

Intersectional Masculinities in Heteronormative Spaces: Exploring Power and Privilege amongst Gay Men in South Africa

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Abstract

This paper discusses the power differentials between various gay men that shape the construction of multiple unequal gay masculinities in South Africa. I argue that there is no single homogenous gay masculinity but multiple gay masculinities informed by various intersections that privilege some gay men while disadvantaging others. Considering the historical and continuing unequal racial divisions, class differences, power differentials, and gender normativity, this paper presents an intersectional analysis of three gay masculinities: White gay masculinity, Black middle-class gay masculinity, and Black working-class township gay masculinities. Intersections of race, gender, sexuality, class, and space shape power differentials amongst gay men in the same manner as heterosexual men, and through a review of literature, the paper demonstrates how intersectionality can help develop nuanced understandings of gay masculinities in South Africa. The paper highlights the need to interrogate the multifaceted nature of South African gay masculinities through an intersectional lens.

Keywords: gay masculinities; intersectionality; gay identities; South Africa; heteronormativity

Introduction

Apartheid in South Africa was not only informed by racial prejudices that marginalised Black people but was further informed by multiple forms of discrimination, such as homophobia and gender discrimination (De Ru 2013, De Vos 1996; Gevisser 1994). Black gay men during apartheid experienced multiple oppressions based on their gender, sexual identity, race and class, and it was this reality that drove the struggle of leading Black gay activists, such as Simon Nkoli, who believed that his freedom was not complete as a Black man, if he was not free as a gay person (De Ru 2013; Gevisser 1994). Discrimination against Black gay men in South Africa is deeply entrenched in heteronormative religious values and African cultural traditions that construct gay identities as unnatural and unAfrican (Epprecht 2013; Reygan and Lynette 2014; Vincent and Howell 2014). While heteronormative beliefs privilege heterosexual masculinities, it has been demonstrated in South African literature post-1994 that it informs the oppression of gay men's masculinities (Langa 2020; Msibi 2009; Ratele 2011, 2013). Gay men's masculinities continue to be undermined and excluded from dominant conceptions of masculinity due to perceptions that gay men are not "real men" since they do not conform to the heteronormative expectation that all men should be attracted to women (Kiguwa and Langa 2017; Ratele 2011).

Some international research has engaged with the concept of gay masculinities and demonstrated that gay men understand and construct their masculinities differently due to their various identity intersections and the spaces they occupy (Coles 2009; Ravenhill 2018; Shio and Moyer 2020). However, little focus has been given to the diversity of gay masculinities in South Africa. South African researchers have given attention to masculinity hierarchies amongst heterosexual men and between heterosexual and gay men over the years (Langa 2020; Morrell 1994, 1998; Morrell, Jewkes, and Lindegger 2012; Ratele 2013, 2014, 2015). The focus on masculinity hierarchies has led to the development of a body of knowledge highlighting the categorisation and power differentials between men. However, limited attention has been given to power differentials that shape gay masculinities. Gay identities are multifaceted, and it is impractical to categorise gay men into a single homogenous masculinity since the construction of their identities is shaped by various identities and spaces in which these identities intersect (Maake, Rugunan, and Smuts 2021; Tillapaugh 2016). These intersectional identities position gay men into different social statuses that inform their power to construct and negotiate their identities (De Vos 1996; Kiguwa and Langa 2017; Scott 2017).

In this paper, I argue that there are power differentials between various categories of gay men that inform the construction of multiple unequal masculinities. The intersectionality of race, class, gender, sexual identity and space informs the power differentials amongst gay masculinities, and through a review of literature, the paper provides an intersectional analysis of three gay masculinities, namely, White gay masculinity, Black middle-class gay masculinity, and Black township working-class

gay masculinities. This paper seeks to answer the question: How does intersectionality advance our understanding of how power, privilege and oppression operate in the construction of multiple unequal gay masculinities in the South African context? To answer this question, I consider the unique historical context of South Africa, which has informed much of the intersectional inequalities that are evident amongst various groups of gay men post-1994, and consult some cases that alert us to these inequalities. I further consider how heteronormativity within particular spaces in South Africa informs the power differentials that allow some gay men to negotiate a place while rendering others vulnerable to exclusion.

