, even though as noted from the discussions above, they did reveal emotional responses concerning the contexts of this 'new knowledge' about their parents. For example, Jabu mentioned that:

> **JABU**: Honestly speaking, I didn't care. And I just, I just preferred for him not to say it because I didn't see it. It wasn't too obvious you know. I just, and honestly speaking, I enjoyed it the way it was, because as much as I knew, but because of how he is and how he basically, he conducts himself, you know, he's just as fine. Like if you don't know him, you can't even say, "hey, that gent is gay." So, I was fine with that. I was like let's just leave it at that. Let me make peace with this and yeah, just let me be.

However, by saying he "*didn't see it*" when referring to his father's gay appearance or how he conducts himself, Jabu makes it as though he did not care about the idea of a gay 'performing' or 'presenting' parent. Jabu's assumptions about 'gayness' openly exclude his father, and like Kwame, he was not interested in finding out that his father was gay because

his father carried himself like a 'gent'. Throughout my conversation with Jabu, he used phrases like "*he's just a gent*", "*he's not all flamboyant, or feminine or anything like that*", "*he's just, it's just him*" to describe his father. To me, his insistence of trying to prove his father's masculinity is embedded in homophobia. By saying that "he's just, it's just him", he makes an assumption being gay means not being yourself. I pressed further and asked whether if his father had been feminine 'presenting' would he have had a different feeling towards him. The following exchange shows how he framed his response:

> **JABU:** Possibly, possibly. I think maybe even you know, maybe at that time also, it was part of denial as well. Because, like I'm saying of, of his character and how he is…
>
> **BONGANI:** …denial from whose side? Denial from your side or his side?
>
> **JABU:** From my side probably, yeah, from my side as well. And not wanting to acknowledge possibly, but I mean, I was okay with it. It's just, you know, I wasn't…I was still a kid. I was not as aware of things as I am right now or as I grew older. But yeah, at that time, it was just an issue of, dude, I mean, whatever. Let me not just entertain the whole thing.

In the above conversation, Jabu shows that his views around homosexuality were limited due to his age at the time and this caused him to be in denial about his father's sexuality. However, he does admit that with age, his views changed over time. What we can take away from this is the fact that just as coming out is a gradual process for the parent, this also applies to the children with gay or lesbian parents as well. It is also worth noting that Jabu's 'not caring' about his father's sexuality was different from Kwame's dismissal of his mother's sexuality in that, Jabu's reaction came across as embedded in homophobia while Kwame just did not want to entertain his mother's efforts to engage him on this topic.

In contrast, for some men finding out about their parents' same-sex desire did have a psychological and emotional impact on them. For example, for Kurt the discovery of his father's sexual orientation from his mother conjured up feelings of shock and anger:

> **KURT**: Eish, if I remember, back then, I think I was way more upset that I had to find out or be told through my mom. Especially the way she also told me. I think it could have been handled in a much better way. A much better way. Definitely a feeling of upset and just very shocked to find out what has been going on for, I don't know how long that it was going on for.

On the other hand, Sifiso said he became rebellious after finding out about his mother's lesbian identity:

> **SIFISO**: I started drinking. Well not started drinking, I was drinking already by Grade 8, but I was over drinking, fights at school, stabbing people, gambling, got arrested…"

What these narratives tells us is that whether children find out directly from their parents about their same-sex desire, or indirectly, the participants' narratives include everything from disinterest to shock, and that the range of responses is embedded in widely different family contexts. Whether it is a feeling of shock and anger, eventually, the participants also seemed to share a 'resolution' narrative of coming to terms with their parents' sexuality leading towards acceptance. As Kurt admits that accepting his parent's sexuality did not happen overnight - "*…it took me a very, very long time to accept my dad*." Likewise, Sifiso noted "*And then yeah, after a while I started understanding her, accepted her*." The proceeding subtheme explores the participants' own disclosure practices in relation to their parents.

4.3.4 To tell or not to tell

Guided by a study done by Goldberg (2007a) who argues that children must consider the potential risks and benefits of disclosing information about their parents' sexual orientation before determining whether to do so. In this subtheme I analyse participants' own 'disclosures' to friends, and others, about their parents' choices. They spoke of what influenced their decision-making process regarding such disclosures, and about their consciousness of homophobia as the ground from which to talk about their own parents. I first started with a question of whether their relatives or extended family members knew about their queer parents and below is how Kwame responded:

> **KWAME**: Yeah grandparents, relatives and stuff – I don't think they dealt with it very nicely, but I mean there had always been like conflict so it's nothing new. Plus, besides, it was only our family here, so we were kind of very distanced from a lot of other relatives and everything.

The excerpt above shows that being away from the rest of the extended family and relatives meant not having to be exposed to the impact that this disclosure could cause the family. However, by saying that extended family did not deal with his mother's disclosure of same-sex desire 'very nicely', I got the sense that this new information had an impact on the family dynamic. The geographical distance meant not having to deal with the possible impact that this might have had had the families been in the same country. Similarly, the idea of extended family being far was highlighted by Michael who said:

> **MICHAEL:** Definitely within the family structure, ja. Like they all knew about [name of mother's partner], they…like my mother and her friendship goes back to like the 70s or whatever, so this person has been a fixture in her life. But my mother being a hippy, being the black sheep, she very much separated herself from her family. My family is like conservative racist bra. They struggle to like to be

comfortable around black people you know. So, we didn't really talk about homosexuals.

BONGANI: Okay. So, they never tried to like bringing it up without your mom being there. Let's say you are visiting your grandmother…

MICHAEL: …never. I guess more conservative cultures are like this, but I would say it is the white way. [laughs], you don't talk about anything that has any potential of creating any conflict. More because I think that my mother pulled us away from the family. Ja, she was like ha a, I'm not going to associate with these people. Like we're not…you know.

BONGANI: But why do you think she did that? Was it to shield you, was it to…?

MICHAEL: …probably to shield herself and her community and her people, and also because…like my aunties and uncles, they're not like woke at all. Like, [laughs], I think it must be very hard to be like an activist homosexual with conservative family.

Michael's narrative starts of by contextualising the era in which his mother grew up in and describes her as a 'hippy' and a 'black sheep'. These terms foreground a certain type of white subculture which often goes against society's normative standards. From this way of framing his mother, Michael wants us to think of his mother as someone who has been living a non-normative life for a while. This in turn sets her apart from the rest of the extended family whom he confesses are "conservative racists". Michael also admits that his mother removed herself away from her family to shield herself and those close to her, especially those with non-normative sexual identity. By saying this, Michael wants us to know that her mother is different from the rest of her family and this suggests that he is empathetic towards his mother because of this. Although these two participants are very different from one another, their material suggests a strong consciousness about the possibly negative effects of widening

the circle of who knows about their parents' sexual orientation. The interviews suggest a kind of internalised surveillance, a need to predict responses and avoid difficulties.

Some of the participants constructed their responses as if their parents' sexual identity was a non-issue for the extended family and relatives. For example, see how Charlton constructed his response to this question:

> **CHARLTON**: Uhm, no, I don't think my family has ever said anything. I know my mom's mom, at the time wasn't also the happiest when my mom came out, but over time, I think that they've realised that it's important or it's the right thing. There was one comment, I was sitting once at my ex-girlfriend's house, this was a while back, and they were really a conservative family. And, I mean, they all knew that my mom was gay, and no one has ever said any comment around my mom. They were fine and they had a good relationship with my mom even and I think they realised also that her sexual orientation has nothing to do with my relationship with their daughter you know.

Again, here we see that disclosure of same-sex desire is not something that people come to accept overnight, but rather it is a gradual process, even for extended families as highlighted in the excerpt above. What is interesting is how Charlton attempts to make a connection between his dating life and his mother's sexual orientation, although he does admit there are no correlations. What this implies is that his mother's sexual orientation has an influence in his own relationships. Nathan's narrative below shows the implicit homophobia (or internalised homophobia as he puts it) that happens with disclosure of same-sex desire:

> **NATHAN**: I do remember clearly that when my mom started going out with the current partner my granny would occasionally refer to her as my mom's friend rather than my mom's girlfriend, but I get the sense of that is because of a much more just

> internalised societal homophobia than it is about her. I don't think she has any hostility towards her. In fact, they get on really well.

Nathan's narrative here shows generational difference around same-sex desire. That is, although he says that his grandmother gets on really well with his mother and her partner, he suggests not being able to acknowledge her mother's girlfriend as her romantic partner reveals an internalised homophobia.

It was also important for me to know whether these men ever disclosed information about their parents to their friends and peers and what the reaction has been. Kwame referring to disclosing his parent's sexual identity to his peers, he said:

> **KWAME**: Uhm… [long pause]…I don't think I spoke about it too much just because, you know, I can see that like people aren't going to, uhm, yeah, **aren't going to speak to me nicely about it**, or have like real conversations about it. But then like, I'd always just give facts and that's it.
>
> **BONGANI**: Okay. Why did you think that people would not respond very well?
>
> **KWAME**: Because I know high school, high school guys and just everything. **Everything is a joke. Everything is an opportunity to tease people**. Everything is an opportunity to just make something out of nothing. I know. Like, I know how it goes. And also, like, I can see, I can see people's opinion on that type of thing and if their opinion doesn't relate, like if it's not the same as mine, then I'm not going to have this type of conversation, just because, yeah, it's too much. I'm not…**I'm not fighting people to change their mind** like, yeah.

From his response one can deduce that he cared about how others will react and hence his apprehension in voluntarily disclosing his parent's sexual identity. As he acknowledges that he knows that potentially people will not speak to him nicely, they will tease him and will

have negative opinions about this. He only disclosed this information to those he knew would be open-minded. To sum up, Kwame's response reveals his knowledge of active homophobia close to him. On the other hand, Nathan brings in the issue of race, religion and culture to foreground his response:

> **NATHAN:** So, my one best friend in primary school is still a good friend of mine. I do remember discussing this with specifically about who this woman [his mother's partner] was in my life because he may have asked and…
>
> **BONGANI:** …did it come as a shock to you?
>
> **NATHAN:** …we were like 11 years old. Like a lot of kids would know at that stage and I don't really know what he made of it because **we were from very different backgrounds** and he may have just thought **this is a white thing or a Jewish thing**. Do you know what I mean? I should ask him actually. I'd be very interested, but in high school it was not a feature at all in my life because my mom didn't have a partner. I do remember mentioning it to my close friends in high school and I think…

Here Nathan suggests that because his friend happened to be racially black, his reaction to finding out about Nathan's queer family may have been perceived as a "white thing or a Jewish thing". Although unaware, Nathan makes an assumption that his black friend associates queerness with whiteness and this feeds into the trope that homosexuality is unAfrican. What seemed to be clear from the conversations I had with some of the participants is that there was no need to disclose information about their parents, while for some, only when they were asked, they would disclose this information. For example, Michael said "*I didn't feel the need to. Everything was very open, yeah […] As in it was never hidden that my mother and (partner's name) were together*." While Kurt said *"[t]hey were completely okay with it because obviously, it doesn't really affect them in a way that it affected me and my siste*r."

