UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Faculty of Community and Health Sciences

RESEARCH MINI-THESIS

The Negotiation of Romantic Relationships Amongst Gay Male Students in a Western Cape University.

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~~Abstract~~

Narratives of romantic relationships are intrinsically connected to the social context in which they develop. Forming relationships and embracing intimacy can be complex for gay male students in spaces that censure same-sex sexual identities and gender diversity. The aim of this study was to enquire on the narratives of gay male university students' negotiation of romantic relationships within a Western Cape university space. The study's objectives were to understand this negotiation by exploring these students' social interactions and the social scripts that are related to same-sex sexuality and intimacy within the university space. The study utilised a qualitative research method that is theoretically grounded in narrative theory. The study made use of purposive and snowball sampling. Six gay male university students from a Western Cape university participated in face-to-face semi-structured individual (one-on-one) interviews that were transcribed and analysed using thematic narrative analysis. The participants told stories involving a lack of safety, stigma, acceptance and support of their sexuality and the visibility of their relationships. Informed by these diverse stories, the study found two contrasting narratives of the negotiation of intimacy within the university space. While one narrative depicts the university as a positive, enabling, and supportive space, the other narrative contrasts the space as exclusionary, persecutory, and monitoring. The study concludes that prevailing negative scripts about same-sex sexuality within the university space obscure the narratives of intimacy amongst gay male students' relationships. The study calls for the advancement of unambiguously safe and inclusive university spaces that can promote awareness of sexuality and gender diversity within the broader South African social context.

Key words: intimacy, gay university students, romantic relationships, universities, South Africa

Plagiarism Declaration

I, Putuke Kekana, declare that this research mini thesis titled: *The negotiation of romantic relationships amongst gay male students in a Western Cape university*, is my own, unaided work in fulfilment a Master of Psychology degree at the University of the Western Cape. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other university. All sources that I have used or quoted are indicated and acknowledged as complete references in accordance with the 7th Edition of the American Psychological Association's Public Manual.

Signed: ……………………….

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I would like to acknowledge my research supervisor and the six research participants who contributed to the success of this project.

To my supervisor, Dr Leigh Adams Tucker. Thank you for agreeing to supervise my research. Thank you for sharpening and moulding all the different research ideas into this one solid topic all the way back in August 2018 right after my acceptance into Mpsych programme. Thank you for the dedication and enthusiasm you have shown towards this research. I appreciate your patience and your timeous feedback throughout the entire research process.

To the six brave research participants. Thank you for sharing your stories with me. May they bring about the much-needed light in most of the dark spaces LGBTQ+ students find themselves in. Together we have added to the knowledge and awareness of gay students' experiences.

This research serves as a voice that advocates for the awareness of LGBTQ+ people that is silenced in various spaces. They will hear us!

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Glossary of Terms

Intimacy

In this research report, the term *intimacy* is associated with an interpersonal and subjective sense of connectedness. This connectedness can be accomplished through the sharing of psychological and sexual desires such as emotional attachment, social engagement, or physical, and sexual practices (Kohlenberg et al., 2009).

Relationship

The term *relationship* is used in the report to denote a romantic relationship between two people which is characterised by the practicing of intimacy. The report uses the term *same-sex relationships* in line with arguments against using the term "gay relationships" which can be regarded as excluding of bisexual individuals (Marcus, 2015). Nonetheless, the focus on this study is based on men who identify as *gay*.

Gender

Gender is defined as a social performance of cultural prescripts of being masculine or feminine; man or woman (Butler, 1990; VandenBos, 2015). Some people do not conform to this binary prescript in their identity or *gender expression*. Gender is distinct from the term *sex*, which denotes the biological aspects of being male or female (VandenBos, 2015).

Gender Expression

Gender expression denotes an individual's communication and presentation of their gender within a given culture. This includes their appearance, behaviour, interests, or activities (American Psychological Association [APA], 2012).

Sexuality

Sexuality defines various aspects of sexual interactions, which include sexual activity or emotional desire, and sexual attraction towards someone of a certain gender or sex (GLAAD, 2016; Rutter & Schwartz, 2012).

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is defined as an integration between a group of individuals' sexuality and self-labelling (VandenBos, 2015). Examples of sexual orientation include, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual, amongst others.

Gay

Gay is a form of sexual orientation that is characterised by a practice of sexuality amongst individuals of the same-sex or gender (GLAAD, 2016). The term gay can refer to both lesbian women and gay men, although it is mostly used to refer to same-sex sexuality specifically between men (GLAAD, 2016). When reference is made specifically to gay men, terms "gay male" or "gay men" are used in this report. The term gay is preferred in literature over the term "homosexual", which has pathologising and marginalising historical connotations (APA, 2012).

Sexual Minorities

Sexual minorities is a term used to identify a group of people whose gender expression, sexuality, and sexual orientation are different from most of the people in their space. This group mainly includes individuals who are gay or lesbian, transgender, and gender non-conforming (Math & Seshadri, 2013). In some instances, these sexual minorities are grouped into a "community" labelled as LGBTQ+ which stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and other sexual and gender minorities (GLAAD, 2016).

Social Space (Space)

The term *social space* or *space* describes not only the physical attributes of an area occupied by people, but also the socio-cultural norms and conflicts that prescribe the interpersonal relations amongst the occupants (Churchland, 1996; Richardson & Jensen, 2003).

Social Scripts (Scripts)

Social scripts or *scripts* are culturally sanctioned norms that determine how people as social actors make meaning of their sense of self and their social interactions within specific social contexts (Crossley, 2007; Meng, 2008).

Negotiation

The term *negotiation* is used in this report to underline the experiences of interacting with prescribed scripts within certain spaces (Silverman, 2013; Meng 2008). Examples of the outcomes of the negotiation includes actions such as "accepting", "resisting" or "conforming" in response to social scripts.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Background

To fully appreciate the narratives of South African gay university students, it is necessary to interrogate the social and cultural contexts that inform how these students narrate their stories (Bradbury, 2019; Canoy, 2015; Chase, 2005; Kiguwa, 2015). As Frost (2013) explains: "Individuals make meaning through the construction of relationship stories by choosing from the vast 'menu' of culture, experience, values, and goals to include the most meaningful and important aspects of lived experience into their stories" (p. 51).

After the adoption of the much-celebrated South African constitution in 1994, gay people in South Africa were offered legal protection; and in 2004, same-sex couples were legally able to get married (De Vos, 2015; De Vos & Barnard, 2007; van Zyl, 2011). This legal protection, however, does not reflect the real lived experiences of gay people and their relationships in South African universities and the country at large (De Vos 2015; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2017; Resane, 2020).

Some South African universities have been found to be an intimidating space for gay students to express their sexuality and relationships (Hames, 2007; Lesch, et al., 2017; Matthyse, 2017). There are reports across different South African universities of gay students enduring physical and verbal attacks, as well as discrimination and stigmatisation that is often dismissed or unacknowledged by university management (Brown, 2018; Jagessar & Msibi, 2015; Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Matthyse, 2017; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2015).

In South Africa, there is a dissimilarity between the lived experiences of Black[1] gay people and that of White gay people in terms of the inclusion and acceptance of their sexuality within their communities (Graziano, 2004a; Mashabane & Henderson, 2021; Moolman, 2013; van Zyl, 2011; Visser, 2013). This dissimilarity is due to the intersection of factors such as race, gender, and socio-economic status that are a legacy of South Africa's history of oppression during the Apartheid era (Graziano, 2004a; Nel & Judge, 2008; Resane, 2020). More Black people live in "Black communities" that are characterised by a lower socio-economic status and are rooted in a different culture from that of White people in South Africa (Kenyon et al., 2015; Nel & Judge, 2008; Resane, 2020; van Zyl, 2011; Visser, 2013). Most Black students migrate from these communities towards universities that are based in urban areas. In this space they find relatively diverse attitudes and increased cultural acceptance towards same-sex sexuality and gender expression that are different from their home communities (Francis, 2021a; 2021b; Nduna et al., 2017).

South African universities in large cities have students who come from homes in various provinces. Research studies from these universities indicate that South African university students have diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences with regard to same-sex sexuality that informs social scripts (Brown & Njoko, 2019; Francis, 2021b; Munyuki & Vincent, 2018; Ngabaza et al., 2018). Therefore, the negotiation of intersectional forms of race, class, gender, and sexuality identities found in the broader South African context mirrors the experiences of many sexual minority university students (Hames, 2007; Ngabaza

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[1]In this research the term *Black* is used as a generic and inclusive category of people who share a history of racial oppression due to Apartheid (Coetzee & Roux, 2002). It includes groups of people from African, Coloured, Indian, and Chinese backgrounds as per South African legislation (Coetsee, 2019).

et al., 2018; Brown 2018; Msibi, 2013). According to Brown (2018) and Ngabaza et al. (2018), South African university students have advocated, through protests, for transformation against racial inequality and low socio-economic status that negatively impact Black students' sense of belonging within university spaces. This advocacy for transformation appears disproportionate when compared to valuing the challenges that sexual minorities experience by virtue of their sexuality (Munyuki & Vincent, 2018). While Black sexual minority students from low socio-economic backgrounds may benefit from a transformed university space, the intersectional oppression that they, and other sexual minorities, experience from a homophobic and heteronormative space, is often undervalued (Brown, 2018; Msibi, 2013).

South African university spaces are a microcosm of the broader society (Nduna et al., 2017; Brown & Njoko, 2019). As such, young gay men from homophobic and religious non-urban communities who migrate to urban universities in hopes of expressing their sexuality are disappointed to find the same hostility and religious intolerance shown at home (Nduna et al., 2017; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2015; Nkosi & Masson, 2017). Some university students retain the stereotypical and discriminatory attitudes towards same-sex sexuality that they have learnt from their home communities (Brown & Njoko, 2019; Francis, 2021a; 2021b). This creates uncertainty for gay students to negotiate their sexuality within the university space.

A homophobic space where gay students must negotiate their sexuality may lead to some of them experiencing psychological distress, engaging in high-risk sexual behaviour, and abusing alcohol (Brink, 2017). The perception of healthcare services being homophobic may lead to gay students avoiding accessing services like sexual health information on same-sex sexuality and mental health support services (Brink, 2017; Kiguwa & Nduna, 2017; Müller, 2017; Scheibe et al., 2017; Victor & Nel, 2016).

Some gay students fear expressing their sexuality in the university space. They employ coping mechanisms such as hiding their sexuality, presenting themselves as heterosexual and disassociating themselves from other gay students (Graziano, 2004b; Hames, 2004; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2017). This leads to some of them feeling distressed, developing mental health challenges, and lacking social support (Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2017; Nkosi & Masson, 2017; Rincón et al., 2021). Psychosocial stressors endured by gay people have been found to impact the intimacy of their romantic relationships, requiring innovative psychotherapeutic inventions (Guschlbauer et al., 2019; Rincón et al., 2021).

It is important to acknowledge that almost all the negative experiences endured by gay males and females are also experienced by transgender people in South Africa (Matthyse, 2017; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2015; Nduna et al., 2017).

The main focus of this study was specifically on gay male students, in understanding how theories of masculinity play out in gay men's relationships (Henderson & Shefer, 2008; Henderson, 2018). This population is also of interest in light of specific health implications, such as increased vulnerability towards Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) transmission in the context of same-sex male sexual relations (Brink, 2017; Henderson, 2012).