Gay masculinities in South Africa are infinite due to the endless intersections that shape the different realities and experiences of gay men, and the focus on only three masculinities does not translate to fixed categories of gay masculinities. The paper recognises the multifaceted nature of gay men's experiences and interrogates these three masculinities as a guideline to how power differentials that inform the construction of multiple unequal gay masculinities can be analysed in the South African context. Intersectionality and Raewyn Connell's (1998, 2000, 2003, 2005) masculinity theory is employed in developing an argument on how the stigmatisation of certain identity markers and the power dynamics that shape the different experiences of gay men inform the power differentials amongst gay masculinities. Thus, the paper explores gay masculinities keeping in mind that gay men are not a homogenous group but are divided by various identity intersections that privilege some gay men while disadvantaging others. These identity intersections further converge with social spaces and the historical context, collectively directing the power divisions that guide the construction of multiple unequal gay masculinities.

Historical Context: The Struggle towards Gay Liberation and Visibility

The gay and lesbian liberation movement in South Africa emerged as a response to the apartheid government's attempt to criminalise same-sex relationships in the 1960s through an amendment to the Immorality Act of 1957 (Belkin and Canaday 2010; Brown 2014; Gevisser 1994). Accordingly, the government sought to classify same-sex relations as a criminal offence, which could result in imprisonment of up to three years (Gevisser 1994). The sexual inclinations of gay men, lesbians and transgender people were socially constructed as unnatural and sanctioned by law, particularly in criminal, civil and family law (Ilyayambwa 2012). The apartheid government emphasised heterosexual marriage and reproduction and condemned same-sex relationships due to their non-procreational nature (Brown 2014). The arguments against sexual minority identities were driven by heteronormative Christian religious doctrines that only recognised sexual relations between people of the opposite sexes as legitimate, with no other possibilities (Brown 2014; Gevisser 1994; Ilyayambwa 2012).

The earliest gay and lesbian organisations, such as the Gay Association of South Africa (GASA), challenged the criminalisation of same-sex relations; however, they represented the interests of White urban middle-class gay men and were not interested

in challenging the broader racial, political structures that oppressed Black gay people (De Ru 2013; Gevisser 1994). Due to their class and racial privilege, White gay activists were able to raise funds through their connections with White middle-class gay men, which allowed them the legal representation to fight against the enactment of legislation that could potentially criminalise same-sex desires. While they were able to prevent the criminalisation amendments to the Immorality Act, it found representation in other revisions, including the increase of the age of consent to same-sex engagements from 16 to 19 and the implementation of the “party” clause that criminalised male individuals who engaged in behaviours that stimulated sexual passion or gratification with other males at a party (Gevisser 1994).

The lack of representation and unwillingness to support Black gay and lesbian people in the movement led to a racial divide, and the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand (GLOW) was established by a gay anti-apartheid activist, Simon Nkoli, who was concerned about the lack of Black gay representation in the predominantly White gay organisations. The struggles of Black gay people were different from the middle-class White gay community since they were oppressed on multiple grounds, including their sexual identities, race and class positions. The organisation provided a space where Black gay people could have a voice, engage as equals and gain access to services that were particularly relevant to them (De Vos 1996; Gevisser 1994). Through the efforts of GLOW, the fight for gay and lesbian rights became a component of the broader movement against the apartheid government’s oppression, leading to the African National Congress’s (ANC) formal recognition of gay and lesbian rights and the inclusion of prohibition of discrimination based on sexual identity in the democratic Constitution post-1994 (De Vos 1996).

The recognition of sexual minority rights led to the increased visibility of gay and lesbian people, mainly through the establishment of “gay-friendly” spaces, such as the Johannesburg Pride, nightclubs, and Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Intersex Queer and other (LGBTIQ+) wellness establishments. However, legal recognition did not transition into acceptance on a social level, since significant research demonstrates that some South Africans do not support the acknowledgement of gay and lesbian rights and continue to discriminate against sexual minority individuals (Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Sandy 2015; Vincent and Howell 2014). While noting that discrimination against sexual minority individuals is a problem in the country, some research has found that it is more intense in rural communities and townships than in urban cities and towns (Ferim 2016; Mamba 2020; Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Sandy 2015; Msibi 2012). Cases of corrective rape, gay murders and violence against gay people occurring in townships and rural areas have been reported by various media publications, indicating the extent to which they affect the well-being of working-class sexual minority individuals and silence them through the perpetuation of fear (Davis 2012; Khanyile 2020).