As noted in the beginning of this theme, the decision to come out to others about their parents' sexual identity is made against the backdrop of weighing potential risks and benefits of disclosing such information. The responses from these men showed that although disclosing information about their queer families can induce anxiety and fear of being teased as expressed by Kwame earlier in the discussion, most of the men expressed never experiencing any sort of tension between themselves and their peers.

4.4 Chapter summary

In this chapter I relied on my interactions with the men I interviewed to come up with the two themes analysed here. The first theme discussed constructions of narratives of family environment. In this theme I was interested to know how the men spoke about their family and the environments they inhabit. What was revealed was that the participants came from different environments which influenced how they narrated their experiences. This further extended to their motivations for participating in this study. The second theme explored encounters of disclosure of same-sex desire. The aim was to highlight the complex ways with which parents' sexual orientation and gender identity expression were framed by the men during the interviews. The participants revealed nuances that were involved in how they got to find out about their queer parents, while the focus here was to also underscore what knowing about their parents' sexual identity meant for these men. Highlighted in this chapter was how the participants weighed potential risks and benefits of disclosing information about their parents' sexuality to others while their decisions to do so were context specific. A noteworthy point in this theme is the fundamental ambiguity with which they give an account of themselves, that is, simultaneously transgressing and reproducing heteronormativity in the course of their interviews with me.

Chapter 5: CONSTRUCTING THE 'SELF' WITH(OUT) FAMILY

5.1 Introduction

Discussed in the previous chapter are constructions of narratives of family environments. What was revealed was that the participants came from different environments which influenced how they narrated their lived experiences. This further extended to their motivations for participating in this study. The previous chapter also explored encounters of disclosure of same-sex desire. The aim was to highlight the complex ways with which parents' sexual orientation and gender identity expression were framed by the men during the interviews.

In this chapter I continue analysing the exchanges from the narratives that arose from my interactions with the men I interviewed. This will be done by discussing two additional thematic areas of *self-identification narratives* and *growing up as a boy/man in counter-heteronormative families*. In the first theme I explore how these men constructed narratives of themselves as subjects in the context of the interview setting. The second theme focuses on their perspectives of growing up with a lesbian or gay parent in a society that deems this type of family as non-normative. These two themes extend beyond narratives of how the participants spoke about their parents during the interviewing process and move towards speaking about themselves as subjects in contexts of having parents with same-sex desires. Collectively, these themes assist in creating a framework through which to respond coherently to the complex research question.

5.2 Self-identification narratives

Existing literature on masculinities in South Africa maintains that hegemonic masculinities celebrate overt and 'successful' heterosexuality (*see* Morrell, 1998; Ratele, 2016; Langa,

2020). In the environments in which the participants found themselves – environments in which same-sex desire became familiar territory because of a parent's sexual orientation, it became important for me to know how the participants constructed narratives of selfhood. More specifically, I wanted to see whether they constructed their identities in heteronormative and/or counter-heteronormative terms, and whether they engaged ideas that 'normative' masculinities could not thrive in counter-heteronormative family settings. The discussions in this theme explore how the participants spoke about themselves as sexual and gendered subjects from their formative years to the current contexts.

5.2.1 Constructing 'the self'

This subtheme emerged from the question "what were your early messages/experiences about being a boy?" What was interesting is how differently each participant answered this question, from descriptions of games and sports they used to enjoy playing as children, to speaking about how their different environments shaped how they spoke about themselves. For example, Kurt framed his response by associating his experience of boyhood with traditional masculinity traits in the following way: "*Being a boy, uhm, playing outside, climbing trees, roaming around the garden. Or extreme sports [light laughter]*." In many respects, the question itself was phrased within a gendered framework, justifiably, the types of childhood games and sports described by Kurt appear to be constructed in a gendered perspective. More specifically, these perspectives for Kurt assume stereotypes about the 'natural' connection between healthy masculinity and physicality. I viewed this way of recalling early childhood experiences as embedded in Judith Butler's (1998) notion of gender as performative. This way of describing experiences of being a boy was common amongst most of the participants. See for example how in addition to this notion of a gendered performance of what it means to be a boy, Nathan recalls:

NATHAN: Uhm so I think I was aware from… So, I certainly have experiences of being aware of masculinity and my own sexuality as a child. I'm not sure if they link directly to my mom's, the experience of my….

BONGANI: …they don't necessarily have to link, but it's just like, for you when you remember or the things or some thoughts and flashbacks of you being a boy – do you remember when it started and what it really meant to understand that gender, that sexuality of who you are, you know?

NATHAN: Let me put it another way. I remember from perhaps the age of 11 sort of being aware of the fact that I was not very good at traditionally masculine things. Even though I enjoyed sports, I was terrible at it. Like soccer, I was just very bad at it and was probably a little more effeminate than most boys my age. And I remember having sort of sexual interest in boys from quite an early age and trying to convince myself that this was something that everybody was going through but knowing deep down that it was not everyone and that I was part of a smaller subset of the population. What I'm not sure of, and I guess I never really thought of this, so it took me…when did I come out? Probably 2012, so I was like 21 and right now when I think about how kids are these days, it feels quite late, but I think at the time it was probably not. But I haven't really thought of whether my mom's experience kind of helped or impeded that journey for me. I think it certainly made me kind of…I think when I was a teenager, I was kind of aware of my family being different and perhaps subconsciously I wanted to, like, avoid that for myself and for my own children as well.

From the above exchange, several things appeared in how Nathan framed his response. First, he immediately relays his love of sport and his incompetence at it. Similar to Kurt's example above, Nathan's response makes a stereotypical assumption about the link between

masculinity and sport. Second, his narrative about being a little more effeminate demonstrates internalised heteronormativity – where heteronormative ideas are so pervasive that they are taken as a given. That is, by implying that being an effeminate man led to him to be "not very good", "terrible" and "very bad" at what he considered "traditionally masculine things" such as playing soccer. This to me suggests that he viewed playing soccer in heteronormative terms with hegemonic masculinity expectations where only masculine presenting men are considered good at performing certain tasks like playing soccer. Whereas men who are feminine 'presenting' are teased or considered 'weak' and are seen as deviating from this hegemonic view of masculinity and often delegitimised through homophobia in society.

Third, Nathan's narrative highlights the first time he noticed his sexual interests towards other boys while questioning whether this was something common with everybody else. This way of finding outside reference or comparison, is an important element in how one constructs a sense of self. Nathan also highlights the changing landscape around disclosure of same-sex desire which he notes appears to be happening at a younger age than for him. Finally, he tries to construct his narrative of being a boy with his mother's sexuality. It was rather interesting to me that his mother's sexuality was something that he thought of when asked about his own gendered experiences. I shall get back to discussing this point in detail at the end of this subtheme.

The influence of family in how these men constructed narratives about their younger selves was also echoed by Kwame who foregrounded his response based on gender roles which his family expected him to play, and this involved not physicality or engagement in sport, but a relationship to 'responsibility':

> **KWAME:** Yoh! Uhm, from my kind of family dynamic, I feel like I've always had, especially, I was actually growing up as the only boy, the only son. I felt there was a whole lot of responsibility and everything for me to deal with, not just from my parents but also from my siblings as well.

In the above excerpt, Kwame narrates his experiences of being a boy using gender roles by noting that as the "only boy and only son" he was treated differently and that his family placed a lot responsibility on him. As highlighted by Butler (1990) in her seminal text *Gender Trouble*, individuals are gendered and are constantly forced to enact and re-enact gender roles. Very often these gender roles are social behaviours that are learned or even enforced by parents on their children and are heteronormative in nature. Although this seemed to contradict what Kwame had told me earlier during our interview when I had mentioned that I might have been in his house visiting his mother and I had thought that he had relocated to another country to study further, and he had responded that it was his older brother who had relocated. Later when I read the transcript of our conversation, I noticed this discrepancy and reached out to him for clarification and he mentioned that his brother is a transman, but his retelling of his experiences of being a boy was in the context prior to his brother's transitioning. Nonetheless, these expectations from his family seem to have put him in a precarious position, but it also revealed that he constructed his masculinity as a negotiation with being put in this position, he learned how to 'deal' and 'navigate' such heteronormative expectations.

Sifiso's response on the other hand shows meaning-making of being a boy through an African cultural lens when he said, "[*clears throat] slaughtering with my dad, I guess, slaughtering like imbuzi (a goat), like you know those ceremony things…*" evoking an argument Ratele (2016) makes that masculinities are inherently linked to tradition. In this

case, Sifiso frames his narration of masculinity in relation to the cultural tradition of slaughtering a goat, a custom often reserved only for men in most South African cultures based in long and diverse histories of racialisation as 'black' under apartheid. Again, this follows a heteronormative prescript of gender roles in which a woman's place is in the kitchen while the men are responsible for the task of slaughtering an animal outside. To further elaborate, I wish to share how Fezile used such a cultural framing to speak about his experience:

> **FEZILE**: So yeah, and yeah, also, like *emicimbini* (traditional ceremonies) like *xakukho imicimbi ekhaya* (when there is traditional ceremony at home). I will always…I mean, sometimes there will be other people who would be like *hambo hlala ngaphaya* (go sit that side). *Amakwedini bahlala eback pha phandle* (little boys sit at the back there outside). And now I'd be like, I feel comfortable *ukuhlala e khichini* (staying in the kitchen) with other women, you know. So those things will also like be there to just remind me that okay, I am a boy because also there was a time when I was living in my head and also living in my environment whereby everybody knew that I was queer, but also with when it comes to other people who are not necessarily part of the family, they would remind me that you know, *xakukho imicimbi* (when there is a traditional ceremony), that okay *kufuneka ndihambe nam ndiyoncedisa, ndiyoxhela* (I must also go help, slaughter) or whatever.

What Fezile highlights in the above extract is how his family enforced gender roles on him based on their traditions. What this tells us is that just as family was influential in how these men spoke about themselves, racial and cultural identity also played a role in how these men constructed themselves as racialised and gendered subjects.

To further understand the influence of family in how these men constructed narratives of themselves, I also asked them to tell me about their relationships with their parents. This was to determine whether they raised stories about both their parents, or just the parent with same-sex desires. Kwame had this to say:

> **KWAME**: I think I get a lot of my personality actually from my father just because he's also very, very reserved, and not so emotional outwardly at times or most of the times. Maybe not the greatest at communicating. So, I didn't have a great relationship with either of my parents, but I think the difference is, my mother was able to communicate a lot better. And kind of fix a lot of those things towards like the end of like teenage high school times. And my father not so much, so especially since, uhm, maybe since like high school even. We just didn't have any type of relationship so much actually. Just like very, very formal and it's still a lot like that but it's a little bit better because I've made recent efforts to try and just do my own, do my part of it a little bit better, which I'm able to do now.

Here Kwame acknowledges that he gets his reserved and quiet personality traits from his father. However, he still maintains that he did not have a good relationship with both his parents, again positioning himself outside of family dynamics. Although it must be noted that his self-construction as masculine stresses the influence of the father but deliberately avoids connecting his path to his queer mother's trajectory. That is, in his response about the influence his father had on him he does not make any explicit connections to how his mother influenced his understanding of himself as a man. In fact, he follows a conventionally heteronormative intergenerational narrative in which men or fathers are the key influence on boys or sons when it comes to the sons' masculinity.