1.2. Problem Statement

Forming romantic relationships becomes difficult for gay male students in a space that censures gay sexual identities, effeminate behaviour in men, and intimacy between gay men (Francis, 2021a; 2021b; Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Lesch et al., 2017; Prado-Castro & Graham, 2017; Rothmann & Simmonds, 2015). As a result, some gay male students conceal their sexual identity and relationships, whereas those who do not, still feel monitored and unsafe in public spaces (Lesch et al., 2017). Male university residences are reported as unsafe spaces for gay male student couples, due to acts of intimacy between men being condemned, and

additional fears of ridicule, physical attacks and stigmatisation that compromise these students' wellbeing (Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Lesch et al., 2017; Msibi, 2009). There is a need for the transformation of South African universities to become inclusive and safe spaces for sexual minorities (Nzimande, 2017; Rothmann & Simmonds, 2015).

1.3. Aim and Objectives

The aim of the study was to explore the narratives of gay male university students' negotiation of romantic relationships within a Western Cape university space. The study's objectives were to understand this negotiation by exploring the social scripts within the university space that may influence gay male students' experience of their sexuality and intimacy within their romantic relationships. These social scripts were explored by understanding the gay male students' interactions with their romantic partners, as well other people within the university space.

1.4. Research Questions

i.   What are the romantic relationship narratives of gay male students within a Western Cape university space?

ii. How do gay male students negotiate relationships and intimacy within the university space?

1.5. Rationale

Gay male students must negotiate their identity within linguistic norms, socially constructed gender roles, as well as university spaces that are potentially unwelcoming of their sexuality (Francis, 2021a; 2021b; Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Prado-Castro & Graham, 2017). This may have negative implications on their psychosexual development and mental well-being (Lesch et al., 2017; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2017).

Gay male students are limited in spaces and opportunities where they can be intimate, resulting in their relationships and identities being "invisible" (Lesch et al., 2017). The rationale of this study is to highlight the social scripts that inform gay male students' experiences and their romantic relationships. Knowledge in this area will be beneficial for the development of various university intervention strategies and may bring visibility to gay students' stories about their sexuality and relationships.

Furthermore, the topic of intimacy and its challenges within gay male relationships remains generally under-researched (Bosco et al., 2022; Guschlbauer, et al., 2019; Pagliaro, 2021), and is similarly under-researched in relation to experiences of gay university students in South Africa (Nduna et al., 2017; Prado-Castro & Graham, 2017). In South Africa, researching intimacy between gay men may be beneficial in challenging notions of traditional masculinities, from which some gay men script their identities (Henderson & Shefer, 2008). This study may shed more knowledge on role of society in the scripting of gay men's masculinities and identity.

Additional research into the experiences of gay students is necessary to share more diverse stories from different samples which could shape more positive narratives. Taulke-Johnson (2008) and Francis and Reygan (2016) contest that academic scholars should not merely report on the negative narratives of gay students and the expression of their sexuality. According to these authors, this not only gives a partial understanding of the lived experiences of gay students but further "pathologises" gay students' sexuality. This is due to the portrayal of these students as mere victims of heteronormativity, homophobia, and hegemonic masculinity (Francis & Reygan, 2016; Taulke-Johnson, 2008).

There is an identified need for the inclusion or revision of the topic of same-sex relationships in university academic programmes (Nzimande, 2017). The topic of same-sex sexual practices and sexual minorities have been historically reported to be pathologising or

marginalising or stigmatising (Graziano 2004b; Hames, 2007; Richardson, 2004). As institutions that continuously produce and evaluate knowledge, university academic programmes are able challenge many discriminatory societal scripts that prevail in these spaces (Nzimande, 2017; Rothmann & Simmonds, 2015). Therefore, the findings gained from this study may further knowledge that can inform university curricula and contribute to the transformation of university spaces into inclusive and safe spaces for sexual minorities.

1.6.Outline of the Mini Thesis

This chapter introduced the research study's background and presented the problem statement and the aim and objectives The chapter ended with a presentation of the research questions and rationale for the study.

Chapter Two consists of the theoretical framework and literature review. The first part of this chapter will introduce the theoretical framework that informs the conceptualisation of the methodology, data analysis and interpretation. The second part of the chapter will present a review of the literature relevant to the research topic.

Chapter Three describes the methodology used and provides the overall strategies that informed the nature of the research, its findings, and data analysis. The chapter will present the study's research design, research setting, sampling, data collection, the data collection procedure that was followed and the data analysis, trustworthiness, reflexivity, and ethics of the research.

Chapter Four, the findings chapter, will begin with an introduction to the research findings and the research participants. This will be followed by a presentation of the findings and analysis of the themes. The chapter will end with a conclusion about the findings of the study.

Chapter Five will provide a discussion of the research findings in relation to existing literature. The chapter will present the implications of the study's findings, the study's strengths and limitations, recommendations for future research and the conclusion.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework: Narrative Theory

The theoretical conceptualisation of this study is based on narrative theory in psychology (Crossley, 2000). Narrative theory not only informed the methodology and data analysis but also the language used in the literature review as well as the emphasis of social contexts (Goodson & Gill, 2011). Narrative theory, as used in this research, views human beings as social actors, who through linguistic and cultural scripts continuously make meaning of themselves and their interactions with other people (Crossley, 2000; Riessman, 2007; Squire, 2013). The use of narrative theory has been found in various research studies to be invaluable in understanding the subjective meaning in which gay men attach to their same-sex desires, identity, and relationships within socio-political contexts (Frost, 2013; Gil, 2007; Hammack & Cohler, 2011; Plummer, 2001; Smith & Tasker, 2017).

There are different approaches to understanding, defining, and conceptualising narratives and narrative researchers often do not rigidly conform to any one conceptualisation (Squire et al., 2014). From an epistemological point of view, Squire et al. (2014) draw on Elliot (2005) to describe a division of narrative researchers who lean more towards a naturalist or a constructionist conceptualisation (Squire et al., 2014). In a naturalist approach, narratives are a form of resource that function to give light into the reality and truth of the social world. On the other hand, from a constructionist approach, narratives function as constructions of the social world in relation to available cultural, social, and interpersonal resources (Squire et al., 2014). In this research, the theoretical framework of narratives leans more towards the constructionist approach of understanding narratives. A constructionist approach may be beneficial in highlighting the complexity of the social context which the research aims to understand.

According to Crossley (2007), narrative theory in psychology is an approach that "appreciates the linguistic and discursive structuring of 'self' and 'experiences' but also maintains a sense of essentially personal, coherent and 'real' nature of individual subjectivity" (p. 132). Narrative theory is concerned with subjectivity, experience, and fully comprehending the person's thoughts or feelings about events in their life (Crossley, 2007). It therefore works on the premise that there is a "chain of connection" between what a person narrates and their thoughts, feelings, and reflections about the world, themselves, and others (Crossley, 2007).

Although narrative theory appreciates the significant role of language and social structures, the social actor still maintains agency and reflexivity in the narration of his self and the interpretations of his experiences, limited by the linguistic and cultural resources at his disposal (Bradbury, 2019; Crossley, 2000; Goodson & Gill, 2011; Squire, 2013). The understandings of narratives are influenced by the interpersonal relationship between the narrator and audience, their individual subjectivities, and the social context in which stories are told and heard.

The conceptualisation of this study through narrative theory is valuable in emphasising the intersubjective and social interactional manner in which gay males experience intimacy and their relationships. This social interactional nature of narratives has significant implications on the methodology of this study, particularly in the discussion of trustworthiness and reflexivity. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

2.1.1. *Defining Narratives*

The conceptualisation of narratives and their academic analysis have evolved throughout history due to different academic debates and critiques (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015; Herman & Vervaeck, 2005; Squire et al., 2014). Consequently, in narrative research, the definition of the term *narrative* and its distinction from *story* varies

amongst different narrative researchers (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015; Goodson & Gill, 2011; Riessman, 2002; Squire et al., 2014). Stories can be seen as subjective accounts of individuals' experienced or witnessed events and include characters and a setting (Murray, 2008; Riessman, 2002). The term narrative can also be understood as a reconfiguration stemming from a story (Chase, 2005). A story is an individual's subjective account of their experiences that is reconfigured into a narrative (Chase, 2005; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015). This reconfiguration occurs through an individual's telling of their story to another (Silverman, 2013). In telling their story, narrators use socially shared resources such as language and other existing narratives in an attempt to make their audience understand them (Silverman, 2013; Squire, 2013). From this perspective, narratives are therefore a social interaction between a narrator and an audience (Atkinson & Delmont, 2006; Squire, 2013).

Another manner of defining narratives is viewing them as an organised interpretation of social experiences that are informed from the stories that people tell about themselves, others, and the social world. Through shared linguistic communication and cultural conventions, narratives become a broad template from which people tell their stories (Bradbury, 2019; Salway and Gesink, 2018; Squire, 2013). Riessman (2007) cautions that there is no clear and simple definition between the two terms and in contemporary writing, story and narrative are used synonymously. Narratives can be found in visual, textual, or oral form (Riessman, 2007; Squire, 2015). The two concepts are often treated synonymously in literature due to their interconnectedness (Riessman, 2007; Squire et al., 2014).

Drawing from the above definitions, in this study narratives are viewed as broader societal meanings that are formed from a collection and interpretation of individuals' subjective understanding of their own personal stories. While this study appreciates the subjectivity and agency of the participants in telling their stories, there is an additional appreciation that their experiences are informed by the society and culture in which they are

situated. Therefore, socio-cultural contexts, language use, and existing social narratives are important in interpretating participants' stories and the narratives in which they form.

2.1.2. The Importance of Narratives in Understanding Negotiations in Social Spaces

According to Murray (2008), narratives are important in bringing order to a disordered world. The narrator attempts to give meaning by organising disorganised events and experiences. When individuals experience disorder within their social interactions, such as separation, illness, or death of a loved one, they attempt to restore order by using narratives. Narratives are therefore a means of creating order and meaning in an ever-changing world (Murray, 2008). Narratives are a way for individuals to see the world, as well as a way in which they actively construct the world (Murray, 2008).

Narratives can be used by individuals for different purposes for different audiences; they can be used to educate, entertain, persuade, overpower, and account for actions (Plummer, 2001; Riessman, 2007). Narratives can be used as a way to communicate past experiences to an audience and also make sense of those experiences (Riessman, 2007). They can be used by narrators as way of inviting an audience to see the narrator's point of view. Furthermore, in positioning themselves into certain characters and roles in stories, narrators may attempt to portray themselves to the audience in a preferred manner (Riessman, 2007). Similarly, narratives can function to allow individuals to construct their identities and distinguish themselves from others. The stories that narrators tell are further informed by stories told by others, thus creating a link between different individuals (Murray, 2008).

An identity is actively constructed by individuals through narration and performance in a believable manner to an audience (Riessman, 2007). While individuals construct their own identities through narrating their experiences, communities and groups also construct their preferred narratives about themselves (Riessman, 2007). Narratives within a certain

culture can be used to bring people together and form social movements through storytelling that is constructed by cultural conventions (Riessman, 2007; Squire, 2005). Narratives are interactional; they need a narrator and an audience willing to listen and engage (Riessman, 2002). Within a social and historical context, stories can function as a mechanism of mobilising a community and shift perceptions and politics within society, especially for stigmatised individuals (Squire, 2005). Chase (2005) explains that in narrating their stories, participants reinforce, inform, challenge, and stand for and against the status quo. This can be done through individuals' telling of stories that resonate with others and encourage them to form social movements that can, for example, advocate against stigmatisation of gay persons (Plummer, 2001; Riessman, 2007; Squire, 2005).