This historical context highlights some of the inequalities that place Black and White gay men in different power positions due to their unequal access to power and privilege.

Similar to an earlier analysis of White and Black masculinities (see Morrell 1994, 1998), the construction and understanding of gay masculinities in post-apartheid South Africa can be understood by considering how historical racial and class differences continue to shape the unequal access to power and privilege amongst gay men. In analysing these intersections, we get to understand how they experience power and privilege in constructing their masculinities. The following sub-section, entitled intersectional masculinities, discusses further the construction of masculinities with reference to the theoretical works of Connell (2000, 2003, 2005) and Crenshaw (1989, 1991).

Intersectional Masculinities

To interrogate the nuanced power relationships between multiple gay masculinities in South Africa, it is essential to consider the power dynamics and identity intersections that shape the relationships between different categories of gay men. Intersectionality refers to intersections of identities in shaping the realities of vulnerable and marginalised groups. It is rooted in the United States (US) Black feminist projects of the 1970s and 1980s, which raised the interconnectedness of race, gender, class and sexuality in shaping the experiences of Black women (Collins 1989). Black African American feminist scholars such as Collins (1989, 2000), Davis (1981), hooks (1982, 1984) and Lorde (1984) have written extensively on the historical race, class and gender studies to intersectionality and actively contributed to our understandings of the marginalisation and exclusion of Black women in the US. Lorde (1984) further considered the intersection of sexual identities with race, class and gender and how homophobia intersects with racism and heterosexism to silence and marginalise lesbian women. While the scholarship on multiple oppressions of race, class, gender and sexuality had already been established, Crenshaw (1989) coined the term intersectionality based on her critique of the antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. Crenshaw (1989) criticised feminist theory and antiracist politics' single-issue framework in attempts to dismantle racism and sexism. Crenshaw (1989) argues that we fail to address discrimination because our understandings do not consider the different intersecting axes of social division that inform our different experiences.

Within intersectionality, we reconstruct single issues of discrimination in the form of racism, sexism, classism and heterosexism and refer to power relations of racism, sexism, classism and heterosexism that only acquire meaning in relation to each other and not in isolation (Collins and Bilge 2016). Collins (2015, 2) states, "the term intersectionality references the critical insight that race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities." As such, intersectionality involves understanding and critically analysing the complexities of social contexts, human relations and human existence. In her work, Crenshaw (1989, 1991) calls for an intersectional framework that considers intersections of multiple identities in efforts to liberate oppressed groups. Intersectionality alerts us to the complex and contradictory nature of the world around us; for instance, it acknowledges

multiple layers of differences within inter- and intra-groups and how these differences inform the relations of power and privilege. For us to understand the issues of inequality fully, it is imperative to question inequalities that are prevalent between women and between men and those that are evident within subcategories of men and women, taking into account other identity markers of social division, including gender, class, race, sexuality, nationality and age as interconnected systems of power that inform men and women's experiences in various social spaces (Collins 2015; Rahman and Jackson 2010). An intersectional framework brings to the forefront the different identity intersections that privilege some gay men while disadvantaging others, indicating that oppression is encountered differently by various groups of gay men in South Africa. An intersectional analysis of gay masculinities illuminates the underlying power imbalances amongst gay men in different social spaces.

Some critics of intersectionality have raised concerns with complexities that emanate from the endlessness of differences in the social world and the categorisation of people based on these differences (Butler 1990; McCall 2005). For example, Butler (1990, 182) argues that "theories of feminist identity that elaborate predicates of colour, sexuality, ethnicity, class and able-bodiedness invariably close with an embarrassed 'etc.' at the end of the list. Through this horizontal trajectory of adjectives, these positions strive to encompass a situated subject but invariably fail to be complete." I suggest that these criticisms propel researchers in gender and sexuality studies to engage with the interconnectedness of multiple identities to address the problem of inequality in various social spaces. Categorising gay men into various masculinities based on intersecting identity markers and social spaces that they occupy helps us address Butler's (1990) concern about the endlessness of differences, since this develops an awareness of how certain identity markers collectively yield privilege for gay men, while others may result in oppression. The beauty of intersectionality lies in the reality that it does not seek to exhaust the endless differences but in understanding the complex intersections of identity markers that inform power relationships in social spaces. Ultimately, it is this endlessness of differences that allows for a continuing exploration and interrogation of power relations in society, and it should be embraced because identities are a part of our social world and inform power relations that privilege some people while oppressing others. Therefore, I employ intersectionality to demonstrate and develop an understanding of how intersecting identity markers inform different experiences of power and privilege in relation to the construction and analysis of gay masculinities. I seek to explore how various interconnecting identity markers situate gay men into different positions of power and shape the construction of multiple unequal gay masculinities in South Africa.