Moreover, he describes his relationship with his father as “formal” and his father as “not the greatest at communicating”. Here Kwame evokes the prevalent and oppressive notions of manhood that view men as individuals who do not share or show emotions with one another (Ratele, 2016). Indeed, without even realising it himself, Kwame personifies this when he said things like “*[…] just a lot of processing within myself* […] *So most of the challenges were internal* […] *I deal with most of my problems internally*.” Here Kwame maintains that dealing with his problems by himself has made him more confident with his masculinity. This way of constructing his masculinity identity seems to follow the cultural script of dominant hegemonic masculinity which encourage men to be strong and independent. Ironically, when I asked him what his sense of what it was like being a man in South Africa, he said the following:

> **KWAME**: Just that, uhm, [long pause] just like the other men around you in like a very broad sense, are not doing or not really setting a very nice example. So, you know, when you talk to…when you talk to women, you know, it’s reflected and like, even amongst my peers, like, it’s very, very obvious that it’s a big, like, men are a big problem, like a huge problem. And as a man, that makes me a part of it, which is not like, it’s not ideal, because I know that, like I don’t represent a whole lot of the problems we face, but then it’s still something to deal with.

In the above extract Kwame views men as problematic and thereby supporting the dominant stereotype that pathologizes South African men as inherently problematic. He bases this on his observation of how men, his peers included, approach and treat women. Kwame admits that he struggles with this as a man and is learning how to do or be better. Simply, to offer a counter-hegemonic and alternative masculinity that is non-violent and non-sexist towards women.

It was clear that my participants did not flag their parents' same-sex desire as central to their self-representations of 'becoming men' as they grew up. This will further be discussed in Chapter 6, but I found it interesting that most participants drew on conventional norms of aspirational masculinity to describe themselves and did not overtly consider their own identification as 'men' to be influenced by the sexual orientation of parents. Next I explore how the school environment influenced the participants' narratives of self-identification.

5.2.2 School influence on constructing 'the self'

My interest was how the men spoke about their school environment as it usually is a space where boys influence each other, especially, around ideas about manhood and dating. Kurt and Kwame both experienced home-schooling. However, Kurt's home-schooling was quite short as he noted *"[…] there was a time where I was also home-schooled for a year and a bit and she [his sister] went to normal school*." While Kwame noted "*schooling, I was home-schooled until I was in Grade 9*." I wanted to point this out as I believe being home-schooled, as well as family, played an important role in Kwame's social life and sense of self. Unlike the rest of the men I interviewed, having spent most of his childhood and early teen years with his family meant he might have not experienced the types of peer influence and bullying that most boys his age experience at school. For example, Kurt shared a story of how he was teased at school because of his dyslexia:

> **KURT:** I remember being the naughty kid and boys joking around. But that also came from whenever like a teacher would ask me to read something. I would try read and obviously, the dyslexia, I would mumble, and everyone thought I was the class clown because I was just joking the whole time, but I wasn't. So, in that sense, it was very frustrating, because there was no extra help like they have nowadays. So, I kind

of just became that kid who [laughs] always got kicked out or got sent to the headmaster's office.

BONGANI: But did you get to a point where you got a little bit angry at them and tried maybe to defend yourself because you're being laughed at?

KURT: I mean, I got…I did get upset. I got frustrated and…but I also realised very quickly that there is no way out of it so I might as well embrace it and try use that in my favour in a way.

Kurt's story of being teased and bullied elicited feelings of frustration and anger, which led him to respond in a way that had negative effects for him. This was a specific way through which he learned to cope with the school environment and forge a version of himself capable of dealing with such contexts. This idea of forging a masculine identity that is able to deal with difficult situations seemed to be common amongst most of the participants. This came across in how they answered the question "what kind of a guy were you in school?" To illustrate, this is how Michael formulated his response:

MICHAEL: My memory doesn't really work really well. Uhm…uhm but yeah as a youth I was quite confident. I was very beautiful and quite a leader. Like I had a lot of confidence and a lot of strength and you wouldn't be able to get out [under] my skin like very easily.

BONGANI: So, then you made friends very easily then?

MICHAEL: Ja, friends and stuff. Mostly female friends.

BONGANI: Okay.

MICHAEL: I made friends with guys, but I found that guys…I didn't like…I don't like teasing and bullying and that kind of stuff. I don't see the point of competition, so I was like on the fence at school. I would have girlfriends and I would be like fully in

> there with the girls like tickling their arms and that kind of stuff and then with the guys it was like yeah, throwing guavas at the train and like going surfing.

From the above exchange, just like the other participants I spoke to, Michael describes himself as someone who was confident and strong to withstand being teased and bullied. What Michael also does here is to make us aware that he made friends easily, but more so with girls than boys. The reasons he provided for this is that boys were often displaying a particular type of masculinity, which was competitive and aggressive, while he tried to position himself as someone who practised an alternative version to this masculinity. In the last section below, I look at how peers and social environments influenced the ways these men constructed their masculinity identity.

In summary, it seems as though the participants did experience discomfort with school peer pressure around masculinity cultures, but in very predictable ways and not on any connection to their parents' sexual orientation in these stories. Their narratives centre around the typical ways which boys and/or young men experience school environments. In the next subtheme I continue to look at how their social experiences influenced how they see themselves.

5.2.3 Social influence on constructing 'the self'

The ways with which these men fashioned their own sense of masculinity, which appeared to be alternative, was highlighted in how they also spoke about their transition from their formative years to adulthood. Here I was interested to know how, outside of the schooling environment, the men constructed narratives about themselves. I specifically wanted to know how they formed friendships and interacted with prospective romantic partners as schoolboys and subsequently as young adults. Because Kwame was home-schooled it became apparent

that his interaction with peers his age in high school forged a self-reliant masculinity that he did not possess while he was home-schooled.

> **KWAME**: I started school only in Grade 9, when I was 14. Uhm…I've always been kind of very reserved, very quiet but at school, I started making friends mostly just because of my soccer playing. High school, I didn't have too many close friends so like the people that I spent most of my time with, very shallow friendships, it's just people that I played soccer with. I also went to a very small white school, so I didn't really have people there too much.

Kwame positions himself as someone who is a 'lone wolf' and introverted. This could be read through a racial lens as he noted it was a "white" school. Thus, his blackness making it difficult for him to easily make friends with white kids. What was consistent throughout my conversation with him was the way in which he represented himself as someone who had a strong desire to be independent. For example, when he said things like "[…] *I just want to be living by myself.", "[…] So, I'm very much the hands-on type of person where I want to like to learn how to do everything myself and I want to be able to like take care of like all parts of me myself […]*" Having noted that studies on masculinity reveal that masculinity typically involves a collective approach to gender identity (see Connell, 1995, 2005; Morrell, 1998; Ratele, 2016), it was interesting to see Kwame maintaining an individualistic sense of self. Likewise, during my conversation with Jabu, he spoke about a particular version of himself concerned with self-containment, especially regarding romantic relationships.

> **JABU:** Oh, yeah. I'm not big on relationships. For one, I'm not a relationships person firstly. I'm just doing it because, yeah, no, I mean, from time to time I enjoy, but yeah, I'm not a very…I'm not very big on relationships. Shame man, they hurt us sometime back and we just like, *eish*, now let's just protect our hearts because hey…

Jabu's ideas on relationships, based on his past experiences, seem to have caused him to embody a self-contained masculinity, which is in contrast to the commonly practiced type of masculinity, which praises and even valorises men who are in multiple relationships. Having multiple romantic or sexual partners is often seen as a key marker of successful hegemonic masculinity. I was not sure if it was because of their age, but it was evident from my encounters with the men I spoke with that they all seemed to be constructing an alternative masculinity that challenges mainstream sexist conceptions of women and girls as objects. In the next theme I explore how the men spoke about growing up in counter-heteronormative families.

The dominant thread in this theme was, despite occasional constructions of their identity as men who do deviate from heteronormative norms (such as in their representation of women), their narratives all form within frameworks of engagement with heteronormative masculinity. None of them locate their engagement with 'becoming men' in direct resistance to, or support of, a family environment in which a parent was lesbian or gay. In the next section I go into this in more depth.

5.3 Growing up as a boy/man in counter-heteronormative families

In this theme I was interested to find out how the men constructed narratives which go against the prevalent stereotypes about the types of families they come from. I first explore how they spoke about growing up in the context of counter-heteronormative families. Secondly, I explore how they constructed narratives about outsider discourse and homophobia inherent in topics of counter-heteronormative lifestyles. The theme emerged from asking the men to share with me what it was like growing up in a context of having a gay/lesbian parent.

5.3.1 Contextualising counter-heteronormative families

Despite the growing number of counter-heteronormative families in South Africa, little is known about what it is like to be from these types of families. To better understand the context of growing up in such families, I asked the participants in the study to share their lived experiences. I thought having this information would be a powerful illustration of how being from such a family may be really beneficial in developing a society that can truly celebrate its unity in diversity. Although this posed a challenge for myself as a researcher and for the participants, I embarked on this journey in the hope that the participants would be comfortable enough to speak about themselves and their non-normative families.

Despite using the term 'non-normative' to describe the families of the participants, my intention is not to mark them as abnormal, but to rather point to how society views them. For these men however, there was nothing abnormal about their families as most of them highlighted during my conversations with them. As Fezile stressed, "*there's always that thing that people think that you didn't have a normal life or a normal upbringing, and I feel like my stance has always been that I feel like I did have a normal upbringing*." The participants emphasised the fact that although their parents lived a life which society deems as abnormal, they showed courage by living their true selves. Kwame alludes to this courage when I asked him whether having a gay/lesbian parent was a big deal or not:

> **KWAME**: I think we need to de-normalize it being a big deal because I don't think it's a big deal. I think it's just, uhm, it can be difficult to accept and come to terms with, but then like you really need to try to do that like as quickly as possible. Because there's nothing else to do besides just being open and accepting of people. And also trying to be supportive because I think a lot of times you get caught up in

> your own thoughts and everything about it. **Meanwhile, they're [the parents] going, like they're actually dealing with like a lot more serious things than you feeling uncomfortable**. It's a lot more serious than it feels as, as I guess, you know, especially when you are young.

From this response, Kwame acknowledges one can get caught up in one's own thoughts and 'being uncomfortable' with having a gay/lesbian parent. However, he theorises an approach to 'open-ness' and being accepting of people who are different to us. He concludes by taking an advocacy stance by pointing to the fact that parents might already be facing substantial challenges in relation to their own sexuality in addition to dealing with other people being uncomfortable with it.

However, for these men there was no difficulty with their parents' choices in living as openly gay/lesbian. To illustrate, below is how Nathan explained what it was like growing up in such a family:

> **NATHAN:** So, I was going to say this in the beginning that I do fear that as a subject, I might not be the most informative for you because I think my family was…I sort of grew up with a lot of queer role models and I identify as gay myself and so my mom…the sort of trauma of my parents splitting up was much more of my mom being with someone else rather than her being with a woman. I'm sort of quite grateful that I was raised in an environment where that was thought of as okay, and my mom's brother is gay, and I knew him as a kind of gay uncle growing up. So, it was already something that was quite accepted in the family.