It therefore becomes clear that narratives are not fixed or definite. They are relational, fluid, contextual and embedded in social interaction. It is for this reason that no one simple definition is adequate in explaining what a narrative is. It is also important to explain the social and cultural contexts in which research participants' narrated experiences are situated. This study thus departs from this call to elicit narratives as constructed from participants' own personal and socio-cultural context. These accounts will provide a better understanding of the lived and witnessed experiences of how gay university students negotiate their sexuality and intimacy within the university setting.

2.2. Literature Review

2.2.1. History of Same-Sex Relationships in South Africa

Canoy (2015) critiques the literature on the topic of intimacy in same-sex relationships as not highlighting social constructs such as class, political power, and culture. Psychological studies are also critiqued as placing focus on individualised understandings of intimacy and thus undervaluing the impact of social constructions to these understandings.

By not contextualising research, the meanings of sexual identities are generalised, and distinctive cultural factors are neglected (Canoy, 2015). Historical, political, cultural, racial, and economic factors are important in discussions around same-sex sexuality and relationships.

In South Africa, as in many traditional and conservative African countries, there is a long-held narrative that same-sex sexuality and intimacy between men is "unAfrican" (Simuziya, 2022; van Zyl, 2011). This narrative fuels many homonegative attitudes and homophobic attacks within many African countries to the detriment of LGBTQ+ people's human rights (De Vos, 2015; Mendos, 2019; Simuziya, 2021; 2022; van Zyl, 2011). Gay men have their sexual intimacy criminalised or stigmatised in many African countries (Mendos, 2019; Resane, 2020; Simuziya, 2022). As a result, a larger number of them conceal their sexuality and have limited sexual health information and support regarding HIV and same-sex sexual practices (Angotti et al., 2019; Mendos, 2019; Stannah et al., 2019).

According to De Vos (2015), some Black communities in South Africa maintain the narrative that same-sex sexual practices and relationships are a middle class, unnatural "Western import" that is foreign to Africa. This narrative denies Black gay people cultural acceptance within their communities (Msibi, 2009; Reid, 2003; Simuziya, 2021), and conceals historical knowledge of same-sex relationships and gender diversity in pre-colonial Africa (De Vos, 2015; Simuziya, 2022; van Zyl, 2011). On the contrary, there is ample evidence in the literature regarding the acceptability and practice of same-sex intimacy, relationships, and cross-gender social roles in pre-colonial African ethnic groups (Graziano, 2004a; Simuziya, 2022; Tucker, 2009; van Zyl, 2011). These same-sex relationships and cross-gender roles continued well into the colonial period in urban areas, amongst male South African miners (Yarbrough, 2015). There are various African linguistic terms amongst various South African ethnic groups that characterised these same-sex relationships (Msibi &

Rudwick, 2015; Tucker, 2009; van Zyl, 2011). Although these same-sex relationships do not emulate the modern-day linguistic characterisation of sexual orientation and gender diversity, the narrative that same-sex sexuality is a Western import is false (Simuziya, 2022).

Ironically, the findings from various literature show that it was with the arrival of colonialism by Western countries that common law and religion prohibited same-sex relations in Africa (Goodman, 2001; Reddy, 2006; van Zyl, 2011). In South Africa, the subsequent Apartheid government criminalised same-sex sexual practices amongst males through legislation (Goodman, 2001; Jones, 2008; Reddy, 2006). Homosexuality was pathologised and harmful psychiatric interventions were implemented by the government amongst White South African men (Jones, 2008). During this period there were LGBTQ+ activism groups that advocated for protection of sexual minorities' human rights. However, these groups were dominated by White people in urban South African areas and overlooked the intersection of the racial oppression experienced by Black sexual minorities (Conway, 2021; Reddy, 2006).

The end of the Apartheid era and the adoption of a democratic constitution in South Africa has seen a development in the legal protection of sexual minorities of all races having equal rights to sexual intimacy and relationships as per the equality clause of the constitution (van Zyl, 2011). These rights include the rights of same-sex couples to get married, adopt children, and receive protection against legal discrimination.

Although in South Africa there is legal protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, some literature concludes that the lived social experiences of sexual minorities does not reflect the legal ethos of the current South African constitution (Resane, 2020; van Zyl, 2011). Many sexual minorities continue to face discrimination, violence, and religious rejection within their homes and communities (Resane, 2020; van Zyl, 2011). This, van Zyl (2011) argues, is part of the process of

reinforcing "African heterosexuality" and unequal gender relations, and thus the exclusion of a sense of belonging for sexual minorities even in a post-Apartheid South Africa. Regardless of these persecutory experiences, in some African countries there are legal developments and court victories that indicate progress in respecting gay people and protecting them from discrimination (Mendos, 2019). These developments include the decriminalisation of same-sex sexual practices in Botswana (Dinokopila, 2022) and parliamentary debates in the South African parliament against homophobic hate speech and allowing civil servants to recuse themselves from officiating same-sex civil unions (Mendos, 2019).

The historical ramification of the Apartheid era continues to create segregated social experiences of the sexuality between White and Black South African sexual minorities (Hames, 2007; van Zyl, 2011). This is due to a dissimilarity of socio-economic status, spatial geographies, social location, and culture amongst different races in South Africa (Brown, 2018; Christopher, 2005; Thobejane & Mohale, 2018; van Zyl, 2011). Black South Africans have been found to have a disproportionately lower socio-economic status and live in non-urban areas of the country, where the exclusionary narrative of same-sex sexuality being a Western import persists (Brown, 2018; Thobejane & Mohale, 2018; van Zyl, 2011). This has resulted in more reports of violent hate crimes towards sexual minorities in non-urban areas (Thobejane & Mohale, 2018; van Zyl, 2011).

As in the Apartheid era, South African urban areas, especially big economic cities such as Johannesburg and Cape Town, have more diverse cultural groups and populations of a higher socio-economic status as compared to most rural areas (Mlambo, 2018; Yarbrough, 2015). Consequently, relative to non-urban areas, urban areas may allow for greater visibility and acceptance of same-sex relationships (van Zyl, 2011; Visser, 2008). In urban areas, gay people have been found to have more opportunities to form acquaintances with other sexual minorities, explore their sexuality, and form intimate relationships with other gay people

(Hames, 2007; van Zyl, 2011). This is facilitated by more opportunities to meet other gay people in gay bars and clubs, LGBTQ+ activism events and on location-based digital dating platforms (Elder, 2005; Milani, 2013; Visser, 2008; 2013). The formation of alliances and opportunities for intimacy has psychosocial benefits such as feelings of belonging and acceptance which are therefore afforded more to gay people in urban areas (van Zyl, 2011).

In South Africa, there is a long history of migration from rural to urban areas in big cities due to the greater availability of higher-education institutions and higher employment opportunities (Mlambo, 2018; Yarbrough, 2015). This has been found to result in some sexual minorities migrating from their home communities to urban areas where they experience opportunities for greater expression and visibility of their sexuality and relationships (van Zyl, 2011).

A limitation to the access to equal rights and cultural acceptance of same-sex couples is illustrated by the reduced opportunity to form same-sex marriages in non-urban South African areas. As it currently stands, the legislation provides for Home Affairs department officials to recuse themselves from officiating a civil union of a same-sex couple on the basis of their religious or cultural background, or conscientious misgivings (Mendos, 2019). This has resulted in there being a lack of opportunities for same-sex couples to form civil unions, more so in non-urban areas (Mendos, 2019).

It is crucial to acknowledge that there is a positive development in the acceptance of gay people in some South African communities. Reid (2003) argues that Black gay men are visible and accepted in their communities, contrary to prevalent beliefs. However, this acceptance is limited to gay men adhering to cultural gender scripts that prescribes that they behave in an effeminate way (Reid, 2003; van Zyl, 2011). Within some Black communities there are LGBTQ+ organisations that advocate for greater visibility, acceptance, and

enforcement of gay people's rights (Conway, 2021). They also offer a sense of support for gay people within these communities (Mendos, 2019; Reid, 2003).

It would however be disingenuous to conclude that there is a rigid divide in the social experiences of sexual minorities of different race groups, locations, and socio-economic status (Simon Rosser et al., 2008; van Zyl, 2011; Visser, 2008; 2013). These intersectional factors are important in contextualising the historical factors that influence same-sex sexuality in South Africa. However, by virtue of their sexual minority status, most gay South African men have to negotiate their sexuality within homophobic and heteronormative scripts that are present regardless of race or class (Maake et al., 2021; Mendos, 2019; Sutherland, 2016; van Zyl, 2011).

2.2.2. *Defining Intimacy in Same-Sex Relationships*

Most individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation, crave a need for intimacy, affection, commitment, reliance, and shared interests with a romantic partner (Hoff et al., 2010; Kiguwa & Nduna, 2017; Peplau & Fingerhunt, 2007). There are various definitions of intimacy depending on the academic discipline, the theoretical alignment and contextual interest of researchers. The commonality amongst the different definitions are the characteristics of openness, commitment, willingness to express one's self, and sharing of connectedness (Prado-Castro & Graham, 2017). In this study, intimacy in a romantic relationship is defined as an interpersonal and subjective sense of connectedness between individuals (King & Noelle, 2005; Kohlenberg at al., 2009). This connectedness is accomplished through the sharing of innermost psychological and/or physical needs, such as emotional attachment, acceptance, commitment, social engagement, and sexual desires (Frost, 2013; King & Noelle, 2005; Kohlenberg at al., 2009).

Due to intersubjectivity, various characteristics of intimacy such as sexual desire or emotional attachment are prioritised by different individuals within different periods and

contexts (King & Noelle, 2005; Kohlenberg et al., 2009). Gay individuals define and categorise intimacy differently depending on the need that each individual prioritises. Examples include physical/sexual, psychological, intellectual, emotional, or social needs. Intimacy can be categorised as physical and/or psychological intimacy. Physical intimacy can include handholding in public, kissing, or engaging in various forms of sexual intercourse. Psychological intimacy in same-sex relationships can be understood in terms of gay people collectively providing psychological support for the social challenges unique to gay people (Canoy, 2015; Guschlbauer et al., 2019; Thobejane & Mohale, 2018), and sharing knowledge and experiences of sexuality and gender (Gras-Velázquez & Maestre-Brotons, 2021; Kiguwa & Nduna, 2017).

A review of the literature reveals that there is no complete definition of intimacy due to influences of social scripts and individual subjectivities. In defining intimacy, this study places emphasis on the interpersonal connectedness that is accomplished through sharing of diverse needs or desires within certain spaces. While intimacy can be accomplished in platonic relationships and friendships, the focus on the current study is on romantic relationships.

Peplau and Fingerhunt's (2007) quantitative study in the United States of America (USA) found that same-sex couples share similar yet unique relationship characteristics with heterosexual couples in terms of love, sexual intimacy, conflict, and commitment. However, as in the USA, gay couples in South Africa may endure social challenges based on their sexual orientation that make their relationships unique; gay couples are often confronted with stigma, discrimination, violence, and a risk for poor psychosocial adjustment (Guschlbauer et al., 2019; Lesch et al., 2017; van Zyl, 2011). Van Zyl's (2011) qualitative study based in Cape Town has found that gay couples who face rejection and a loss of belonging amongst their families of origin acquire this emotional form of intimacy through their romantic

relationships. For same-sex couples, intimacy can also take the form of acceptance of their sexuality and support against the rejection endured by sexual minorities (Guschlbauer et al., 2019; King & Noelle, 2005; van Zyl, 2011).