Connell (2000, 2003, 2005) is cognisant of the role that identity intersections play in shaping the different forms of masculinities, as she argues that the interplay between race, gender, and class informs the constructions of multiple and changing masculinities. Connell (1998, 2005) argues that at any point in time, there is one masculinity that is culturally exalted and accepted as the ideal and dominant

masculinity. She argues that this masculinity is hegemonic because society accepts and legitimises its power. It is important to note that there is no single hegemonic masculinity, since one may be hegemonic in a specific context at a particular time and subordinate in a different context (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). However, it is clear from Connell's (1995, 1998, 2005) global studies on masculinities that a common characteristic of hegemonic masculinities in many societies is heterosexuality. These masculinities are privileged by heteronormative beliefs and ideas that afford men who identify as heterosexual the power to position other men in subordinate, marginalised, and sometimes vulnerable positions. Connell (1995, 2005) argues that gay men are in subordinate positions in the hegemonic gender structure. Gay men are positioned in subordinate positions since they do not meet the heteronormative requirements that assert heterosexuality as a primary attribute to qualify one as a "real man" (Connell 2005). Thus, gay masculinities are hindered from reaching a state of hegemony because the legitimacy of these masculinities is questioned and often not accepted.

Connell's (1998, 2000, 2003, 2005) work has been influential in understanding masculinities and power differentials in South Africa. Earlier applications of Connell's theory in South Africa may be traced to Robert Morrell's (1994, 1998) historical analysis of masculinities, with a particular interest in how race, class and gender structured the hierarchal ordering of White and Black masculinities. In his work, Morell (1998) demonstrates how certain intersections, such as White middle-class men, are afforded the privilege and power to dominate other intersections (Black working-class men). He further notes that Black masculinities are not equally disadvantaged because while White masculinities dominate most due to the apartheid racial divide, they are hegemonic in some contexts, such as the predominantly Black rural communities (Morell 1998), supporting Connell's notion that some masculinities may be hegemonic in specific contexts, and subordinate in others. Morrell (1994, 1998) paved the way for further research on the construction of masculinities and power differentials amongst men in South Africa.

Building on Morrell's (1994, 1998) work, subsequent analysis and conceptualisations of masculinities in South Africa took sexual identity into account and considered the power differentials that positioned heterosexual men at the top of the masculinity hierarchy and gay men at the bottom. These analyses were necessary considering the extent of homophobia and heteronormativity in South Africa pre- and post-1994. In his work, Ratele (2011, 2013, 2014, 2015) alludes to the role that heteronormativity has played in disadvantaging gay men and excluding them from dominant conceptions of African masculinities. The hegemonic ideas on African masculinities exclude gay men as they are not considered "real men" because they engage in sexual relationships that are not procreational in nature (Kiguwa and Langa 2017; Langa 2020; Maake et al. 2021; Ratele 2011, 2013, 2015; Scott 2017).

In the exploration of power differentials between heterosexual and gay masculinities, we see an interrogation of multiple heterosexual masculinities and a single homogenous

gay masculinity. This discrepancy does not allow for a more profound and nuanced understanding of gay masculinities in South Africa. Gay men are not a coherent homogenous group; they are different and do not experience power, privilege and oppression in the same manner. It is only if we consider the intersections of identity markers, such as race, class and gender, with a sexual identity, that we can get to interrogate the differences that inform the construction of multiple gay masculinities and explore the power and privilege that position gay men in dominant or subordinate positions. In line with Ural and Bospinar (2017), class differences and social settings matter in how working- and middle-class gay men negotiate identities, present themselves and perform their masculinities. As such, this paper takes Connell's masculinity theory further and builds on existing and growing literature on masculinities in South Africa by highlighting the need for an intersectional lens to the construction and analysis of gay masculinities.