In the previous section Nathan expresses doubts of not being an ideal subject for this study although he comes from a non-normative family setting which this study is interested in. However, it was clear that for Nathan, coming from a family that was accepting of same-sex

attraction was something that made it easier for him to accept his mother's choices in openly living with same-sex desires and for himself to also live authentically.

The notion of having queer individuals 'around' was something that a few participants emphasised in their conversations with me. This emerged from asking the participants whether their parents' sexual orientation presented challenges and opportunities for them. For example, Kwame responded by saying:

> **KWAME:** Uhm… Maybe not so much, but then I think as far as environments and that type of thing, a lot. Just because when they split homes and like by my mother's…like I'd usually be…uhm, what's the word? Yeah, just be [long pause] shoo [laughs]. Um, just in like an environment where like, there's like a lot of queer people around, a lot more discussions being had, a lot more…

Based on the extract above, it became clear that having a queer parent presented Kwame with opportunities to engage with other queer people outside his family and he was included in conversations that involved queer topics. He acknowledges (or even dismisses) these topics as being "*about that type of thing*" and he tries to represent himself outside of this counter-heteronormative framing. When I asked Michael what it was like having a gay/lesbian parent, he interestingly said:

> **MICHAEL:** The story of having a gay parent for me is being marinated in gay women my whole life.
>
> **BONGANI:** Okay. What does it mean to be marinated in gay women?
>
> **MICHAEL:** That means only gay women. They were the only gay people I knew. I was raised by gay women, like a group of them. Half of them decided to have children without men kind of thing, like you know, "I don't need a man"; impregnated by a friend. That's one half. The other half had relationships with men

> that all fell apart and then they just went back to being gay, and then those were the people I was surrounded by my whole life.

Based on Michael's response, it is clear that this counter-heteronormative environment was something he was used to and that he knew how to navigate. Although for someone who seemingly spent his whole life being surrounded by gay women, I was surprised by his statement "*then they just went back to being gay*." The statement implied that one easily switched between heterosexuality and homosexuality as a result of a failed relationship. That is, Michael's narrative shows his awareness of sexuality being something that is fluid.

While family environments for some of them might have shifted with the separation of their parents, moving between two homes or even moving countries and cities, the knowledge about their parents' sexuality did not have an impact on their feelings towards their parents. To give an example, having a gay/lesbian parent meant that the family dynamic has changed for some of these men. Below is an example from my conversation with Charlton expressing such changes:

> **CHARLTON:** I think I never ever loved my mom less. I think I was just concerned around…I just wanted, like that nuclear family that you're talking about because it's so common you know. I didn't still want people to ask questions or anything like that. And the older I got, I think, the more I realised how tough it is for my mom, living in Cape Town, living in South Africa as a lesbian. I mean she took a lot of risks as well. Leaving my dad, in terms of being financially stable, and all of that as well, you know, and then started a completely different life. And, yeah, I think I just really…as I was getting older you know, I was more protective over…in terms of to the point where if I was a youngster and someone said anything about my mom, I would

> just…like in Grade 7, I would go like 'hey fuck you', you know what I mean? I was that protective you know.

Charlton highlights a few things in the response above. Firstly, he expresses his love for his mother regardless of her sexual orientation and the fact that this sparked a kind of protectiveness towards his mother against potential outside discrimination. Secondly, he expresses his concern in relation to his family transition from the common nuclear family dynamic that he was familiar with to spending time between two households. However, as discussed in the "*Encounters of disclosure*" theme in the previous chapter, the revelation of this new family dynamic was gradually embraced by Charlton, similar to the other participants. Thirdly, learning about his mother sexual orientation meant that he would have to deal with outsiders and answer questions about his non-normative family. Lastly, highlighting the common discourse of "man as a provider" discourse (Mavungu, Thomson-de Boor, & Mphaka, 2013), this separation was framed in terms of financial instability for his mother.

As clearly seen in the previous chapter with regard to the gradual nature of disclosure of same-sex desire, how the men spoke about their families revealed their progressive approach towards understanding the complexity of living in a counter-heteronormative family. Thus, these participants, by and large, used no pathologisation of same-sex desire in their narratives, and in many instances were clear that the family environment itself did not generate tensions around parents' sexual orientation, especially as far as their own gendered and sexual identities as 'men' were concerned.

5.3.2 Outsider discourse and homophobia

Having a counter-heteronormative family might mean having to deal with outsiders who are either opposed to or do not understand your family environment. For these men this meant learning to face such contexts, whether these were their own internal challenges with this 'new' family setup, homophobia, or even opportunities to educate others about their families. As extensively noted by Jabu below:

> **JABU:** And from time to time, I try to…I try to interject and try to educate. But also, it depends on the environment, it depends who I'm talking to as well. Because also, I think what's important is also to respect people as well. Also have a common…have a basic understanding. And also, the word being open-minded. That's why I'm saying it's relative because you cannot now be in a place where homophobia is a thing, and it's a big thing. And whenever someone just tries to be homophobic then there I am jumping now and saying, "hey, you can't say that." I mean, one also needs to read the environment and one has to also understand that there's a time and a place also to be able to address issues.

Jabu's above narrative points the 'education' aspect that might come with having a gay/lesbian parent. That is, being able to teach others about embracing non-normative sexualities. Although he warns that this teaching should happen in context specific spaces especially being aware of possible homophobic counter-narrative. Other interviewees expressed hope that their participation in this study would educate or offer insights about growing up in counter-heteronormative families. While the participants expressed not being concerned about their parents being targets of homophobic violence, they were aware of the treatment that members of the LGBTQAI+ community experienced for living as openly gay or lesbian. Fezile even pointed out that, not only was his parents' sexuality something of a safety concern, but also the fact that they were women:

> **FEZILE**: I mean, like, I'm always scared. And I think for me, mostly, it's because of, I'm scared, first and foremost, for my parents, because of the fact that they are women. Yeah, that in itself is just, you know, on its own is scary enough for me. And also, there's that lady, of course, that she's queer. You know, I'm scared of that as well.

Fezile's fear, importantly, links gender-based violence to homophobia, in a way that other participants did not, with the exception of Sifiso who remarked about how capable of defending herself his mother was – "*because [sigh]…yeah, I know she can defend herself. She's also got a gun*".

Moreover, it must be said that in their narratives, the participants did not make clear distinctions between implicit and explicit homophobia in relation to their counter-heteronormative families. By implicit homophobia I mean how they described reactions, comments or actions when speaking about same-sex desires. To illustrate, this is how Charlton framed his behaviour before finding out about his mother's lesbian identity:

> **CHARLTON**: I was more embarrassed, you know, to have a parent that is gay. And at the time and still as a child you know, I think because we grew up in a society…I used to…I would say I used make fun of gay people. It was wrong, like, no, that is…you know, but I would see or watch a movie and I see two boys kissing or two girls kissing, it would be like…like no! That's not how it works…

The above excerpt shows that Charlton is aware of his own homophobia that was influenced by the society in which he grew up and he realises how this was wrong. Although these reactions or comments happened or were said in unwitting acceptance of prevailing social narratives, they were still embedded in intolerance which could result in violence, whether verbal or physical. Whereas, by explicit homophobia I refer to how these men spoke about

experiences of physical violence brought on by having a gay/lesbian parent, although none of the participants discussed their parents as being victims or targets of homophobia. However, by excluding the implicit homophobia as part of their parents' experience, I understood this as reflecting a society where implicit homophobia happens through everyday experiences and only being noticed as homophobia when it happens physically or violently. How these men narrated stories about their reactions towards others who were gay/lesbian before learning about their own parents' sexualities was also informative. Similar to Charlton's narrative above, Kurt noted "*I used to joke around about gay people with my dad and now all of a sudden, my dad comes out to be gay*." That is, they exhibited signs of homophobia either within the family setting or amongst their friends, but this attitude changed once they learned about their own parents. Perhaps this heightened awareness of and sensitivity to their previous ill-judged behaviour can be linked to the discussion in the previous chapter on their motivations for participating in the study to either to create awareness, to learn or to teach others who find themselves in similar situations.

5.4 Chapter summary

This chapter explored narratives that emerged from the interviews with the participants on two themes, namely, self-identification narratives and growing up as a boy/man in counter-heteronormative families. In the first theme I discussed how the participants constructed narratives of 'the self' as subjects, influences of school and social influences in relation to perspectives of themselves. Important to note in this section was how these men forged masculinity identities that were contrary to the dominant hegemonic masculinity which objectifies women, but in many other ways conformed to hegemonic norms. The participants acknowledged how they perceived themselves as different to these prevailing stereotypes or how they worked to counter them. They also expressed how their masculinity was informed

by their different family backgrounds. This resonates with the second theme, which explored their perspectives of growing up with a lesbian or gay parent in a society that deems this type of family as non-normative. What stood out was how they viewed their families like any other. They speak of many issues; a process of acceptance, a deep recognition of others' homophobia and sometimes of their own, a need to normalise same-sex desire, a move towards gay/lesbian advocacy. This chapter and the previous (Chapter 4) addressed a total of four analytical themes to foreground the next chapter. A more in-depth discussion of key issues raised in this chapter and the previous chapter take place in the next chapter. Moreover, in the next chapter I discuss the findings of this study while reverting back to the literature review, research question(s), methodology and theoretical framework.

Chapter 6: DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I interpret and explain the theoretical implications of the analysed results of this study. This will be done by explaining how material from the previous two chapters help to respond to the research questions animating the process of the study in engagement with work on masculinities, same-sex desire, and the South African legal context reviewed as literature critical to my own interests. It is crucial to note that this research did not give me conclusive answers to any of the questions; rather, the value here concerns the insights I obtained from the research participants about living with parents legally safe to express same-sex desire but embedded into contexts of cultural/social homophobia and heteronormativity.

I entered the field with a hunch that young men with gay and lesbian parents encounter a shift of engagement with their sense of masculinity and, more seriously, with their self-location within a country in which same-sex desire remains anathema to large sections of South Africa while being protected by the Bill of Rights, when their parents 'come out'. My interests lay in three main areas. Firstly, I wanted to think about the meaning of living as a young man within a country in which much legal advocacy has opened up a relationship to democracy for lesbian and gay citizens in relation to questions of rights. Secondly, while much research has explored the broader socio-political implications of living as gay or lesbian in South Africa (such as exposure to homophobic violence), there is very little exploration of what a changing legal and cultural context around gay and lesbian rights might mean for children with gay and lesbian parents. Family spaces constitute political zones as critical as public, or, organisational, zones and I was interested in the meaning of radical democracy within a family space. Thirdly, I was interested in questions of masculinity because of contemporary research which explores the ways in which South African contexts

generate flexible and changing options for masculinities (Ratele, 2016; Langa, 2020); I wanted to explore the ways in which young men with lesbian and gay parents might reflect on their own masculinities. In this way, this research adds to the small, but growing body of literature on masculinities in South Africa.