Intimacy in gay men's relationships is influenced by how they negotiate social scripts regarding their sexuality. As Canoy (2015, p. 937) explains, "to have a happy and 'normal' family, they need to reconfigure or challenge aspects of their intersecting social realities". This process of reconfiguration shapes and impacts upon their everyday intimate lives. Frost's (2013) qualitative study based in the USA sought to examine gay participants' stories and their association of social stigmas related to same-sex sexuality and the intimacy in same-sex relationships. The study found diverse stories of negative and positive associations of stigma and intimacy in same-sex relationships. While some participants have found that stigma negatively impacts the intimacy in their relationships, others narrated how they redefined stigma towards enhancing the intimacy in their relationships, or stigma not having a significant impact on their intimacy. Some stories show that stigma introduced psychosocial stressors to same-sex couples and created a disconnect in their relationships (Frost, 2013). Nonetheless, many of the participants in the study related that experiencing social stigma provided them with the opportunity enhance their intimacy through support, acceptance, and protection within their relationships.

Frost (2013) argues that the association between stigma and intimacy is not always unidirectional and negative as is often found in quantitative research. Instead, a qualitative exploration of this relationship has highlighted that the resilience and psychological strategies that same-sex couples use against persecutory social scripts can work to improve their intimacy and relationships. Challenges such as stigmatisation of same-sex relationships has been found to be informed and re-informed by the societal discourse that perpetuates unequal gender relations and the oppression of sexual minorities (Brown & Njoko, 2019; Canoy,

2015; Ngabaza et al., 2018; Resane, 2020). This leads to gay people needing to negotiate intimacy through heteronormativity, masculinity ideals, and homophobia.

2.2.3. *Heteronormativity and Masculinity Scripts in Same-Sex Relationships*

Heteronormativity is an ideology that a normal expression of sexuality is between heterosexual men and women, and alternative forms of expressing sexuality are therefore denounced (Weinzimmer & Twill, 2015). In South Africa, heteronormative scripts and hegemonic masculinity have been found to influence intimacy in gay relationships (Henderson & Shefer, 2008; Henderson, 2010; Henderson, 2018; Kiguwa & Nduna, 2017; Mantell et al., 2016). These heteronormative scripts influence how gay men label and identify themselves in accordance with linguistic constructions of gender (Kiguwa & Nduna, 2017). Therefore, patriarchal gender norms of power, pleasure and intimacy that are found in heterosexual relationships are often emulated in many gay relationships (Henderson & Shefer, 2008; Henderson, 2012).

Hegemonic masculinity, which is often regarded as the "most honoured way of being a man" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 823), refers to a pervasive cultural ideal that circulates in society and creates conditions against which men are evaluated. The traditional normative ideal of hegemonic masculinity is the White, heterosexual, able-bodied man. Those men who are regarded as compliant with this hegemonic ideal, are seen to receive the benefits of patriarchy without enacting a strong version of masculine dominance (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Gay men are often positioned in opposition to hegemonic masculinity, in what may be termed, "subordinate masculinities" (Pascoe, 2012). In South Africa, many men perpetuate hegemonic forms of masculinity which empowers heterosexuality and anti-femininity scripts (Henderson & Shefer, 2008; Morrell, 2001; Ritcher & Morrell, 2006). As such, gay men in South Africa develop their sexuality in societies where feminine behaviour is equated with submissiveness and disempowerment (Henderson & Shefer, 2008).

The social constructs of heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity may influence gay men's romantic relationships even within private spaces (Henderson, 2018). The act of penetration has been found to be a central characteristic of masculinity and power in the sexual intimacy of heterosexual relationships (Henderson, 2010). It then follows that hegemonic masculinity and heteronormative scripts may influence gay sexual relationships (Collier et al., 2015; Henderson & Shefer, 2008; Henderson, 2018). This may emerge in gay men's use of linguistic terms such as *top* and *bottom* to describe their sexual preferences but also how they gender their identities in relationships (Kiguwa & Nduna, 2017). Identifying as top is characterised by being the insertive partner during anal penetrative sexual intercourse (Henderson, 2018), while the receptive partner in this sexual intercourse is termed bottom. Gay men who uphold traditional masculine ideals may subscribe to the label of being top in a relationship, while those characterised by stereotypical feminine traits may face further subordination and a relinquishment of power as they are assigned or take up the role of a bottom partner (Henderson, 2018; Kiguwa & Nduna, 2017).

According to Prado-Castro and Graham (2017), traditional conceptions of masculinity have been found to negatively impact intimacy in same-sex relationships due to characteristics of psychological intimacy being associated with femininity. This has resulted in a distance between intimacy and sexual pleasure between some gay men who may want to uphold hegemonic masculinity ideals (Kiguwa, 2015; Prado-Castro & Graham, 2017). They would thus prioritise physical or sexual intimacy and avoid displaying intimacy through love, emotional expression, or vulnerability.

Heteronormative scripts and hegemonic masculinity may contribute to violence, emotional abuse, and psychosocial maladjustment within gay relationships (Henderson & Shefer, 2008; Henderson, 2012; Mantell et al., 2016). Henderson's (2012) qualitative study based in the Western Cape, found that top gay men exhibited dominance over their partners

through physical assaults, verbal attacks, and expectations of submissive behavioural from their bottom partners. Gil's (2007) study based in Israel found that some university students who identified as top partners derived sexual pleasure by displaying power and inflicting pain on their bottom partners. This abuse of power according to Henderson (2012) may have led to instances of sexual assault, humiliation, and HIV transmission. Furthermore, bottom partners experienced psychological abuse; and had limited negotiation over expressions of intimacy in their relationships (Henderson, 2012).

2.2.4. *The Influence of Femmephobia and Homophobia on Same-Sex Relationships*

Femmephobia is a term that is often used synonymously with the terms "femiphobia", effemiphobia and anti-femininity. These terms are characterised by negative feelings and behaviours towards femininity in anyone who displays feminine behaviour as prescribed by societal definitions of masculinity and femininity (Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). However, Miller and Behm-Morawitz (2016) report that the term femmephobia is mostly used in academic writing because it is more comprehensive and has been found to discriminate against both lesbian women and gay men. It is for this reason, that the term femmephobia will be used in this report.

Femmephobia can be linked to hegemonic masculinity due to men feeling disturbed by gay men showing effeminate behaviour and thus deviating from pursuing hegemonic masculinity (Pascoe, 2012; Taywaditep, 2002). Femmephobia has been found to influence gay men's sexual experiences and practices (Kuperberg & Padgett, 2015; Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016; Taywaditep, 2002). Gay university students often meet sexual partners through internet sources such as dating applications and websites (Kuperberg & Padgett, 2015). These online platforms are filled with hegemonic masculinity and femmephobic language that is used to exclude and stigmatise gay men who are viewed as feminine (Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). Gay men who perceive themselves as masculine seek only

masculine gay sexual partners and use femmephobic language to express their lack of desire towards effeminate men (Kuperberg & Padgett, 2015; Miller & Behmn-Morawitz, 2016)

The use of femmephobic language has been found to be some gay men's attempt to enhance their attractiveness to masculine users on the internet platforms (Taywaditep, 2002). The use of femmephobic language was seen in Miller and Behm-Morawitz's (2016) quantitative study in the USA as ineffective in gay men's pursuit to appear attractive or be perceived as masculine. Miller and Behm-Morawitz (2016) found that some gay men were less likely to meet online users who used femmephobic language to form friendships with them, but they were still likely to meet them to have sexual intercourse. However, most gay men found online users who used femmephobic language to be less sexually confident, overcompensating for their own femininity and therefore undesirable. This shows that although gay men may use femmephobic language to be perceived as more masculine and attractive, they are not always perceived that way by others (Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016).

Some gay men have been found to be overly conscious of presenting themselves in line with traditional masculinity prescripts (Taywaditep, 2002). As such, some of these gay men often display femmephobic behaviour as a defence mechanism against the childhood ridicule that they themselves experienced for displaying feminine behaviour (Taywaditep, 2002). This preoccupation can become part of their self-concept and thus lead them to be continuously conscious of presenting themselves in a masculine manner in accordance with societal scripts of masculinity (Taywaditep, 2002). Sánchez et al. (2016) argue that gay men who are preoccupied with upholding traditional forms of masculinity show internalised homophobia and hold femmephobic attitudes. Taywaditep (2002) explains that although gay men who uphold traditional masculinity are able to avoid experiencing femmephobia and to hide their sexuality, "their ongoing preoccupation with 'fitting in' may unfortunately come

with a price, as they have associated their own and other gay men's gender nonconformity with discomfort and disapproval" (p. 18).

Homophobia is the implicit or explicit antagonism towards persons who identify or are perceived to be gay (Thomas et al., 2014). A homophobic and unreceptive space towards same-sex relationships and effeminate gay men has been found to influence the scripting of gay men's experiences of intimacy (Mantell et al., 2016). In Mantell et al.'s (2016) qualitative study based in Mpumalanga, gay effeminate partners experienced emotional turmoil over having to keep their relationships with their partners hidden from the public, as their partner, who would typically identify as top within the relationship, rejected self-identification as gay. This is because the label gay is associated with femininity and thus a loss of respect and victimisation in homophobic spaces (Mantell et al., 2016).

Some gay men form relationships with older gay men who are perceived as valuing traditional hegemonic ideals of strength and dominance because these traits are deemed more sexually desirable (Mantell et al., 2016). However, Kiguwa's (2015) qualitative study based in Gauteng found that some effeminate gay men form relationships with older men to acquire a sense of protection from violence geared towards subordinate masculinities in their homophobic communities.

There is a gradual shift towards embracing more contemporary masculinities in South Africa (Morrell, 2001). Additionally, not all spaces in South Africa disempower gay people. There are some areas, mostly the urban areas where South African universities are situated, that are welcoming or tolerant of gay sexualities (Canham, 2017; Munyuki & Vincent, 2018). Some gay men's sexual preferences disrupt the gendered scripts that are assumed within gay men's relationships (Gil, 2007; Henderson & Shefer, 2008; Henderson, 2018; Kiguwa, 2015; Rankotha, 2005). For example, the participants who identify as bottom in Kiguwa's (2015) qualitative study in Gauteng, and Henderson's (2017) qualitative study in the Western Cape,

refute that power and pleasure in their sexual relationships lies with the top partner. A participant in Gil's (2007) study who identifies as bottom, found being dominated during penetrative sex as more sexually desirable for top partners and therefore more empowering for him as a bottom partner.

Furthermore, the notion of being *versatile* in gay sexual relationships challenges the scripting of a binary feminine-masculine categorisation of sex roles (Gil, 2007, Henderson, 2018; Rankotha, 2005). Versatile partners either both engage in receptive and insertive anal sexual intercourse or they do not engage in penetrative sex (Gil, 2007; Henderson, 2018). Gay men may also not subscribe to these gender scripts in their relationships and choose not to label themselves as either top, bottom, or versatile (Henderson, 2018).

The social influences of sexual roles, gender expression, power, and intimacy, as discussed above, may set a backdrop from which gay university students negotiate their same-sex relationships within the university spaces.

2.2.5. *Cultural and Religious Perceptions of Same-Sex Sexuality within Universities*

South African universities that are fuelled by powerful societal attitudes and prescripts based on religious and cultural intolerance of gender and sexuality diversity have been found to create many challenging experiences for gay students (Brown & Njoko, 2019; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2015). A qualitative study by Brown and Njoko (2019) aimed to explore the perceptions of same-sex sexuality by student educational psychologists at a Johannesburg university. The study indicated that cultural and religious backgrounds of students influenced their attitudes towards same-sex sexuality. Amongst the findings was that student educational psychologists held heteronormative attitudes and hegemonic masculinity ideals that were based on their religious and African cultural backgrounds. Some participants in the study explain that they believe in binary gender constructs and a dissociation from gay

people because according to their religious and cultural beliefs these sexual minorities are "confused…cursed", and "something is wrong with them" (Brown & Njoko, 2019, p. 14018).