African Gay Masculinities: Towards an Understanding of Power Differentials amongst Gay Men

White Gay Masculinity

Historical research on lesbian and gay movements in South Africa demonstrates that there have always been differences in the experiences of White and gay men (Gevisser 1994). While White gay men were disadvantaged and discriminated against based on their sexual identities, Black gay men experienced double oppression since they were discriminated against based on their sexual and racial identities. Additionally, White gay men occupied privileged class positions due to opportunities to access better education and employment, while Black gay men, like many other Black South Africans, were denied access to quality education and better jobs due to the apartheid racial division of labour (Gevisser 1994). The class differences positioned White gay men in affluent urban areas and confined Black gay men to townships and rural areas with little opportunities for upward mobility.

The privileged positions of White gay men led to the construction of a White gay dominant masculinity with the powers and resources to challenge the apartheid government on its anti-gay laws (De Ru 2013; Gevisser 1994). This masculinity was dominant because it was able to form organisations and mobilise funds to protect their rights and practise their agency without fear of the extreme intimidation and violence experienced by Black people who dared to go against the government (Gevisser 1994; Ilyambwa 2012). The exclusive representation of White middle-class gay men in GASA is an example of the historical White privilege that allowed for the construction of a hegemonic White gay masculinity that had access to power structures that Black gay men could not access due to their race and class.

Although a White gay masculinity was not hegemonic in the broader political structures due to heteronormative cultures and beliefs that placed the White heterosexual masculinity in a hegemonic status, this masculinity was dominant in the gay and lesbian

community due to its racial and class privileges that allowed White gay men to negotiate their gay identities (Belkin and Canaday 2010; De Ru 2013; Van Zyl et al. 1999). The Black gay masculinity was subordinated due to Black gay men's race and class, which disadvantaged them and limited their powers to mobilise or challenge the apartheid anti-gay laws. The evidence lies in the predominantly White gay and lesbian organisations' unwillingness to include race in their fight against anti-gay laws, since race did not disadvantage White gay men (Brown 2014; De Ru 2013; Gevisser 1994). The racial exclusion in these lesbian and gay organisations served to preserve the status quo (racial discrimination of Black people) and protect the dominance of the White gay masculinity.

Post-1994, South Africa employed a democratic constitution that protects the rights of all people; however, due to the legacy of apartheid, White privilege is a reality and continues to entrench racial inequalities since unemployment and poverty remain high in Black more than White communities (Resane 2021; Vanyoro 2021). Geographical and racial segregation is still prevalent, with many Black people occupying disadvantaged rural areas and townships while White people secure residence in affluent urban areas (Resane 2021; Seekings and Nattrass 2005). The legacies of apartheid automatically place White gay men at a point of privilege compared to Black gay men who bear the brunt of a legacy of exclusion and disempowerment (Milani 2015; Vanyoro 2021). Against this backdrop, I argue that White gay masculinity remains hegemonic even in post-apartheid South Africa, and I share examples of two prominent LBGTIQ+ spaces that exalt, validate and legitimise this hegemony.

Since its inception in 2009, the winners of Mr Gay World South Africa, previously known as Mr Gay South Africa, have always been White middle-class gay men, and despite reported concerns of racism over the years, there has been little change. It was only in 2021 when the first Black gay man, Bongani Ndima (who was initially the first runner-up) was crowned Mr Gay South Africa, taking over the reign from a White gay male winner, Louw Beytenbacht, who went on to win the international Mr Gay World title (Iguar 2021). Ndima soon gave up the title amidst claims of racism, following differential treatment, unfulfilled promises and lack of support from the Mr Gay World South Africa organisation (Mazibuko 2022). Winners of Mr Gay World South Africa pageants are seen as role models in the LBGTIQ+ community, and the competition continues to embody an ideal White gay masculinity. Thus, the success of White middle-class gay men in the competition empowers the White gay masculinity and protects its hegemony in LBGTIQ+ spaces. The empowerment of the White gay masculinity indicates how race and class inform the power differentials between White and Black gay masculinities and inform the power differences in a democratic South Africa.