As the previous two chapters show, the participants' narratives as well as their perceptions of the questions and topics raised in our conversations, are at the heart of this study. This chapter discusses the implications of the findings chapters for the three areas in which I was interested as I began and will be broken down into two main sections, namely, *situating families: environments and disclosure*, and *masculinities in context*. Both these sections will be used to interpret and explain the sub-research questions and the meaning derived from the interviews and findings. A final section will be used to summarise the findings and analysis, as well as to assess the study's success and failures in answering the main research question. This will be achieved using Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), Queer Theory (Jagose, 1996), and Radical Democratic Theory (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001) as multidimensional theoretical frameworks through which to 'read' the data.

Intersectionality as a theoretical framework identifies how oppressive institutions and systems function in society (Crenshaw, 1989), and it understands how these institutions contribute to social inequity and exclusion (Nash, 2008). This theoretical framing aided reading the participants' responses as informed by their different racial, class, economic and geographical background and experience. My take up of Queer Theory questions the heterosexual/homosexual binary's normative social ordering of identities and subjectivities, as well as the privileging of heterosexuality as 'natural' and homosexuality as deviant and/or 'Other' (Jagose, 1996). For example, this framing allowed for me to understand the

participants' parents' sexual identities outside of the gay/lesbian binaries based on participants' recollections of identity terms their parents used or preferred to describe or define themselves (e.g., bisexual, queer, etc.). Theories of radical democracy on the other hand increases the importance of citizenship by presenting a concept of democracy as the mode of life as an ongoing challenge to the limits of politics (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). I was interested in the ways in which the rights acquired via a democratic legal approach to same-sex desire might be experienced within the bounds of a family, and how family citizenship may be negotiated and conceptualised by young men with parents who are gay/lesbian.

I would like to remind the reader the objectives of this study were to examine how these young men formulated their life stories in relation to their parent's sexual orientation, and to investigate how they 'manage(d)' their parent's coming out and whether that has had any impact in their child-parent relationship, and lastly, to investigate whether their parent's sexual orientation has had an impact on how they relate to their peers and communities they live in.

6.2 Situating families: environments and disclosure

As chapters 4 and 5 show, participants' reflections of the formation of heteronormativity in their families and the processes of a parent's 'coming out' offered rich material. This section of the chapter will explore how the participants framed and understood their environments and finding out about their parents' sexual orientation, as well as the meanings which emerged from these discussions. Most of the participants spoke about their precarious environments in relation to their family, schooling and social life, specifically, their family trajectory in relation to their own transition from boyhood to adulthood.

Based on the literature reviewed for this study, the meaning of democracy shows that the legalisation and access to marriage for same-sex partners has opened up complex avenues for the political space of the family. The legalisation of same-sex marriage, and the discourse thereof, has largely focused on either the individual or the same-sex couple themselves, that is, protection against discrimination. However, despite a large number of South Africans who think gays and lesbians should be afforded the same human rights as their heterosexual counterparts, a study conducted by Sutherland et al (2016) found that 72 percent of the respondents considered same-sex sexual activity to be 'morally wrong'. This in turn marks the site of the family as public through the social recognition of marriage while being given legitimacy through legal underpinnings (Van Zyl, 2009).

The findings in this study shows that within the family, the intimate presence of same-sex desire is negotiated in multiple ways. As demonstrated in the analysis chapters, for one participant, the intimate presence of same-sex desires leaves the family with a tragic suicide of a parent, while for others, the revelation of same-sex desires causes tension between the parents. However, one central point of interest for the participants themselves was the development of two homes after the parents' separation as an external discourse. Where parents' separation happened concurrently with disclosure of parents' sexual orientation, some participants reported more challenges with the separation than with the parents' sexuality, an experience that appears to have disrupted a sense of family identity. This thereby supports Macleod, Morison and Lynch (2018) who contend that what determines children's comfort is family processes rather than family structure. This also challenged my own original hunch: the participants' narratives rarely saw their parents' same-sex desire as something which influenced their own sense of family disruption. What disrupted the family for their own sense of identity was the process of creating new homes in the process of

separations and divorce. This resonates with the findings from a study conducted by Welsh (2011) in the United States with adolescents growing up in gay or lesbian parented families, which revealed that "acknowledging, understanding, and accepting the realities of family structure is essential in supporting one's ability to acquire a sense of self that is connected to parents, peers, and society" (p.66).

One unanticipated finding was the fact that although the main research question used identity markers 'gay' and 'lesbian' for the parents, this was not always the framing used by the participants. No participants seemed to 'name' their parents' sexual orientation with discomfort, and several of the men in this study were keen to work with the parent's own choice of self-reference. Seen within a queer theoretical framework (Jagose, 1996) the identity markers their parents used were fluid and went beyond the binaries of 'gay' and 'lesbian'. Because the study was interested in men who were all willing to be interviewed on the basis of self-identification as men who grew up with a lesbian or gay parent, one key focus was how they spoke about finding out about their parents' sexual orientation. In contemporary Euro-American queer literature, there appears to be a lot of attention and impatience with notions of 'coming out', a moment where all is revealed (see for example, Tasker, Barrett & De Simone, 2010; Bozett, 1980; Lynch & Murray, 2000 amongst others).

A study conducted by Bozett (1980) revealed potential benefits for gay fathers to disclose their homosexuality to their children. The possible benefits include the ability to fully integrate their homosexual identity into their current identity as a father, as well as the creation of more authenticity in their connection, which is beneficial to both children and fathers. On the contrary, studies by Goldberg (2007a) and Breshears & Lubbe-De Beer (2014) reveal that children's trust is harmed when parents choose to conceal their sexuality.

In this study, however, there was no generalisable moment of disclosure described by the participant and that 'coming out' was a complex and context-specific family process that defined a non-heteronormative family identity. These findings appear to be consistent with research conducted in the United Kingdom by Tasker, Barrett, and De Simone (2010) on how adult children learn about their gay fathers. Their findings revealed that the father's sexual identity was not always explicitly addressed, but rather understood gradually and through direct discussion.

In some cases, 'coming out' was irrelevant for the men in this current study because the narrative of disclosure was disallowed by the participants even though the parents tried to make this 'a moment'. Apprehensions of common shyness between parent and child concerning a parent's love/sex life were raised by the participants, as well as the child's need to preserve private boundaries. A few participants in Tasker, Barrett and De Simone's (2010) study made links between parental same-sex desire and children's rejection of it, stating that most children had never thought of their fathers in any sexual terms, let alone gay ones, prior to their disclosure. One participant in their study even went as far as to say that they were fine with their father being gay, but they did not want to be in the same place when the father was with another man.

Moreover, it was clear in the present study that although parents' sexual orientation was significant in the participants' lives, it was not necessarily the central focal point of their narratives. Rather, their narratives stressed the proliferation of their internal struggles about a wide range of issues and family conflict more. These findings support previous research conducted in Australia into the importance of parents' sexuality for children in relation to the

dissolution of their marriage (Titlestad & Pooley, 2014). It can therefore be deduced that my hunch at the beginning of this study that young men with gay and lesbian parents encounter a disruption of the meaning of 'family' when their parents 'come out' appears to be contradicted by these findings, as the separation of the participants' parents dominated the shift they experienced. This finding speaks to both the ways in which, despite evidence of socio-political homophobia as widespread in South Africa, there may well have been an increasing acceptance of gay and lesbian people in specific family environments.

Where the heterosexual parent showed hostility to their partner's newly expressed sexual orientation, the discussions were embedded in cultural socialisation reflective of homophobia from the heterosexual parent. As the literature reviewed showed, there exist contested discourses around homosexuality in Africa, where cultural and religious contexts inform how individuals view homosexuality (Dlamini, 2006; Vincent & Howell, 2014; Ndzovu, 2016; van Klinken & Obadare, 2018). This internalised homophobia for one participant in this study resulted in tragedy caused by shame. This suggests that this homophobia from the heterosexual parent was embedded in deeply rooted and culturally specific understandings of homosexuality. Using an intersectional theoretical framework (Crenshaw, 1989), we can conclude that intersections of gender, sex, tradition and culture were among social signifiers which informed how the heterosexual partner responded to the disclosure of same-sex desire from their spouse.

Despite the overarching shape of participants' relative disinterest in a parent's "coming out" to them, some participants highlighted their own internalised homophobia which was expressed in their narratives before learning about their parents' sexual orientation, at times after disclosure of same-sex desire. Interestingly, this internalised homophobia was context-

specific and informed by different backgrounds and experiences for both the participants and their heterosexual family members in this study. What I found was that while family reactions do reveal pockets of intense homophobia in a few narratives, these do not translate into the participants' own practice of avoiding questions of same-sex desire.

When looking at the dynamics of parent-child relationships amongst the participants in this current study, the results agree with the findings of studies conducted by Lubbe (2008) with children growing up in lesbian-headed families in South Africa and by Welsh (2011) with adolescents growing up in same-sex parented families in the United States. Their findings revealed that while dominant cultural paradigms continue to reinforce traditional heterosexual nuclear family structure, the participants' understanding of social constructions of family goes beyond conventional concepts. The participants from this literature suggested that the sexuality of their parents added an extra layer of difficulty, requiring them to acknowledge, accept, and integrate this aspect of their parents' identity into their developing sense of self. For this current study, however, learning about their parents' sexual orientation did not cause any tensions in how they viewed their parents. This suggests that, contrary to existing literature about heteronormativity in families, the presence of homosexuality within the family would impact on how children, particularly young boys, perceive their parents (i.e., parent-child relationships), but this was not the case for these participants.

In summary, as discussed above, there was a fundamental ambiguity with which the participants in this study gave an account of themselves; namely, they both transgressed and reproduced heteronormativity during their interviews with me. While their narratives did not, despite very different contexts, mark any kind of shock or distress about being the son of a parent living out their same-sex desire openly, they did see the establishment of new/double

homes as challenging and they did want to separate their own sense of their identities from whatever was happening for their parents' as mothers/fathers lived out their own sexual trajectories.

What was noteworthy with regard to the gradual nature of disclosure of same-sex desire, was how the men spoke about their families revealed their progressive approach towards understanding the complexity of living in a counter-heteronormative family. I began this research with the homogenising assumption that when a parent reveals same-sex desire, this has an impact on a young man's sense of his environment, his masculinity, and even perhaps, his sexuality. This assumption was cross-referenced with literature about heteronormativity in families and discourse about democracy in terms of rights for gay and lesbian citizens. Literature about legal advocacy in relation to human rights for gays and lesbians highlights the socio-political implications of living as a gay or lesbian in South Africa while also highlighting the homophobic violence experienced by these citizens.

However, this was not the case for any of the participants in this study. In spite of the small size of the study, responses from the participants revealed no experience of direct, or indirect, homophobic violence in relation to their parents. It also revealed no instance of anger or tension towards a non-heteronormative parent concerning that parents' sexual orientation, although anger sometimes was expressed about the degree of tension caused by the family split up and one participant spoke with resentment about the number of women 'mothers' his own mother's lesbian relationship had brought into his home environment. The lack of hostility shown in the narratives towards non-heteronormative parents was not something for which the literature on embedded cultural and local homophobias in South Africa prepared me, and my study therefore opens up the need for much more research on how new legal

options for gay and lesbian parents may possibly have influenced strongly engrained contextual homophobia, and the continued assumption of much scholarship that such homophobia is uncomplicatedly omnipresent.