Furthermore, Brown and Njoko's (2019) study highlights, the role of ethnicity in the attitudes and beliefs of same-sex sexuality. In the study, a White Afrikaner participant references her ethnic culture and Christian values as the basis of her rejection and negative perception of same-sex sexuality and gender diversity. This religious and cultural prejudice and discrimination endured by gay university students is similarly found in Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Sandy's (2015) study at a rural university in Limpopo. In their study, the sexual minority students narrate experiences of stigmatisation and victimisation frequently by the university staff and students. They are labelled as "sinners, satanic or demon-possessed" (Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2015, p. 4). Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Sandy state that the university administrative staff and healthcare workers perpetuate this discrimination by denying services to gay students. They view supporting gay students as promoting sin and that it "would anger God and be a bad omen for the university" (Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2015, p. 4).

Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Sandy (2015) report that there were interventions supported by heterosexist lecturers and students which sought to transform the gay students to being heterosexual. The participants in the study explained that there are "spiritual and physical interventions such as offering prayers and sprinkling potions and solutions to drive away the evil spirits that caused them to become non-heterosexual" (Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2015, p. 4).

2.2.6. The South African University Campus

The negotiation of experiencing intimacy with persecutory social scripts, such as homophobia and femmephobia, can be challenging for young gay university students (Lesch et al., 2017). When young gay students enter the university environment, some encounter a

sense of freedom to express their sexuality and an opportunity to form romantic relationships with other gay students (Lesch et al., 2017; Nduna et al., 2017). However, this space can also offer conflicting social scripts, which inform the narrated experiences of their sexuality (Nduna et al., 2017). Furthermore, these challenging social scripts affect the functioning of their romantic relationships, through aggravated mental health concerns and increasing risks to sexual health, including the acquisition of HIV (Hoff et al., 2010; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2017; Peplau & Fingerhunt, 2007).

Various studies in South Africa have found that a culture of heteronormativity, hegemonic masculinity and homophobia prevail in various South African university campuses (Brown, 2018; Francis, 2021a; Nzimande, 2017). There are reports of implementations of university policies that aim to protect sexual minority students in most of these institutions that have progressed over the years (Ngabaza et al., 2018). Nonetheless, from the literature it appears that there remains an insignificant change in the social and lived experiences of gay students in these universities. Therefore, similar to the broader South African context, the legislative and protective rights that sexual minorities are provided do not reflect their everyday lived experiences that are characterised by marginalisation, harassment, and discrimination (Ngabaza et al., 2018).

Research by Francis (2021a; 2021b) based at Stellenbosch University indicates that heteronormative attitudes are held by most university students. This has resulted in sexual minority students being subjected to marginalisation, exclusion, and violence based on their gender and/or sexuality. Francis's (2021a) study has found that some students are open to including sexual minority students, although many of their attitudes are more indicative of tolerance rather than acceptance as equals.

The findings of studies prior to Francis (2021a; 2021b) indicate that a negative picture towards same-sex sexuality has been displayed in the literature in various South African

universities over the years. This is illustrated in findings by Graziano (2004b) who looked at the adaptions that gay students endured after decisions to disclose or conceal their sexuality, and similarly by Arndt and de Bruin (2006), who examined university students' attitudes towards same-sex sexuality. Graziano's (2004b) qualitative research which was based at Stellenbosch University found that gay students report various stories of experiencing homophobic attacks that are physical and emotional in nature, bullying stigmatisation, and rejection of their sexual orientation amongst their peers. This resulted in many gay students concealing their sexuality in fear of these hostilities towards same-sex sexuality (Graziano, 2004b). Arndt and de Bruin's (2006) quantitative study based in a Gauteng university has found that a significant number of heterosexual students hold negative attitudes towards gay students based on religious and cultural rejection of same-sex sexuality.

Over the years, a similar pattern to the findings of Graziano (2004b) and Arndt and de Bruin (2006) is found in the literature. This pattern of a prevalence of homophobia, homonegativity and heterosexism in South African universities has been reported in numerous studies. Amongst these studies are those of Brown and Njoko (2019), Kiguwa and Langa (2017), Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Sandy (2015), Msibi (2013), Munyuki and Vincent (2018), and Nzimande (2017).

Matthyse's (2017) and Ngabaza et al.'s (2018) qualitative studies from the University of the Western Cape have found that the university space is largely unwelcoming for gay students, regardless of the implementation of protective university policies that are present. These studies appreciate the importance of contextualising experiences of gender and sexuality with the intersectional socio-political factors of race and class. Ngabaza et al.'s (2018) study found that students' experiences of gender and sexuality intersected with heteronormative, femmephobic and homophobic spaces that limited the expression of diverse genders and same-sex sexuality. Due to fears and experiences of marginalisation,

discrimination and violence, sexual minority students were found to be denied a sense of belonging and safety within most of the university spaces (Matthyse, 2017; Ngabaza et al., 2018). Nzimande's (2017) qualitative study based at the University of KwaZulu-Natal found that the general university culture is that of exclusion and persecution of sexual minorities.

2.2.7.   *Same-Sex Sexuality in South African High Schools*

The findings in the literature of the persecutory experiences of gay students in South African universities are similarly found in studies that investigated the attitudes and perception of sexual minorities in South African high schools (Brown & Diale, 2017; Francis & Reygan, 2016, Msibi, 2012). This indicates that the negative scripts of same-sex sexuality that gay university students encounter in their first year into the university spaces mirror those that many have already experienced and negotiated. Msibi's (2012) study in a KwaZulu-Natal high school has found the school to be dominated by a culture of homophobia and heteronormativity. Francis and Reygan's (2016) study that is based in various Free State high schools has found that young gay students negotiate intimacy and their sexuality within a school environment that is largely homophobic. Brown and Diale's (2017) and Brown's (2018) qualitative studies based at an unnamed South African university has found that same-sex identifying student teachers have experienced implicit and explicit discrimination, intimidation, and violent attacks at the high schools in which they perform their practical studies, as well as within their university campus. According to Brown (2018), this homophobia and femmephobia is perpetuated by the heteronormative culture that prevails within this university and the high school. Brown and Diale (2017) further illustrate that some university students who are pursuing a degree in Education encounter the same exclusion they experienced as high school students, when they do their practicals in high schools.

2.2.8. Gay Students in University Residential Spaces

It is crucial to highlight the narrated experiences of gay students within South African university residential spaces. This is because these residences become a new home for students with diverse racial, cultural, and religious backgrounds who come from various urban and non-urban areas across the country (Munyuki & Vincent, 2018). According to Munyuki and Vincent (2018, p. 67), "the idea of being 'at home' implies, as a wide literature has shown, comfort, mutual recognition, support, intimacy, privacy, safety, being 'oneself' and a sense of belonging". Munyuki and Vincent's (2018) study indicates that some university residences exclude gay students from this experience of being "at home". A review of similar studies indicates that there is consistency of marginalisation experienced by gay students in South African university residences (Graziano, 2004b; Jagessar & Msibi, 2015; Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Msibi & Jagessar, 2015). The broader culture of homophobia and heteronormativity that is found in various other spaces within the university and the country persists in gay students' area of residence (Munyuki & Vincent, 2018).

Graziano's (2004b) study reports that first year resident students at Stellenbosch University were required to gather, sing, and chant homophobic slurs as part of their orientation programme. Amongst these were gay students who participated uncomfortably. Graziano (2004b) reports that complaints of the homophobic nature of this residential orientation were dismissed by university administration as part of the residence culture. In the University of Zululand, Jagessar and Msibi (2015) and Msibi and Jagessar (2015), report similar hostility towards gay students in student residential dormitories who were violently attacked, ridiculed, and forced out of the residences by heterosexual students.

Kiguwa and Langa's (2017) qualitative study involved students living in a South African male university residence. The study found that the university residence was characterised by heteronormativity, homophobia and femmephobia. Based on stereotypes of

gay men displaying feminine behaviour, the students who were perceived to meet this stereotype, and those who were openly gay, were marginalised and subjected to implicit and explicit forms of homophobia and femmephobia. This included being called derogatory labels and being victims of violent attacks.

From the literature presented above, the presence of hegemonic masculinity ideals, homophobia, and heteronormative scripts present a stressor for gay university students' interpersonal relationships (Munyuki & Vincent, 2018). They have to navigate the consequences of these social scripts in academic spaces such as lecture halls, places of leisure such as university pubs, and their places of residence (Brown, 2018; Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Matthyse, 2017; Ngabaza et al., 2018). This deters them from their main reason for being at the university, which is to advance their academic studies and plan for their careers (Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2015; Munyuki & Vincent, 2018).

2.2.9. *Resistance, Coping, and Survival Strategies Implemented by Gay University Students*

In response to the predominantly unwelcoming university space, gay university students have been found to employ various coping and survival mechanisms in their interpersonal relationships. These include adherence and concealment (Graziano, 2004b; Lesch et al., 2017; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2015; Munyuki & Vincent, 2018), avoidance and normalisation (Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Msibi & Jagessar, 2015), and resistance (Hames, 2007; Ngabaza et al., 2018).

Being *in the closet*, has been found in the literature as the most common survival strategy used by gay students against homophobia (Graziano, 2004b; Hames, 2007; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2015). Being in the closet involves an active concealment and non-discourse of gay students' sexuality in response to homophobia (Graziano, 2004b; Hames, 2007). For many gay university students, this has become a survival strategy they are

already familiar with before they enter the university. This is because many South African high schools are found to perpetuate homophobia and heteronormativity (Msibi, 2012).

In the university context, Graziano (2004b), and Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Sandy (2015) found that some gay students would conceal their sexual orientation to most students in public spaces; however, they would privately engage in romantic, sexual, and platonic relationships with fellow gay peers. This came with maintaining a dualistic (public and private) image, as publicly, students would conceal their sexuality by displaying behaviour that would depict them as heterosexual (Graziano, 2004b; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2015). For gay male students, this involved behaving in a more traditionally masculine manner (Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Munyuki & Vincent, 2018) and having romantic or sexual relationships with females (Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2015).

Gay men have been stereotypically associated with effeminate behaviour and as such deviating from hegemonic masculinity ideals (Brown, 2018; Kiguwa & Langa, 2017). Therefore, the hegemonic masculinity ideals that are present in universities have led to some university students enduring femmephobic attacks. As such gay university students have been found to censor their gender performance while in public to appear more masculine (Brown, 2018; Kiguwa & Langa, 2017). This was done as a mechanism to conceal their sexuality (Graziano, 2004b; Msibi & Jagessar, 2015) and align to hegemonic masculinity (Hames, 2007; Kiguwa & Langa, 2017).

It has been found that the maintenance of this public image is not merely a survival strategy based on fear, but also a coping mechanism for the experiences of exclusion and rejection that gay students endure by being amongst heterosexual peers (Msibi & Jagessar, 2015; Munyuki & Vincent, 2018; Tshilongo and Rothmann, 2019). The dualistic manner of interacting with their peers has been found to lead to psychological stress, mental illness, and risks of unsafe sexual practices for many gay university students and has led some to

terminate their studies (Brink, 2017; Graziano, 2004b; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2015). It is through privately associating with other gay peers through intimate relationships, friends, and peer activism groups that students experience a sense of comradeship, belonging and acceptance (Graziano, 2004b; Msibi & Jagessar, 2015).