Although founded on the principles of inclusivity and representation in post-apartheid South Africa, the famous Johannesburg Pride Parade has been heavily criticised for its racial and class exclusions, which developed the view that the organisation is

predominantly White and middle-class (Conway 2022; Matebeni 2018). The criticisms emanate from the Johannesburg Pride's geographical locations over the years as the event has been held in historically White affluent suburbs, limiting access to the Black working-class and unemployed LGBTIQ+ people in the surrounding historically Black townships (Conway 2022; Matebeni 2018; Scott 2017). The organisation has further been criticised for lacking representation and support for the Black LGBTIQ+ community. A privileged group organises it and predominantly represents the lifestyles of a privileged White urban LGBTIQ+, paying little attention to the issues that affect Black LGBTIQ+ people, such as racism, unemployment, and poverty (Conway 2022; Matebeni 2018). Taking the racial and class exclusion of disadvantaged sexual minorities, I argue that White gay men, as part of this privileged community, are provided with a fertile ground to practise their agency and promote their interests, while most Black gay men located in townships are denied access to this prominent Pride space due to consumption and limited resources. White gay masculinity is again provided with a space where it can be visible and dominant, while most Black gay masculinities are excluded with little visibility. Some Black gay masculinities have access to this space due to their privileged class positions, and I discuss a Black middle-class gay masculinity in the subsequent section.

Black Middle-class Gay Masculinity

While it has been established that White gay masculinity benefits from the unequal legacy of apartheid in South Africa, it is worth noting that Black gay men post-1994 are divided by class statuses that dictate their degree of access to resources and spaces. Following South Africa's democratic transition, there has been significant growth in the Black middle-class communities because of improved access to tertiary education and better jobs (Southall 2016). The increased access to tertiary education and better-paying jobs has allowed some Black people upward mobility, equipping them with the resources to gain residence in previously White affluent and privileged areas (Southall 2016). The Black middle-class gay masculinity is situated within these areas, which are mainly access controlled, gated, and have 24-hour security. Occupying these previously White affluent urban spaces comes with privileges that some gay men, particularly those in the townships and rural communities, cannot access.

Various researchers argue that geographical location has unavoidable repercussions on the construction of gay identities and masculinities (Langa 2020; Maake et al. 2021; Matlebyane 2020). Studies on discrimination against gay people in rural areas, township and urban spaces have found that while heteronormative beliefs and values are evident, discrimination is more prevalent in rural areas and townships than in urban areas. The argument is supported by the extensive hate crimes and violence against lesbian and gay people reported in South African townships and rural areas (Khanyile 2020; Mamba 2020; Msibi 2012). The structure of affluent urban spaces (high walls, security gates and 24-hour security patrols) offer gay men opportunities for independence, individualism, anonymity, and reduced pressure to conform to heteronormative gender

expectations, since the heterosexual gaze in this space is not as attentive as in rural and township spaces.

There is a constant policing of men's behaviours in rural and township communities, which discourages the non-normative performance of masculinities (Msibi 2009). Gay men in urban middle-class areas are not exposed to this intense policing of their masculinities due to the degree of anonymity and privacy offered by these spaces. The reduced exposure to heteronormative policing does not suggest that Black gay men in urban spaces do not experience discrimination, but it demonstrates that they are not as exposed to heteronormative surveillance as gay men in the townships, whose behaviours and relations are easily observed because of the close-knit community ties. Black middle-class gay masculinity holds some form of tertiary education, occupies a professional job, and has some financial stability which secures their consumption and residence in the affluent urban spaces—a privilege that is not accessible to all Black gay men. They are disadvantaged by persisting racial inequalities in these spaces but privileged by their class position, which offers opportunities to escape the conservative heteronormative beliefs and values inherent in township cultures.

Black Working-class Township Gay Masculinities

Black South African townships remain poor and are known to be heteronormative, and some of the most severe forms of discrimination, such as corrective rape and gay murders, occur in these spaces (Davis 2012). Various studies in South Africa have found that LGBTIQ+ people are not safe in South African townships, as they continue to experience hate and violence daily (Hlongwane 2016; Naidoo and Karels 2012). The inclusive South African legal framework has not been sufficient to change homophobic attitudes on the social level, and research demonstrates that South African townships are some of the areas in which heteronormativity and homophobia are rife. Langa (2020) published a book on young Black boys' experiences of constructing masculinity in the Alexandra township, Johannesburg, and his findings indicate that homophobia and violence form a crucial element of the Black heterosexual masculinity in this township, as it forms part of young Black men's socialisation into the dominant ideas of what being a man entails. The young men in Langa's (2020) research learned from an early age to distance themselves from any behaviour or people associated with gay identities and called gay people names and bullied gay boys in school.