In the next section, I will discuss my findings on how the participants spoke about constructing their masculinity in contexts of counter-heteronormative families. My interest in this is that existing research on South African contexts suggest the generation flexible and changing options for masculinities. I was interested to see whether such options included intimate connection with parents living out their same-sex desire within the home.

6.3 Masculinities in contexts

Having an idea of how the participants spoke about their gradual acknowledgement of their 'new' family constellation, this section first discusses findings regarding self-representations of boyhood to manhood in relation to school, community and peer environments. This would help answer the sub-question, *how do young men with a gay/lesbian parent negotiate the intersection of family, identity and community*? Next, I discuss findings of narratives of how the participants spoke about their parents' sexuality in relation to negotiating their social and sexual masculinity. This part of the discussion will mainly address the sub-question, *how do these young men negotiate social and sexual masculinity in their lives*? Lastly, I explain findings of what the participants privileged in their narratives of growing up as men in counter-heteronormative families. Findings from this part of the discussion will help answer the final sub-question, *why do sons of gay/lesbian parents navigate their own masculinity in the way that they do*?

6.3.1 Becoming men (with)out

Similar to a study conducted by Welsh (2011) findings in this study support the fact that participants' narratives of themselves are complex and fluid, shifting as they developed a sense of self and shifting with proximal distance from their family formations. The material from the participants' narratives suggests that school environments had a major influence on how they self-identified as masculine. Their early childhood narratives also suggest the social roles most participants occupied were broadly influenced by parents and family dynamics. These social roles were often a set of heteronormative expectations that dictated what it meant to be a boy for the men in this study, while reinforcing hegemonic masculinity ideas of what it means to be a boy. The performative nature of gender as articulated by Butler (1990) and evident in the narratives of the men in this study, corroborates ideas by Langa (2020) who argues "being an adolescent boy and adopting the masculine identity of a 'real' boy is a complicated process, one that is often characterised by contradictions and feelings of ambivalence" (p.157). The men in this study expressed internal conflict about assumed gender stereotypes (Ratele, 2016) about the natural link between healthy masculinity and physicality as they moved through family, school and social contexts. They spoke about family and school environments being influential in enforcing gender roles stereotypes on them. In this regard, although they all experienced home contexts in which counter-heteronormativity was closely interwoven into their experiences, they spoke about schooling's influence on their masculinities in ways very similar to participants in other research, living with heterosexual parents and caretakers.

Furthermore, the participants narratives described discomfort with school peer pressure around masculinity culture, but in very predictable ways and not on any connection to parents' sexual orientation. Although Breshears (2011) argues that children's exposure to

opinions about same-sex parenting occurs in a variety of environments, including school, the discomfort expressed by the participants in this study was rather general discomfort such as being bullied or teased, commonly experienced by children in school while developing a sense of self. That is, they were no more likely to report being victims of bullying than if they were from heterosexual families. Moreover, the findings in this study differ from those expressed by participants in Padovano-Janik, Brabender and Rutter's (2015) study who reported influence of lesbian mothers on their children's identity formation. The discussions from the participants in this study suggest that the participants drew on conventional norms of aspirational masculinity to describe themselves. Despite the occasional constructions of their own identity deviating from heteronormative norms, their narratives all formed within frameworks of engagement with heteronormative masculinity. None of them located their engagement with 'becoming men' in direct resistance to, or support of, a family environment in which a parent was lesbian or gay. Based on the literature reviewed, the theory of the presence of homosexuality having an impact on constructions of masculinity for young men living in largely heteronormative South African contexts is therefore contradicted by these participants' responses. What these findings highlight is the power of heteronormativity in structuring young masculinities, even when we put same-sex desire centrally into the experience of someone who is not unwittingly gay.

Lubbe (2007:51) maintains, "schools can be places of discrimination and prejudice – silencing minorities and otherness such as same-gendered families – or they can be places of openness, tolerance and even acceptance that serve to enhance disclosure, openness and transparency and authentic relationships in schools." This coupled with societal homonegative attitudes towards same-sex desire, a challenge was identified in how the participants spoke about whether to disclose information about their parents' sexuality to

others. The narratives in the current study suggest that the men did not voluntarily share information about their parents' sexual orientation and cared about how others would react. This was based on their awareness of potentially being bullied or teased and that others might have negative opinions about their parents' sexuality and counter-heteronormative family in general. They made a conscious decision to only disclose such information to those they knew would be open-minded. These findings are consistent with studies conducted by Garner (2004), Bozett (1980), Lynch and Murray (2000), Goldberg (2007a), and Fairtlough (2008) amongst others, who found that children from counter-heteronormative, broadly, experience anxieties and fear other people's reactions.

In contrast to studies by Breshears (2010, 2011), Breshears and Lubbe-De Beer (2016), Oakley, Farr and Scherer (2017), for example, where parents with same-sex desire proactively communicated their family identity to their children to prepare them for outsider discourse about their non-heteronormative family identity, the men in this study did not report such communication taking place between themselves and their parents. In many instances, the responses from the participants showed that although disclosing information about their queer families can induce anxiety and fear of being teased, most of the men expressed never experiencing any sort of tension between themselves and their peers caused by their parents' sexual identity once this information was shared.

Using intersectionality theory to interpret the above discussions, we can therefore conclude that the different social and cultural backgrounds which the participants reported during the interviews informed how they negotiated the intersections of family, identity and community. Understanding this was important considering the participants in this study came from different racial, class and cultural backgrounds. Compared and contrasted with previous

similar studies, the men in this study negotiated their environments based on specific contexts which they found themselves in. The material from the participants suggests that they did not suggest that the work of 'becoming men' was directly impacted by a parent's open same-sex desire. However, implicitly, the participants' material does suggest a shift in their approach to 'being a man' in the world. That is, they are extra private about talking about family; they are protective of their gay and lesbian parents; they are aware of the need to 'take responsibility' in relation to issues of gender and sexuality; they are willing to be reflective about the meaning of being gay or lesbian. Therefore, indirectly, their discourses of their own masculinity encompass both a renewed commitment to traditional masculinity (protective, private, independent) and an incorporation of acceptance of same-sex desire close to home. Therefore, this is an interesting shift in what research suggests is called "alternative masculinity" (see for example, Langa, 2020).

6.3.2 Negotiating social and sexual masculinity

The findings from this study also showed how the participants forged identities of masculinity that were in some ways contrary to the dominant hegemonic masculinity notions which objectify women and despise gay and lesbian people, but in many other ways, they conformed to hegemonic norms. These findings corroborate those found by Langa (2020) and Hamlall (2018), who showed that men frequently occupied a subjective position that both supported and opposed hegemonic masculinity notions. How the men spoke about their social identity was tied to notions of social constructions of masculinity where showing resilience, bravery, independence and strong character traits was celebrated. Some participants' narratives showed self-reliant and self-contained masculinity, again, their views seem to have been context-specific and informed by their previous experiences, particularly when they discussed their own romantic relationships.

The participants' sexual masculinity narratives suggest they exhibited what Ratele (2016) calls 'liberated' masculinity or 'alternative' masculinity, as suggested by Langa (2020). Simply, in contrast to the commonly practiced type of masculinity that praises and even valorises men who are in multiple relationships, as this is often viewed as a significant marker of successful hegemonic masculinity, the men in this study portrayed themselves outside this view of masculinity. This was seen in their portrayal of how men in South Africa are generally problematic in how they treat women. A possible explanation for this could be the narratives of the participants' awareness of gendered violence in the country, which is similar to the literature review discussing racialized (-gendered) violence (Mkhize et al., 2010; Gqola, 2015; Judge, 2018). Looking at how the participants spoke about other men, their narratives reveal that they viewed themselves outside this 'problematic' view of men, that is, the view that men are violent towards women.

Although half of the men reported not being romantic relationships currently, and they did not report difficulties in being relationships. Similar to other studies with children from same-sex parented families (Tasker & Golombok, 1997; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001; Goldberg, 2007), some participants reported their own sexuality being questioned at times, but interestingly, not because of their parents' sexual orientation, but rather because of the way they carried themselves. One participant self-identified as gay, one as queer, another as gender-fluid, while the rest of the participants identified as heterosexual. Those with 'non-normative' sexual identities noted that although their parents' sexual orientation had nothing to do with their own sexual identity, seeing their parents being proudly 'out' encouraged them to live openly. These findings back up Titlestad and Pooley's (2014) findings, which demonstrated that gay, lesbian, and bisexual parents who were proud of their sexuality were a key influence in their children's self-professed confidence in their own identity development.

The above discussion suggests that the participants negotiated their social and sexual masculinity in context-specific ways. The way they negotiated their masculinity was socially influenced and their parents' sexual orientation provided them with courage to be accepting and embracing of sexualities beyond heteronormative understandings. Their awareness of social pressures around what it means to be 'men' in South African society was linked to the endemic violence perpetrated against women and sexual minorities in general. The participants in this study constructed their masculinity in ways that challenged, at times conformed to, existing notions around masculinity in the country. Thus, challenging and opening up new modes of the hetero-homo dichotomy with which constructions of changing contemporary masculinities are researched in South Africa. Most research on masculinities in South Africa polarises hegemonic masculinity (as heterosexual) and counter-heteronormative acceptance of sexual ambiguity or fluidity. The narratives of my participants suggest that approach masculinity from the gaze of this binary is not necessarily useful; the homo-hetero dichotomy may deserve rethinking as new versions of living sexual diversity are slowly embedded into the ordinariness of young men's experiences of family, culture and their own options.

6.3.3 Why these men navigate masculinity the way they do

Participants in this study reported challenges which were both complex and powerfully felt, specifically when it comes to how non-heteronormative families are socially understood. However, findings show that this did not hinder how they navigate their own masculinity. They articulated that having a parent with same-sex desires provided them with opportunities to meet others with non-normative sexuality outside their family terrains. This encouraged them to be open and accepting of others and their sexuality. Two of the participants from this study reported 'acting out' or being 'rebellious' after knowledge of their parents' same-sex

desire. However, these two participants reported these reactions at the time were informed by their expression and practices of masculinity for adolescent boys, though I would argue this was also tied to their own internalised homophobia as discussed earlier in this chapter. However, these voices were in the minority within my participants' narratives. This does not mean their representations of these rebellions should go unmarked, and a wider study might look more carefully at how masculinities narratives justify to themselves what are seen as "rebellions." Moreover, although none of the participants reported themselves or their parents having experienced any direct homophobic violence, the findings suggest that they were very much aware of the possibility of encountering homophobia. Similarly, in a study conducted by Breshears and Lubbe-De Beer (2016) with parents and children from same-sex parented families in South Africa, the participants reported never experiencing any direct discrimination or violence as a result of their family identity status.