"Normalisation" is other survival strategy that gay students use against homophobia and femmephobia that is found in the literature (Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Msibi, 2012; Munyuki & Vincent, 2018; Tshilongo and Rothmann, 2019; van der Toorn et al., 2020). This is done through gay students' surrender or acceptance that their sexual orientation and gender performance is "othered" and inevitably associated with the risk of persecution (Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Rothmann & Simmonds, 2015; van der Toorn et al., 2020). Kiguwa and Langa (2017) report that the gay university students in their study would experience incidences of discrimination, exclusion, and stigmatisation within the university residences. They would, however, fail to report these. This was "because they perceive nothing can be done but also that such practice has become so *normalised* [emphasis added] that it is taken for granted when it does occur" (Kiguwa & Langa, 2017, p. 60). This response to homophobia and femmephobia is similar to the findings of Jagessar and Msibi (2015).

Normalising heterosexism and homophobia within the university space allows some gay students to openly express their sexuality and enforce coping mechanisms against the expected or actual experiences of this discrimination (Munyuki & Vincent, 2018; Tshilongo and Rothmann, 2019). These coping mechanisms include association with other gay students which may result in comradeship, intimacy, support, protection, and acquaintanceship within the university (Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Lesch et al., 2017; Munyuki & Vincent, 2018; Tshilongo and Rothmann, 2019). Similarly, some gay students are able to collectively form activism for the rights of other sexual minorities through LGBTQ+ activism groups (Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Matthyse, 2017; Ngabaza et al., 2018; Tshilongo and Rothmann, 2019).

Gay university students have been found to have the awareness that some spaces within the university have more incidences of actual or threatened homophobia and femmephobia (Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Munyuki & Vincent, 2018; Tshilongo and Rothmann, 2019). Some of Kiguwa and Langa's (2017) study participants have identified their residential dormitories as such spaces. As a result of the persecution and exclusion that exists in these spaces, some gay students feel isolated and vulnerable amongst peers who are predominately heterosexual. Individual gay students have thus been found to avoid these spaces and collectively form alliances with other gay students in separate spaces. The normalisation of exclusion in certain spaces permits the avoidance of these unsafe spaces and becomes a "survival strategy that enables the individual to maintain a sense of well-being, both physically and mentally" (Kiguwa & Langa, 2017, p. 64).

In their study, Munyuki and Vincent (2018) report that "some participants described adopting a strategy that might be termed 'turning the tables on heteronormativity' – the deliberate and public announcement of a space that is exclusively gay" (p. 72). In avoiding spaces that were deemed too risky for them, the individual gay students were collectively able to *claim* certain spaces within the university as exclusively theirs. Munyuki and Vincent's (2018) study, similar to that of Kiguwa and Langa (2017) and Tshilongo and Rothmann (2019), highlights that through survival strategies, gay students can collectively gain experiences of protection, belonging and power within predominately heteronormative and homophobic universities campuses.

Survival strategies employed by gay university students are not necessarily positive in creating an inclusive university space for all sexual minorities. This is because survival strategies such as gay men pretending to be heterosexual, adhering to hegemonic masculinity, and seeking acceptance through assimilating heterosexuality in same-sex relationships may

indirectly be privileging gay people to the exclusion of other sexual minorities (Brown, 2018; Dungan, 2002; Santos, 2013).

South African universities' space, as with the country at large, have not yet been found to be free from homonegativity, heteronormativity and homophobia. This poses a challenge for gay students who would like to explore their sexuality and form intimate relationships. It would, however, be inaccurate to conclude that all gay students in South African university have stories of challenging experiences with regards to their sexuality within the university spaces. Similarly, to conclude that university spaces are static in terms of improving the lives of gay students, would indicate a negative bias against some of the progress that is made in various universities. Such homogeneous conclusions are critiqued by Francis and Reygan (2016) and Taulke-Johnson (2008), who contest that academic scholars should not merely report on the negative narratives of gay students and the expression of their sexuality. This, according to these authors, not only gives a partial understanding of the lived experiences of gay students but further pathologises gay students' sexuality. This is due to the portrayal of these students as mere victims of heteronormativity, homophobia, and hegemonic masculinity (Francis & Reygan, 2017; Taulke-Johnson, 2008).

The literature thus indicates that gay university students endure several challenges based on their sexuality. Nonetheless, there are some positive stories of comradeship, intimacy, and acceptance found in the university spaces (Arndt & de Bruin, 2006). This is largely due to LGBTQ+ activism and association with other sexual minority students (Graziano, 2004b). Tshilongo and Rothmann's (2019) study based in the North West University, echoes the similar experiences of homophobia narrated by some students. The qualitative study has found that while some gay students' narratives included experiences of vulnerability in expressing their sexuality, there were also reports of positive narratives from gay students who did not experience incidences of homophobia or direct discrimination.

While cognisant of the broader heteronormative attitudes that prevail in the university, some gay students have created spaces where they feel a sense of safety and freedom to express their sexuality (Tshilongo & Rothmann, 2019).

The narratives of experiencing the university space as safe for some gay students may indicate progress in student activism efforts in transforming South African university spaces to be more inclusive of diverse sexual identities (Ngabaza et al., 2018; Tshilongo & Rothmann, 2019). Similarly, Matthyse's (2017) autoethnographic study reports positive accounts, that student-driven university programmes by activist groups have led in challenging the marginalisation of students' expression of their gender and sexuality within the university space. Activism against homophobia that is enforced by gay students creates collective empowerment and transformation of university spaces. This, Ngabaza et al. (2018) envisions, opens up possibilities of transformation and encouragement for diversity which could result in university spaces being receptive and safe spaces for all students.
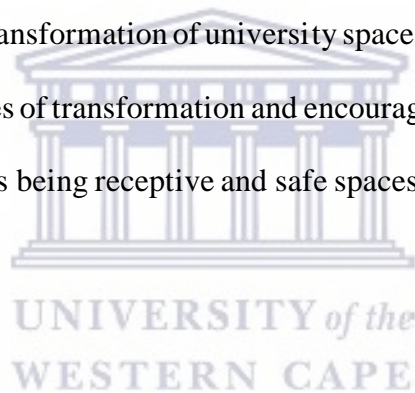
Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1.Research Design

The research made use of an exploratory research design and a qualitative method that is guided by narrative theory. An exploratory design was best suited for this study because it allowed for an exploration of minimally researched phenomena such as the intimacy amongst gay students and their relationships (Lesch et al., 2017; Prado-Castro & Graham, 2017). Exploratory research is characterised as initiating an under-researched phenomenon that can be explored in further studies (Patton, 2002). An exploratory research design mostly takes the form of qualitative research methods (Patton, 2002). A qualitative method was useful in understanding the subjective meaning-making process of the participants about the complex phenomenon that is being researched (Creswell, 2014). An exploratory research design that is grounded in narrative theory allows participants to construct their lived experiences and stories in a comprehensive manner while appreciating the relational role that the researcher plays in the construction of the participants' narratives (Chase, 2005; Finlay, 2003). A qualitative method allows the study to provide a rich and holistic picture of the contextual and yet subjective accounts of the participants' narratives (Patton, 2014; Chase, 2005).

An exploratory research design using qualitative methods does not seek to generalise the findings; they can however be a starting point in informing future studies that may be quantitative in nature (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002). Therefore, due to the scarcity of research on the topic of the study, it is important to lay a foundation from which future hypotheses in quantitative research can be drawn.

3.2. Research Setting

This study was based in a peri-urban university in Cape Town, Western Cape province. All the research interviews for this study were conducted in 2019 prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the university's website, accessed in July 2022, it has 23000 students that includes undergraduate and post-graduate students. The university houses students on campus residences as well private accommodations around the campus. The university reflects a history of resisting racial discrimination in South Africa, while continuing to work towards social justice and transformation.

3.3. Sampling

The study made use of purposive and snowball sampling strategies to specifically recruit university students. The target group for the study was full-time gay male university students who were in current or past romantic relationships with other gay male students from the same university. The target group formed part of the inclusion criteria in the participants' recruitment. The focus was on the cultivation and development of relationships within the university space, and therefore excluded students who have only had same-sex partners from outside the university.

Purposive sampling was suitable for this study as it focused on specific participants and elements of participants' narratives (Daniel, 2012; Squire, 2005). Purposive sampling is advantageous in acquiring participants who have characteristics that best suit the topic under investigation (Daniel, 2012). However, participant recruitment is a known challenge for research samples that include vulnerable groups such as LGBTQ+ individuals, due to barriers such as participation risks as well as miscommunication and mistrust about the research process (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). Acquiring participants was difficult in this study and took a lengthy period of time. A snowball sampling technique was therefore deemed suitable as an opportunistic sampling strategy to reach populations such as gay men, which may be difficult

to locate (Daniel, 2012; Ruben & Babbie, 2007). Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling strategy that obtains participants through creating a network or chain that is initiated from an identified source which spreads information about the study (Daniel, 2012).

Attempts to recruit participants via the university's LGBTQ+ organisation was unsuccessful; I was unable to make contact with the programme coordinators for the LGBTQ+, despite attempts via varied means of communication.

A student who is a known member of the university's LGBTQ+ programme was contacted by the researcher on Facebook. He was requested to inform his acquaintances, both who are part of the programme and those who are not, about the study. This was done for awareness of the research to enter the university's gay network and have interested prospective participants contact the researcher to join the study. Since he met the participation inclusion criteria, this student participated in a pilot interview. The student was requested to forward an invitation in the participation information sheet as a form of recruitment (see Appendix B) to any student who was a prospective participant or knew of a student who is.

The participation information sheet aimed as recruiting participants as well as providing them with all the details of the study. A prospective participant would be a gay student who met the participation inclusion criteria. The participation information sheet included all the details regarding the study including my contact information as the researcher. Five students contacted me informing me of their interest in participating in the study. I confirmed whether they met the inclusion criteria, and then invited them to participate in the interview.

Determining a sample size and saturation is contestable in qualitative research (Sim et al., 2018). The aim of this study was not to generalise findings but to enquire on the narratives of individuals from a specific group within a specific space (Riessman, 2007). As

such, a small sample of six to eight participants was proposed in order to gain a rich insight of participants' narrated experiences in lengthy interviews (Chase 2015; Squire, 2013). In this study, data saturation was considered based on the depth of stories collected after the first six interviews and was reached after the sixth participant.

3.4. Data Collection

The qualitative nature of this study was conducted through individual (one-on-one) semi-structured interviews that were guided by narrative theory. Semi-structured interviews were conducted through guidance of a prepared interview schedule (Smith, 2008). The interview schedule in this study (see Appendix A) consisted of open-ended questions and question probes that resulted in flexible and interactive interviews (Smith, 2008). The proposed questions for the interview schedule were guided by the relevant literature and the theoretical framework, in order to explore the dynamics of the university context, and key concepts like intimacy, relationship roles, and well-being. Since the participants were provided the opportunity to expand on their stories, the use of semi-structured interviews provided greater flexibility to explore new and unplanned aspects of the investigated topic (Bless et al., 2006).

As guided by narrative theory, the interviews conducted in this study were characterised by an interactive role between the researcher as an active audience and the participants as narrators of their stories (Riessman, 2015; Slembrouck, 2015). The aim of the interviews were to gain in-depth and detailed accounts, which included specific events and not merely short and general answers. The interviews therefore required broad and open-ended questioning and flexibility on the part of the researcher (Esin & Squire, 2013; Goodson & Gill, 2011; Slembrouck, 2015).