Similarly, a study conducted by Bhana and Mayeza (2017) in a working-class primary school in KwaZulu-Natal found that young boys' views on masculinity were violent and homophobic. They did not consider Black gay boys "real boys" and held that they did not play with them because they were weak and could not fight or behave like the other boys. Langa's (2020) research was conducted over 12 years, and considering that Bhana and Mayeza's (2017) research findings are recent, it creates a picture that homophobic perceptions in townships are far from being eradicated. Hegemonic conceptions of masculinity in the townships exclude gay masculinities and discourage their visibility

by perpetuating violent and homophobic reactions to observable gay boys and men in the spaces.

In my discussion of the Black working-class township gay masculinities, I refer to the “straight-acting” Black gay and “feminine” gay masculinity. Spiece (2020) argues that while gay masculinities occupy subordinate positions in the hegemonic gender hierarchy, gay men who perform masculinity in heteronormative ways may occupy more dominant positions than those who do not. The “straight-acting” gay men can capitalise on particular social privileges, such as avoiding harassment and discrimination (Spiece 2020). Accordingly, the “straight-acting” Black gay masculinity in the townships is less visible and yet dominant due to its alliance with heteronormative gender expectations and the heterosexual masculinity. This masculinity is often represented in what is called “After 9s”; a practice of gay men who maintain public heterosexual relationships and hidden gay sexual relationships (Matlebyane 2020). However, not all men who portray a “straight-acting image” are “After 9s” since some only engage in sexual relationships with gay men but adhere to the gender normative expectations that assert how men should behave. For example, in a study conducted by Maake et al. (2021) on the experiences of Black gay men who worked in mining towns and stayed in small mining townships, it was found that Black gay men engaged in what Goffman (1963) terms “passing”; a sexual identity management strategy in which the gay identity is hidden, and a heterosexual identity is constructed to escape discrimination. The participants in Maake et al.’s (2021) research were less vulnerable to discrimination because they incorporated aspects of a heterosexual masculinity into their identity and maintained a heterosexual front. While this act may have some psychological implications, it gives these men the power to negotiate an acceptable place in the heteronormative townships and navigate fear. The “straight-acting” Black gay township masculinity becomes attractive to Black gay men in townships because of the privileges that come with being known as heterosexual and experiencing little exclusion or discrimination. As Goffman (1963) argues, anyone in a position to “pass” will do so to escape the negative connotations of embodying a stigmatised identity.

The “feminine” gay masculinity is vulnerable in the townships and is predominantly subordinated because it does not resemble the hegemonic heterosexual masculinity. This masculinity is often questioned due to the socially defined feminine characteristics that gay men may portray. The vulnerability of this masculinity results from the dominant ideas of what it means to be a man in the townships, definitions that often view femininity in men as a weakness (Langa 2020; Ratele 2011). Ratele (2011) argues that in some South African cultural traditions, being a real man is closely attached to the use of one’s genitals, where real men are expected to penetrate women and not other men or be penetrated by other men. The portrayal of behaviours that are socially described as feminine may discredit the person portraying them in the eyes of other men, leading to their exclusion from the concept of a “real man.” In their research, Maake et al. (2021) discovered that most participants distanced themselves from “feminine gays” due to the perception that the association would bring their masculinity into disrepute.

Furthermore, they constantly monitor their behaviours to identify and eliminate attributes that others may observe as feminine and actively adjust their behaviours to align with the dominant heterosexual masculinity.

Participants in Matlebyane's (2020) qualitative study on Black men's experiences of negotiating masculinity indicated that due to heteronormative constructions of masculinity and fear of being isolated and viewed as outcasts, they conform to the heterosexual gender normative expectations and avoid portraying mannerisms that are socially defined as feminine. The participants self-monitored and "corrected" feminine mannerisms, which they argued posed a risk of their sexual identities being disclosed and possibly encountering rejection and stigma (Matlebyane 2020). The findings in the two studies are in line with Spiece's (2020) argument that since passing as straight may result in certain privileges, being "not gay enough" becomes significantly more desirable than being "too gay," and the two categories are on the opposite positions on the gender hierarchy, with one category being privileged while the other is marginalised.