The participants also expressed how their masculinity was informed by their different family backgrounds. In their perspectives of growing up with a lesbian or gay parent in a society that deems their type of family as non-normative, what stood out was how they viewed their families like any other. This is in line with a study conducted by Breshears (2011) with lesbian-parented families, which reported that while their family constellation was not as common as the traditional family, their families were nonetheless normal and okay for them. The participants in this current study spoke of many issues; a process of acceptance, a deep recognition of others' homophobia and sometimes of their own, a need to normalise same-sex desire, and a move towards gay/lesbian advocacy. What may explain this are narratives of parents' sexual orientation offering opportunities for the participants to educate others about homosexuality and growing up in counter-heteronormative families. In addition, some men in this study reported reacting in a protective manner in relation to their parents' sexual

orientation or even in relation to their families' identity in general. This data supports findings in studies by Goldberg, (2007) and Titlestad and Pooley's (2014) where their participants largely reported being protective of their parents and the queer communities in general. Findings observed in a study by Lubbe (2007) reported acceptance, love and a sense of community as positive aspects for children growing up in lesbian-parented families. Thus, these participants, by and large, used no pathologisation of same-sex desire in their narratives, and in many instances were clear that the family environment itself did not generate tensions around parents' sexual orientation, especially as far as their own gendered and sexual identities as 'men' were concerned.

It could be concluded that the participants in this study navigate their masculinity the way they do based on their unique experiences and backgrounds. Being exposed to others who live non-normative lives and their awareness of possible homophobia played an important role in why these men navigate issues around masculinity the way they do. Thus, their exposure to diverse sexualities influence these men to be protective and stand up against dominant constructs of masculinity which view their parents, family and members of the LGBTQIA+ subordinate or 'Other'. I would also like to point out that many of the participants in this study had a lot to say about how their racial, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds influenced their paths to navigating masculinity. This was arguably more important to many of them than the fact of their parents' sexual orientation. For example, those who had some experience with township life, particularly the black participants, conveyed concerns about the dangers of navigating township environments, while those with religious links spoke of how this informed how they carried themselves.

6.3.4 Navigating South African heteronormativities

In this section I attempt to answer the main research question using information discussed in this chapter thus far. In this study, literature reviewed on gay/lesbian sexual orientation in South Africa demonstrate contradictions between socio-cultural perspectives and legislative rights granted to sexual minorities in the country (Isaack, 2003; De Vos & Barnard, 2007; Lubbe-De Beer & Marnell, 2013; Morison, Lynch & Reddy, 2018). This current study suggests that living 'the laws of democracy' within intimate family settings is a complex and multidetermined endeavour, demanding both continuous vigilance around wide-spread homophobia and awareness to new modes of masculinity formation in the country. A radical democracy theoretical framework (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001) allows us to understand that democracy is conceived as a continual challenge to the boundaries of politics, and this extends to intimate family settings. While same-sex legal rights offer sexual minorities in the country protections, their 'private lives' are constantly being challenged by outside socio-political underpinnings and this has an effect on children from these families.

Participants in this study primarily spoke about their experiences of having a parent with same-sex desires in positive terms, and these findings are similar to those within the study conducted by Breshears and Lubbe-De Beer (2016) with gay and lesbian parented families in South Africa. While there was awareness of homophobia in the country in general, in this study the participants' narratives focused on opportunities and open-mindedness that came with having a parent with a non-normative sexuality (Lubbe, 2008). Based on the narratives from the participants, it can be said that their narratives challenge claims that South Africa is generally a homophobic society as reported in the research surveys conducted by Roberts and Reddy (2008), and the South African Human Rights Commission (2017). Looking at the motivations for participating in the study reported by the participants, that is, to create

awareness and to teach others about having gay or lesbian parents, I argue that we can learn from children who are from these families in order to promote a rise in social acceptance of homosexuality in post-apartheid South Africa. What was clear from the participants' narratives was that they occupied positions from which to confront and challenge heteronormativity's coercive effects. Consistent with prior research, this study suggests that growing up in counter-heteronormative families affords young men to be more tolerant of diversity and to occupy positions of 'alternative' masculinity, one that is non-sexist to women and open to questions of same-sex desire and fluid sexuality. Finally, I would like to note that there were no possible differences between having a gay father and having a lesbian mother noted in the participants' narratives. This suggests that further research is needed to ascertain whether there are any specific differences between children raised by lesbian parents and those raised by gay parents.

6.4 Chapter summary

This chapter begin by linking information from the two previous analysis chapters to achieve the study's aims and answer the research questions. The reviewed literature from this study was referenced to compare and contrast the findings of the study. The discussions were broken down into three sections where the first two sections aimed to answer the research sub-questions and the last part provided a broad answer to the study's main research question. The chapter discussed how the participants simultaneously challenged and conformed to heteronormativity in how they spoke about growing up in counter-heteronormative families. Their narratives suggested that they constructed their sense of 'self' outside their parents' sexual orientation. The findings also highlighted that their parents' sexual orientation was not key to negotiating contexts of school, family and community for these men. The participants spoke about constructing their masculinity in ways that challenged, and at times conformed

to, existing notions of masculinity. Their parents' sexuality provided them with opportunities to be open to diversity and therefore influenced the way they navigated masculinity the way they do. We can therefore suggest that growing up in counter-heteronormative families afforded these young men to be more tolerant of diversity in order to navigate South African heteronormativities. This was a unique study exploring the intimate feelings of participants whose parents 'came out' as gay and lesbian, thereby adding to the small but important emerging body of literature exploring masculinities in a South African context. Participants in the research went through a process of acceptance, a profound knowledge of others' – and occasionally their own – homophobia, a need to normalise same-sex desire, and a shift toward gay/lesbian advocacy. By interpreting and explaining the theoretical implications of the analysed material in this study through an intersectionality framework, it was useful to understand how the participants formulated their responses during the interviews. This was done by understanding that they all came from different racial, cultural, religious, and class backgrounds, which informed their engagement with work on same-sex desire and masculinity in the country. This research challenged my own assumptions and the viewpoint from the reviewed literature that when a parent reveals same-sex desire, this has an impact on a young man's sense of his environment, masculinity, and even his sexuality. For the participants in this research, family processes and the intimate presence of same-sex desire are negotiated in multiple ways, which existing literature seems to view in monolithic terms. In the next concluding chapter for this dissertation, I will reflect on the process of conducting this current research and discuss potential options for new areas of research based on the findings of this study.

Chapter 7: CONCLUSION

My own questions about changing family relations, the meaning of democracy, and shifting homophobia in modern South Africa prompted me to pursue this line of inquiry. I began this study with a hunch that young men with gay and lesbian parents have to 'manage' a transition that may occur as a result of their parents' coming out. Specifically, a transition in how the young men speak about their own experiences of identity, sexuality, gender and masculinities after parental disclosure of sexual orientation. I was curious about how these young men might 'manage' this change, as well as if the underlying heteronormativities of most South African family contexts present new obstacles and chances for young men with parents who are 'out'. In these conclusions, I will synthesize the insights gained during the research process and analysis of the material gathered, highlighting key themes and outlining theoretical and practical implications. The findings reported here reflect and build on current research on 'the laws of democracy' within intimate family environments, changing homophobia within South African contexts, and constructions of masculinity identity in cases where a parent has same-sex desires.

7.1 Highlights from key findings

By analysing how democracy is imposed on private family environments, especially within same-sex partnered family contexts, this dissertation has shown how young men from these families navigate heteronormative South African environments. In particular, this study has shown the extent to which having a parent who lives a non-heteronormative life can provide opportunities and challenges for men. Using a qualitative approach, this study explored narratives of how young men raised in gay or lesbian families navigate heteronormative communities in South Africa. By using intersectionality, queer theory, and theories of radical democracy as theoretical frameworks through which to read the material produced through

semi-structured interviews, themes and subthemes emerged. A decolonial intersectional narrative analysis helped in identifying themes and sub-themes, illustrating the complexities and tensions in how these men navigate heteronormative environments. The analytical framework used here brings awareness of the relevance of overlapping identities and the social production of meaning-making that these men in the study brought into their narratives.

Although the participants' parents' sexual orientation was important in their lives, it was not always the dominant focus of their narratives in the current study. Rather, their narratives focused on the multiplicity of their personal conflicts over a wide variety of social issues, as well as familial conflict. These findings support literature into the importance of parents' sexuality to children in relation to the dissolution of their parents' marriage. As a result, my initial hunch that young men with gay and lesbian parents suffer a disruption in the definition of 'family' when their parents 'come out' appears to be challenged by the participants' narratives, as the participants' parents' separation dominated the shift they experienced. This study showed that the ways in which, despite evidence of pervasive socio-political homophobia in South Africa, there may well have been an increasing acceptance of gay and lesbian individuals in specific family environments.

In addition, the narratives from the participants revealed that there is no such thing as a universal moment of disclosure when it comes to their parents' sexual orientation, that 'coming out' is a complex family process that sometimes occurs in the context of divorce and parental conflict, and that sometimes, 'coming out' was irrelevant for these men because the narrative of disclosure was refused. These findings were surprising considering how existing scholarship from the North often has a lot of impatience with notions of coming out,

that is, the idea that there is this moment where everything gets revealed. The men in this current study, however, show that 'coming out' for a parent with same-sex desires was not something of importance to them and at times felt awkward for them to discuss with their parents because of wanting to keep certain aspects of their sex and love life private.

Their sense of privacy in relation to their parents was also apparent in how they constructed narratives about the shift in their approach to being or becoming men in the contemporary world. That is, they are extremely private when it comes to discussing certain aspects of their family; they are protective of their gay and lesbian parents; they understand the need to "take responsibility" when it comes to matters of gender and sexuality; and they are prepared to think about what it means to be gay or lesbian. As a result, their masculinity discourses implicitly include both a revitalised dedication to traditional masculinity traits (protectiveness, privacy, independence) and an acceptance of same-sex desire close to home. Therefore, showing an interesting shift in what masculinities scholars like Malose Langa (2020) call "alternative masculinity." Simply, these men learned to represent a positive alternative masculinity that challenges mainstream sexist ideas of women and girls as objects as a result of growing up in counter-heteronormative families. Thus, my research suggests that enacting democracy's rules in intimate family contexts is a complicated and multifaceted task that needs both constant vigilance against widespread homophobia and sensitivity to new forms of masculinity creation in the country.

In South Africa, the majority of research on masculinities distinguishes between hegemonic masculinity (as heterosexual) and counter-heteronormative acceptance of sexual fluidity. The responses from the participants in this study suggest that approaching masculinity through the lens of this binary was not always helpful. This is where queer theory was useful in

understanding how these men approached masculinity in their respective environments. Moreover, this research highlighted the power of heteronormativity in structuring young masculinities, particularly for those who find themselves at the intersections of family, community, and constructions of selfhood.

The method used to collect material for this research worked best because I was able to clarify information with the participants where I needed clarity, especially when one participant's transcription showed discrepancies. This would have been difficult had I chosen to use quantitative methods or relied on secondary data, for example. The use of an intersectional theoretical approach was also useful as it allowed me to read the participants' narratives from a multidimensional perspective, that is, to understand that their responses to my questions were informed by their different and diverse backgrounds. Thus, reading the narratives using queer theory or theories of democracy alone would not have provided me with such rich and diverse material to work with.