In response to questions within a narrative interview, participants construct meaning of their past experiences and are allowed to tell their own stories through storytelling

(Slembrouck, 2015). From this meaning-making process, stories are collected as narrative texts to be analysed (Chase, 2005; Slembrouck, 2015). The aim of the narrative interview was to allow the participants the agency to tell their own stories, and position characters. However, a limitation of the semi-structured nature of the interview noted in this study is that some of the stories were guided by the researcher and thus not always free flowing (Smith, 2008). Therefore, the participants' storytelling had to be strategically invited to extend beyond the interview schedule questions and to be guided by the flow of the participants' stories. (Esin & Squire, 2013; Riessman, 2007). This was done through active listening, and curiosity from my side as the interviewer.

3.5. Data Collection Procedure

After following the necessary ethical clearance and institutional permission procedures, the data collection process was initiated. Firstly, a pilot interview was conducted, and this afforded my supervisor and I to evaluate the content and structure of the interview schedule. Improvements to the interview schedule were implemented, and the schedule was finalised. Thereafter the appointments to conduct the interviews were set with prospective participants.

The research interviews were held at a private and convenient venue in the Psychology Department. The interviews were audio-recorded, once-off, face-to-face, individual interviews between each participant and researcher. Before each interview was conducted, the participants were given a chance to read an informed consent form (see Appendix C). This form was also explained verbally, describing the interview process that included consent for audio-recording. The participants were given an opportunity to ask any questions they may have had about the research process. Finally, participants were asked to sign the informed consent form. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the aim of providing the participants an opportunity to narrate their experiences. Six interviews

individual were conducted with different participants, with an average of 60 minutes duration per interview.

After each interview, a debriefing session was conducted with each participant. This provided valuable information regarding the thoughts and feelings of the participants, especially with regards to their comfort relating to the topic discussed and whether any further psychological intervention was required. All the participants expressed positive attitudes towards the study and denied any immediate distress or need for intervention. One participant expressed his initial anxiety prior to the interview. He reported that he had not participated in a research study before and was not completely sure what to expect.

3.6. Data Analysis

The data in this study was analysed using thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2007). Narrative analysis has been found to provide rich accounts of the experiences and stories of gay men negotiating their sexuality and relationships with dominant social scripts (Frost, 2013; Salway & Gesink, 2018; Smith & Tasker, 2017). The conceptualisation and methodology of narratives varies within the different disciplines and researchers in the social sciences and continues to evolve overtime (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015; Goodson & Gill, 2011; Riessman, 2007; Squire et al., 2014). What is common amongst disciplines is the appreciation that narratives and/or stories provide valuable interpretations of human experience (Goodson & Gill, 2011; Squire, 2013; Squire et al., 2014). There is currently no distinct manner by which narratives can be analysed (Riessman, 2007; Squire et al.,2014).

Salway and Gesink (2018) explain that "narrative researchers try to understand *how stories act* [emphasis added], rather than treating stories as data" (p. 1790). Therefore, stories are conceptualised as re-enactments of the social life and their storytelling as social interaction in which narratives are formed (Atkinson & Delmont, 2006). The participants' storytelling is viewed as a dynamic performance that uses existing narratives, social scripts,

and linguistic resources to account for and evaluate their constructed identities and experiences (Atkinson & Delmont, 2006; Riessman, 2007; Salway & Gesink, 2018). Therefore, the understanding of the participants' experiences required an interpretation of stories as subjective constructions as well as their analysis of the social scripts, language, and spatial context in which the stories were told.

In storytelling, narrators use language to create a plot that involves characters who are given roles within a specified space. They can position themselves as a character within the story, or as an observer of other characters' actions (Chase, 2005). This is done in an attempt to persuade the audience to view them, others, and the social space stories, in a manner they prefer (Riessman, 2007). An analysis of narratives can include an evaluation of how participants as narrators sequence, organise and structure events and how they use language and social scripts to give meaning to their experiences (Riessman, 2007; Squire et al., 2014).

In this study, the conceptualisation of the narratives was analysed in accordance with narrative theory, as described in chapter two. This comes with the definition of stories as individual accounts of events in a social world. Narratives are defined by their social interactional formation through linguistic and socio-cultural scripts within a social setting. In the analysis, each participant's stories provides data from which narratives about the participants and their social world can be interpreted and analysed. The narratives that were formed in the research are a combination of the participants' stories and the meaning that they hold and form about the social space.

3.6.1. *Thematic Narrative Analysis*

Riessman (2007) describes various methods of analysing narratives which are structural, performative, visual and thematic narrative analysis. A common feature amongst all the forms of narrative analysis is their inquiry into the content of the narratives (Riessman, 2007). Thematic narrative analysis was used in this study due to its straightforwardness and

flexibility. This flexibility afforded the research to be analysed in a manner which best suited the research aims and data (Riessman, 2007).

Thematic narrative analysis focuses mainly on the content of the stories, focusing on what is said (Riessman, 2007). In a thematic narrative analysis, themes or patterns are usually found within individual cases (Chase, 2005; Riessman, 2007). These themes were inductively drawn by the researcher from each narrative text (Bleakley, 2005), as well as from a prior theoretical lens (Riessman, 2007).

A holistic comprehension of the narratives regarding sexual minorities requires a complete appreciation of the socio-cultural prescripts, and the political and historical contexts that inform their stories (Frost, 2013; Goodson & Gill, 2011; Plummer, 2001). It is for this reason that in this study, the analysis focused not only on the content of the stories but also an analysis of the social interactions and cultural context in which the stories are embedded (Atkinson & Delmont, 2006; Chase, 2005; Esin & Squire, 2013; Squire, 2005). According to Bleakley (2005), this involves asking the following two questions: "What happens in a story, appreciated as an overall pattern" and "How the pattern of a story unfolds taken in context" (p. 537). In this study patterns were noted within each participant's narrative text (i.e., interview transcript), and similar patterns emerged across many of the other participants' texts. This could be explained that, while individuals construct their own identities through their storytelling, this is done through shared social, cultural, and historical prescripts (Esin & Squire, 2013).

The narrative texts in this study were analysed based on the recommendations of Bleakley (2005), Crossley (2007) and Riessman (2007). They are presented step-by-step as recommended:

1. After each interview, I as the researcher[2] listened to each audio-recorded interview. This allowed for preliminary reflections of each interview before the next interview.

2. I transcribed each audio-recorded interview with the guidance from Esin and Squire, (2013). Each interview was transcribed verbatim and included conventions such as chuckles and stray utterances such as "uhm" etc. Furthermore, I noted diction (i.e., choice of words) used by the participants in the construction of their stories that I found noteworthy to highlight in the analysis.[3]

3. I re-read each transcript and checked the text against the audio-recording and fixed any errors that I noted. I found this to be beneficial in allowing me to become more acquainted with each participant's stories within the interview.

4. The first part of the analysis involved deriving personal narratives from each participant by working on one transcript at a time. I read each finalised transcript line by line, this time identifying and highlighting stories within each interview. Generally, a story is identified through an event that includes a plot, characters, setting, and time (Frank, 2010; Riessman, 2007). I read through the interview text and highlighted areas where participants described events, themselves, other people, and certain places. I also highlighted the participants' answers related to direct questions; for example, "What do you understand by the term intimacy?"

5. After I was acquainted with the stories of each transcript, I started noting emerging patterns inductively from each story from the participants' subjective accounts (Bleakley, 2005; Crossley, 2007; McAdams & Pals, 2006). Working on one transcript at a time,

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[2] In pursuit of reflexivity (Davis, 2012) and the appreciation of narrative research as a construction between researcher and participants (Chase, 2005), I use a first-person writing style in this report.

[3] In the findings chapter, noteworthy diction is highlighted in bold. This emphasis was made by me in the analysis.

different narratives were highlighted inductively as well as deductively from the stories, through a theoretical lens (Chase, 2005; Crossley, 2007; Squire, 2005) and my professional knowledge (Riessman, 2007; Squire 2005). This included asking the question: "What meaning can be drawn about the research inquiry from this participant's stories?"

6. The second part of the analysis involved working across transcripts. This allowed for the socio-cultural scripts that inform the participants' narratives to be analysed (Atkinson and Delmont, 2006; Esin & Squire, 2013; McAdams & Pals, 2006; Murray, 2008).

7. A summary of the reflections from each interview and the narratives that were derived from the interview were presented and discussed with my research supervisor. This included an account of the participants' reflections of the interview process during the debriefing session. To take different interpretations into account (Riessman, 2007), a summary of the preliminary analysis of each participant's narratives were presented to my supervisor for her interpretations and preliminary analysis of dominant narratives. This reflexive activity allowed for the identification of my blind spots, biases, and any unexplored ideas of enquiry.

8. Working across transcripts, different narratives that emerged in each transcript were analysed to identify similarities and narrative themes.

9. With the interpretations of both my supervisor and me, narrative themes across all the participants were finalised.

10. Finally, all the narrative themes were woven together to form dominant narratives that were drawn from the research objectives and analysed taking into consideration the socio-cultural contexts that informed them.

3.7.Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is defined by the degree of confidence in the data collection, the data analysis and the interpretations presented (Given, 2008). Some procedures used to ensure trustworthiness and rigour in qualitative research include mechanisms of providing credibility, dependability, confirmability, authenticity, and transferability (Connelly, 2016). Nonetheless, what constitutes trustworthiness and the mechanisms to determine it, is a contentious issue amongst researchers in qualitative research (Connelly, 2016).

Aligning itself with Narrative theory, this research took the position of Riessman (2007) who argues that an attempt to establish trustworthiness as used in other forms of research may not be suitable for narrative research. This is because "truth" in narratives is never fixed or complete, nor factual (Murray, 2008, Riessman, 2007).

Trustworthiness in qualitative research involves the appreciation that narratives are formed through an intersubjective meaning-making process between a narrator and an audience (Chase, 2005; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015). This process is informed by socio-cultural factors such as language, gender, race, time, and setting (Squire, 2005). This means that a trustworthy narrative researcher would not claim to provide a complete and final interpretation of the participants' narrated experiences (Goodson & Gill, 2011).

As explained by Finlay (2003), "meanings are negotiated within particular social contexts so that another researcher will unfold a different story." (p. 5). New meanings from narratives are continuously reconfigured in the retelling and listening of narrator's stories within a specified social context (Chase, 2005; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015; Goodson & Gill, 2011). There are thus multiple realities and interpretations within narratives that are reconfigured by the audience's retelling of the narrator's stories (Riessman, 2008; Squire, 2005). Therefore, in producing a trustworthy research, the researcher is required to deliver a

reflexive account of the contextual interactions which shaped and continuously shape the meanings drawn from the narratives presented in their research output (Squire, 2005; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015). Additionally, the researcher needs to account for the role of their own subjectivity and the social contexts in which the participants told their stories (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015; Finlay & Gough, 2003).

In line with the arguments above, it would be disingenuous for me to claim that the interpretations and conclusions of the research topic are those of the participants. The narratives presented in this report are my retelling of the participants' stories in a context of a research study for examination. The participants' stories are reconfigured by their retelling which is influenced by my own subjectivity and considerations of the audience of the report. Furthermore, I acknowledge that the participants' stories were told a few years prior to the finalisation of this report. This means that the conclusions drawn from these stories may have changed.

This study takes into consideration three interactional contexts in which meaning from the participants' stories were reconfigured and narratives were formed. These are interactions between narrators and audiences in the following forms: 1) the researcher and participant, 2) the researcher and supervisor, and 3) researcher-examinee.