The cases above demonstrate the vulnerability of the "feminine" gay masculinity, often stigmatised more than the "straight-acting" Black gay masculinity. Considering the close association of the "straight-acting" gay masculinity to the hegemonic heterosexual masculinity in townships, I argue that this masculinity has the potential to be dominant when compared to the marginalised "feminine" gay masculinity in the township spaces. The dominance emanates from the privileges of conforming to heteronormative social expectations, including tolerance and some degree of acceptance. The fear of discrimination and violence marginalises the "feminine" gay masculinity as it is often under siege, not allowing or providing space to negotiate a position in the heteronormative township contexts. These masculinities are marginalised because they are positioned in previously disadvantaged Black townships on the peripheries of the cities, without the safety provided by high walls, boom gates and 24-hour security. Compared to middle-class gay men who stay in affluent areas in the cities, gay men in the townships do not enjoy the same degree of individuality that can allow them the power to construct their identities without the limitations of collective heteronormative ideals held in the townships. Their access to gay networks and communities, including gay Pride, gay clubs, and gay health services, is limited by geography and consumption for those who cannot afford the resources to travel to these spaces. As such, the township gay masculinities are somewhat excluded in the prominent visible urban "gay spaces," which predominantly represent the lifestyles of White gay men and middle-class Black gay men.

Conclusion

The paper critically analysed gay masculinities in the context of South Africa, and it has been argued that gay men's masculinities are different due to the multiple identity markers that empower some gay men while disempowering others. Race, class, gender, sexuality and space were identified as prominent identity markers that inform the social statuses of gay men in South African society. While discrimination against sexual

minorities continues to be a problem in South Africa, the intersections of these identity markers make us aware of gay men's different experiences of oppression. This awareness allows for an understanding that we cannot view gay men as a homogenous group because of their common sexual identity. Masculinity studies in South Africa have been less critical of the complex identity intersections that inform the construction of gay masculinities. My argument is that we need to employ intersectionality in our attempts to comprehend gender relations between gay and heterosexual men and between various groups of gay men. In understanding gay masculinities, we should not focus only on sexual identity, but be critical of the intersections between sexual identity and other identity markers and the spaces that gay men occupy in society. The paper demonstrates that intersectionality is crucial in interrogating power dynamics that inform the construction of multiple unequal gay masculinities. Arguments raised in this paper are not against the interrogation of the privilege of identifying as a heterosexual man in South Africa, but suggest that we should also be critical of the intersectional differences that control gay men's access to power and privilege. Thus, while gay men are a marginalised group and often occupy subordinate positions on the gender hierarchy due to their sexual identities, when we interrogate intersectional differences among them, we learn that there are intragroup differences that privilege some better than others. South Africa has a unique historical context that has shaped the current realities of gay men. Therefore, the country's historical context must be considered in attempts to develop an understanding of the inequalities between gay men. The historically institutionalised racism in South Africa predominantly informs the racial and class differences between gay men, and we can comprehend the power differentials between gay masculinities when we consider the legacies of these historical inequalities. We learn from previous research that historical context is essential in developing an understanding of masculinities and gender relations amongst men in South Africa. This paper visited the country's historical context in its analysis of the current realities of gay men and the complex power relationships between various gay masculinities.

Previous research has indicated how intersections of identities shape masculinities, particularly amongst heterosexual men and, to some extent, gay men in South Africa. However, there is a need to develop knowledge of power and privilege amongst gay masculinities and break down the notion of a single subordinated gay masculinity in a broader hierarchy of masculinities. Identity intersections that shape the constructions of multiple gay masculinities are continuous, and they cannot all be interrogated in a single paper; hence the need for gender and sexuality to produce research that pays attention to multifaceted gay experiences and unearths the complex nature of gay masculinities in the South African context. Some of the masculinities mentioned in this paper can be interrogated further and broken down into multiple categories when more intersections are considered. For example, there are opportunities to interrogate what I presented as a White gay masculinity by considering other intersections such as age, occupation, and religion and how they inform the construction of multiple White gay masculinities. It is necessary to consider the endless identity intersections that inform the construction of multiple unequal gay masculinities in developing nuanced understandings and

contributing to knowledge on African gay masculinities. It is in our understanding of these intersectional relationships of power and privilege amongst gay men that we can interrogate the different constructions of gay masculinities in South Africa, and not develop a single idea of what being a gay man in South Africa means. If we do not break away from the notion of a single homogenous gay masculinity, we will continually fall into the trap of telling one story of how gay men construct their masculinity, which will prioritise the experiences of the most accessible gay men, while marginalising the less accessible and silenced.

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