7.2 Theoretical and practical implications

While the aim was to investigate what it means to have a gay or lesbian parent for young men living in South Africa, the theoretical frameworks used in this study posed a challenge. In particular, the use of queer theory in relation to the 'gay' and 'lesbian' identity categories in the sampling frame. I encountered a problem during the recruitment phase when potential participants asked whether my interest was only with men with parents that only fit the binary of 'gay' and 'lesbian' and nothing outside this limiting binary. This was a challenge for me, especially when I proposed using queer theory, which goes against looking at the world through the binary lens. To establish the sample frame and allow the participants to either define or label their parents' sexual orientations, I believe it was important for me to use the

terms ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ during the recruitment process. The reason for maintaining this seeming contradiction is that there is no way to avoid using material from outside the discursive space of this study, namely, the terminology and labels that are generally recognised and utilised by the men’s parents. With the participants, I tried to work reflexively with my usage of these terms.

The use of queer theory as an epistemological framework to address the ethics of doing research with individuals from counter-heteronormative families is expanded in this study. This study may have attempted to include participants as collaborators in the research process and shed light on the presence of such families in the country by prioritising the agency of the participants and avoiding a pathologizing approach about their distinctive non-normative family identity. While queer theory was beneficial in the design of this study, it was more difficult to follow the men’s meaning frames in my encounters with them. When referring to their parents, some participants used terms like ‘gay’, ‘lesbian’, ‘bisexual’, and ‘queer’ interchangeably during our conversations, emphasising the flexibility of the concept of gender. Future research could explore the use of these identity terms in South Africa more closely.

Understanding the lives of sons of gay and lesbian parents in South Africa and how they negotiate their own identities opens up new research possibilities and questions across the hetero/homo divide. For example, learning from the participants that their parents’ sexual orientation was not such a big deal in their lives means that research that looks at why/how society deems same-sex desires unacceptable yet when same-sex desires occur within the family, the narrative changes. The question then becomes, is this intolerance of homosexuality only a factor when it is towards strangers and not towards those we hold dear?

Reports of homophobic violence in the country (*cf*. Igual, 2021) show that there is still a long way to go before the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community become a reality in South Africa. This study might be beneficial to organisations and family practitioners in South Africa who currently provide care to this subgroup of sons, and possibly also to girls.

Furthermore, this research study opens up questions around the construction of identity in contexts where masculinity and homosexuality are implicated. That is, how do we begin to think about constructions of masculinity within the presence of homosexuality when our immediate society dictates what it is to be a man? The participants in this study found themselves in ambivalent situations as they challenged and conformed to these popular notions of masculinity. What I learned from this experience is that we need to think about masculinity beyond this narrow view of celebrated and frowned upon masculinity traits and, rather, just like gender and sexuality, view masculinity as evolving and contextually based. Understanding masculinity in this way helps us to understand men (and even women) as capable of being both vulnerable and strong, depending on the situation.

7.3 Future research recommendations

My research highlights the need for much more research into how new legal options for gay and lesbian parents may have influenced deeply engrained contextual homophobia, as well as the continued assumption of much scholarship that such homophobia is uncomplicatedly universal. It is therefore recommended that the homo-hetero dichotomy may need to be reconsidered as new forms of living sexual diversity become increasingly embedded in young men's everyday experiences of family, culture, and their own choices. What has also emerged from this study is that there needs to be more research that looks at the changing landscape of family, particularly more work that looks at queer families with adult children.

This would help in shaping scholarship around heteronormativity, even homonormativity, in a country where the law and societal attitude differ when it comes to issues of same-sex legalisation. In addition, research which looks at the experiences of sons of gay and lesbian parents from rural and township spaces could be explored to see whether there are differences in experiences compared to those in urban and middle-to-upper class spaces. Although I use 'gay/lesbian' as a single phenomenon throughout this dissertation, this is not to override a huge scholarly debate about men's or women's engagement with parental work. Further research looking particularly at this debate is worth pursuing to ascertain whether there are any specific differences between children raised by lesbian parents and those raised by gay parents when it comes to parental work.

7.4 Limitations of the study

This study was explorative in nature and began its inquiry by making an assumption that young men with gay/lesbian parents go through a shift when their parents 'come out'. As such, there was a risk that no particular shift or change takes place within these young men's lives when their gay/lesbian parents 'come out'. It is worth noting that this study purposefully only relied on experiences of *young men* with parents who identify as *gay/lesbian* and not *all* young adults with gay/lesbian parents. Therefore, experiences expressed by the participants in this study cannot be generalised to fit all children with gay/lesbian parents, but rather are representative of the experiences of only those who participate in the study. I would also like to note that this study might only reflect the views and experiences of men who are from what could be seen as a middle-class social standing and that the experiences of those living in rural areas or townships (although some participants spent some part of their lives in the townships, the majority of their transition from boyhood to manhood was in middle-to-upper class locations, thus, outside of the township space) might have yielded different results.

Furthermore, this research relayed only on narratives rather than other methods of data to answer the research questions posed in this study, therefore, it cannot be replicated using other methods of enquiry to reach the same conclusions.

7.5 Afterword

As a researcher, one of the most important lessons I have learned since starting this project is that there appears to be a steady growth in social acceptance of homosexuality in South Africa. This was evident in the accounts of the men who took a chance and entrusted me with their personal stories. Despite the fact that I did not have the same embodiment of having a queer parent and do not completely comprehend what it is like to have a parent with same-sex attractions in a culture steeped in heteronormativity, I congratulate the men for overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic's difficulties to speak to me. It is not something to take lightly when your family is labeled as "different" because your parent chose to live an openly queer lifestyle. In this regard, it is critical that these stories are told, and that they continue to be told, in authentic and enriching ways that can result in real, transformative change, not only in the lives of those who choose to live authentically queer in a South African society, but also in the creation of safe environments for children from non-heteronormative families. I have discovered what it means to be human not just through practicing, but also by embodying, a radical sensation of empathy and care during my time with the participants. For me, this is what it means to be engaged in work that is truly decolonial and feminist in its quest of knowledge production. To sum up, one of the participants in this research, Fezile, said, "there's always that thing that people think that you didn't have a normal life or a normal upbringing, and I feel like my stance has always been that I feel like I did have a normal upbringing."

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Appendix A: Recruitment Poster

Appendix B: Interview Schedule

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The study

The purpose of this research study is to explore narratives of how young men raised in gay and lesbian families navigate a heteronormativity society. The aim is to investigate what it means to have a gay/lesbian parent. The objectives of this research are: (1) to examine how these young men formulate their life stories in relation to their parent's sexual orientation, and (2) to analyse how meanings and experiences of having a gay/lesbian parent are expressed in their life stories, and lastly, (3) to investigate how they 'manage(d)' their parent's coming out and whether that has had any impact in their child-parent relationship.

A. Motivation:

Information from this research would be useful in understanding lived experiences of young men with gay/lesbian parents living in a heteronormative environment.

B. Interview duration:

The interview should take approximately 60 – 90 minutes. Would you be available to respond to some questions at this time?

C. Ethical considerations:

Your involvement and participation is valuable in this study. I respect your decisions, experiences and responses to the proposed questions. Therefore, your participation is completely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without a penalty. You have a right to privacy through not sharing information that you do not feel comfortable in sharing. Do take note that although the interview is voice recorded, your name will not be mentioned on the tape, and pseudonym and interview numbers will be used.

You are now required to sign this consent form as proof of permission to partake in the study. If you do have any questions or concerns, you are more than welcome to voice them now before we commence the interview process.

(**Transition**: Let me begin by asking you some general demographic information)

D. Questionnaire:

THEME ONE: Getting to know you

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and where you grew up?
2. What were the highlights/lowlights of growing up in your context?
3. What were early messages/experiences about 'being a boy'?
4. What field of work/study are you in now, and what do you enjoy or dislike about it?
5. Do you mind telling me why you decided to participant in this study?

THEME TWO: 'Having gay/lesbian/queer parents'

1. What is your story of having a gay/queer parent? Are both your parents gay or lesbian? Or is it just one? How does it work?
2. Did you always know your parent/s were gay?
3. Was there any kind of 'we are telling you we are gay' moment… what happened? What was your response or their responses?
4. What did that mean for you at the time? Immediate thoughts (can they remember); did your feelings about parents being gay shift over time? If so, why?
5. Did anything in family change for you after you knew about parent/s' being gay/lesbian… how do grandparents, extended family feel about the situation?

THEME THREE: Peer environment

1. What kind of guy where you at school – messages, experiences, role models, best and worst things about being a guy in those years

2. Did you tell friends that your parents were gay; why, why not?
3. Did your parents' orientation cause any arguments or challenges for you?
4. And what about opportunities – did your parents sexual orientation have any influence on stuff you read, or people you got to meet?
5. Are/were your parents activists at all around questions of sexual orientation – how is that for you?

THEME FOUR – homophobia in general and personal

1. What is your sense of what it is like to be gay in South Africa?
2. Are you ever scared that your parents could be targeted by homophobia? Has it happened? What went down? How did you cope?
3. Have you even been attacked because of your parents? What are your strategies?
4. Do people make assumptions about you as a guy because of your parents? What does that look like? How do you react?

THEME FIVE – journey of masculinity/sexuality

1. When did you start being interested in girls? The story of first romance.
2. Are you in a relationship now? What's it like – highlights/lowlights
3. Do you see yourself getting married ever and having kids?
4. Some people say guys should have as much sex as possible – it's healthy, it's fun… would you agree? Why? Why not? How do you like to come across to girls you want to hook up with, or date?
5. Would you say you were becoming the man you want to be? Why? Why not?
6. What is the toughest thing about growing up as a man in South Africa?

THEME SIX: closing remarks/reflections

1. What advice would you give to a guy whose parents are gay? Is it a big deal or not?

2. I appreciate the time you took for this interview. Could you reflect on your experience of talking to me today?
3. Is there perhaps anything you think would be helpful for me to know?

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

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You are invited to participate in a Master's dissertation research project under the Section of Gender Studies, in the School of African and Gender Studies, Anthropology and Linguistics, in the Faculty of Humanities.

Informed Consent Form

Title of research project: How do young men raised in lesbian and gay families navigate South African heteronormativities?

Name of Researcher: Bongani Matabane **Email**: mtbbon004@myuct.ac.za

Name of Supervisor: A/Prof Jane Bennett **Email**: jane.bennett@uct.ac.za

Thank you for participating in this study.

The following conditions will be met:

1. Your real name will not be used in any source (dissertation or articles). Instead, you will be given a pseudonym.
2. All attempts will be made to keep your identity anonymous.
3. Your participation is entirely voluntary and to note that in this research study you shall not be compensated.
4. The interview material will be used, presented and analysed within my Master's dissertation and might also be published as academic articles or reports.

By signing this form you are agreeing with terms set out above.

Participant Name: ……

Participant Signature: ……

Date: ……

Declaration by Researcher

I have given a verbal explanation of the research project; its procedures and risks and I believe that the person responsible for the participant has understood that explanation.

Researcher: ……..…….

Signature: ……..……

Date: …….