1. Researcher-participant interaction (immediate context)

The immediate context in which meaning was configured occurred during the interaction between me as an audience, and the participants as narrators before, during and after the interview. The participants and I share the same racial group and gender. Therefore, the rapport built may have influenced the participants' decisions to include or exclude some details in their stories and their comfort with the interpretations I may form from their stories. The use of English being the only language in which the interview could be conducted may have influenced the participants' construction of their stories because it was not the home

language of any of the participants. The interviews were conducted in English because I was not proficient in speaking any of the participants' home language. Although the participation information sheet included a description that the interview would be conducted in English, the participants were not explicitly told that they could not use any other language. In a few instances, some of the participants used terms in African languages that I understood.

The interview context involves a one-sided question-answer social interaction in which participants constructed their stories to an unknown social actor (Goodwin, 2015; Slembrouck, 2015). This restricted them from asking certain questions that they may have had in mind, such as "what about you?". The construction of the same stories may carry a different meaning when told within a different social context (Goodson & Gill, 2011; Squire, 2005). Other contextual factors that influenced the participants' construction of their stories included, for example, the location of the interview, the awareness of being audio-recorded, and that their stories will be reproduced.

Furthermore, my sexual orientation and sharing of the same university as the participants had an influence on the interview. For example, being a gay male, I had certain assumptions and understandings based on my "insider status", this includes terms such as "fem", "closeted", "top/bottom" and references to particular places in the university. A different researcher may have sought clarity related to these aspects.

2. Researcher-supervisor interaction (analytical context)

A re-configuration of meaning of the participants' stories occurred within the analytical context. Being a post-graduate student who has researched a similar topic has influenced my interpretations of the participants' stories. These interpretations were reconfigured by discussions with my supervisor. Her own interpretations are influenced by her own subjectivities and work in the area of young masculinities.

3. Researcher-examiner interaction (presentation context)

During the data collection, the participants actively constructed their stories and told them in a manner which positions them and other social actors in a particular way (Riessman, 2007). A similar process is undertaken in this research report. The narratives from the participants' stories are presented in this report in a manner aimed to persuade the examiner that the findings are rigorous and reliable. In reading the report, the examiner interprets and constructs meaning in their mind about the participants' narratives, as they have been reported. The construction of meaning from narratives is never a completed shape in a text but is completed in the reader (Goodson & Gill, 2011; Squire, 2005).

Riessman (2007) offers the following suggestions in producing pragmatic and trustworthy narrative research: a) Is there a clear definition of what is meant by "narrative"? b) What theory frames the research? C) Is there a step by step-by-step explanation of the use of methodology? D) Is there an explanation of the extent in which language and form is used? E) Is there an explanation of the local and societal context? F) Is there acknowledgement of different interpretations? The above questions are answered within this research report. Therefore, I feel safe to conclude that the findings and conclusions of this research are trustworthy.

3.8. Reflexivity

Reflexivity, as described by Finlay and Gough (2003), is a self-critical analysis towards the researcher and the intersubjective elements that impact and transform their qualitative research. In modern qualitative research, the presence of the researcher is no longer regarded as a construct from which the research process should be distanced (Finlay & Gough, 2003; Goodson & Gil, 2011; Riessman, 2015). The role of the researcher is key to understanding the manner in which qualitative data is constructed (Finlay & Gough, 2003).

This has a fundamental influence on the data collection and interpretation (Finlay & Gough, 2003).

The exercise of reflexivity in narrative research involves an acknowledgment of the researcher's subjectivities and their impact on the relationship with the participants (Goodson & Gil, 2011; Riessman, 2015). As explained by Goodson and Gill (2011) an analysis of narratives is:

> …a collaborative process of inquiry, where both the participants and the researcher acknowledge they are part of the phenomenon being studied and that their perceptions, values, and worldview make up the inter-subjective exchange, and that wider social and cultural contexts are embedded in this. (p. 24)

Goodson and Gill (2011) advocate for narrative researchers to pay attention to ethical considerations in conducting and analysing narrative research. Narrative researchers should analyse narratives contextually, however during a research interview, the researcher as an audience should attempt to understand the participants' stories from their point of view (Chase, 2005). Furthermore, in reporting on the participants stories, narrative researchers need to be reflexive and acknowledge that their interpretations are reconstructed by their subjectivities. It would be false for narrative researchers to make the claim that their research empowers the participants' voices because their interpretations may not necessarily echo the actual experience of the participants (Riessman, 2007). As Chase (2005) explains:

> [Narrative researchers] develop their own voice(s) as they construct others' voices and realities; they narrate results in ways that are both enabled and constrained by the social resources and circumstances embedded in their disciplines, cultures, and historical moments; and they write or perform their work for particular audiences (p. 657).

Narrative researchers are therefore tasked with the responsibility of representing the stories of the research participants to others. This task requires the researcher to adhere to strict ethical requirements of their discipline and produce rigorous research (Goodson & Gill, 2011).

Throughout the research process I took note of any personal biases and subjectivities that could have influenced the planning, data collection and analysis of the participants' stories. Contributors to such biases stem from my being a student within the same university as the participants and being an openly Black gay man and a LGBTQ+ activist. Biases that are based on my personal experiences as a gay student at the university were limited by my level of study and limited familiarity with the university. The planning of the research was mostly done prior to my becoming a student at the university. During the data collection, I was a postgraduate student who had been in the university space for approximately 10 months and lived in a different area to the university. Consequently, I had a limited opportunity to interact on a personal level with many students or become integrated into the university's LGBTQ+ student network. I had a limited personal understanding of the spatial context of the participants' stories.

I sought not to "impose" any political opinions or biases on the topic of experiences of gay relationships within the university. The presence of biases was controlled by feedback from my supervisor, and it became evident in my choice of words in the writing of the findings chapter. For example, in presenting an analysis of a participants' story I would often "impose" arguments that were better placed within the discussion chapter. Where such bias became evident, I sought to revise my interpretations by returning to the interview transcriptions.

Secondly, I sought to build a comfortable rapport with the participants before the interview, during the interview, and during the debriefing session. As discussed above, the

research context (i.e., the interview) required the participants to construct their stories within a context that is uncharacteristic of everyday storytelling. In this regard, I sought to make the interaction as non-threatening as possible for the participants and to build a trusting rapport. My interaction with the participants was characterised by a display of attentiveness, interest, empathy, sensitivity, and non-judgement towards each of the participants' storytelling.

Thirdly, in an attempt to create a less non-threatening context in which the participants could built a sense of trust in the research, I discussed with the participants all the research ethical requirements that would be strictly followed. This was done during the informed consent process. This includes amongst others: confidentiality, anonymity, and the researcher-participant relationship after the interview, especially since we shared the same university.

In summary, I took intentional actions to maintain the trustworthiness of the data and exercised reflexivity in line with the recommendations of Finlay and Gough (2003), Goodson and Gil (2011) and Riessman (2007). These actions included strictly adhering to professional ethical guidelines in the data collection, acknowledging the influence interactional factors amongst myself, my supervisor, and the participants, acknowledging the academic context in which the participants' stories are presented and emphasising the possibility of different interpretations of the data.

3.9. Ethics

Before conducting this study, formal ethics approval was acquired from the UWC Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) prior to the start of data collection (see Appendix D). Permission was also requested from the UWC Office of the Registrar to conduct the research at the university (see Appendix E). Upholding confidentiality and anonymity is especially important when working with individuals who may be potentially stigmatised based on their identity. These two concepts are concerned

with the participants' right to privacy within a research context (Kaiser, 2009). Confidentiality refers to the management of participants' information in a way that its disclosure will not prejudice them. Anonymity is maintained by disguising or limiting any information that may make the participants' identities easily determined (Tilley & Woodthorpe, 2011).

All the participants' personal information was managed in line with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPI Act). This study strived to uphold these ethical obligations as much as possible, without affecting the contextualisation of the study. This was done by omitting naming the university in the title of the study, methods, and findings chapter. Additionally, participants are allocated pseudonyms in the report. Although direct quotes from the transcripts are used in the report, identifying information such as the university name and university areas are omitted. Furthermore, demographics such as age, home location, residence, race, and faculties are generalised and not specified to a participant. The number of years in the university is specified to each participant to contextualise each participant's stories. However, the level of study (e.g., 1st, 2nd, or 3rd year) is generalised to 'undergraduates'. For example, although a participant may have been in the university space for a certain number of years, it does not necessarily mean they are at a certain level of study.

Prospective participants received a participation information sheet that explained the aim of the study, why it is being conducted, how the data would be collected, and what would happen to the information and stories provided. Participation in the study was voluntary and participants were free to withdraw from the interviews at any time, without negative consequences. Limitations to confidentiality for legal obligations are mentioned in the participation information sheet and informed consent form.

Furthermore, it is acknowledged that the participants and I shared the same learning space and could therefore come into contact on campus. This issue was discussed during the

consent processes and debriefing. To respect privacy and confidentiality, the participants were explained that I would not openly initiate contact with them in public spaces, without their acknowledgement or approval, by them initiating contact first.

The participation information sheet (Appendix B) and the informed consent form (Appendix C) explained that the interview would be audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and that direct quotations may be used in research outputs. Audio recordings and transcripts were stored on my password-protected computer, with the transcripts further password-protected for the duration of the study. The original audio data was deleted from all recording devices, following successful transfer thereof. Interview transcripts disguised identifying information such as participant's names. Upon finalisation of the thesis submission, all electronic data and documentation such as consent forms would be stored in locked facilities within the Psychology Department for a period of five years.

Due to the potentially sensitive nature of the research topic, a debriefing session was conducted after each interview. The participants were informed that should they become distressed they may pause or terminate the interview without any negative consequences. Additionally, if any of the participants were to display distress during the interview, the interview would have been paused, and I would have contained the participant, as per my clinical training. Although this situation did not arise, after the debriefing session, all participants were advised that if the study aroused any psychological distress, they could contact me for a referral to psychological services offered by the university and Psychology Department. Resource information for other off-site counselling organisations and telephonic counselling were also provided. The contact details of these organisations were noted on the participant information sheet that the participants were able to keep.

Chapter Four: Findings

4.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the findings of the narrative analysis of the participants' stories. The chapter begins with providing demographic descriptions of the participants. The narratives that emerged from the analysis of the participants stories are then presented under themes. The chapter ends with conclusions that can be drawn from the narratives in relation to the research inquiry.

4.2. Participants

The participants in the study are provided the following pseudonyms: Buhle, Cele, Dumisani, Eyethu, Grant and Ryan. They are all undergraduate students from various faculties from a Western Cape university. The participants' ages ranged from 19 to 27, with a mean age of 21 years. All the participants were Black and South African. Two of the participants identified as coming from a Coloured background and four of the participants identified as coming from an African background. Two of the participants come from an urban area, three from a township area and one participant from a rural area, all across different provinces in South Africa. Two of the participants stay on the campus residence, three stay in student accommodations off-campus and one stays at home close to the university. At the time of data collection, Cele and Grant had been in the university space for three years, Eyethu and Ryan had been in the university space for two years, and Buhle and Dumisani had been in the university space for approximately one year. The number of years within the university is included for a temporal contextualisation of the participants' stories.

4.3. Narratives

Two contrasting narratives emerged from the participants' stories related to the negotiation of intimacy and sexuality between gay students within the university space. These are:

1. The university space as a context for exclusion, surveillance, and persecution.

2. The university as a positive, enabling, and supportive space.

The two dominant narratives are informed by an analysis of the participants' stories and are presented through the following themes:

Table 1

Outline of Narrative Themes

Narrative	Themes
1. The university space as a context for exclusion, persecution and surveillance.	1. Not crossing boundaries. 2. Surveillance and vigilance. 3. Normalising same-sex sexuality.
2. The university as a positive, enabling, and supportive space	1. Freedom and visibility 2. Peer acceptance and tolerance. 3. Online spaces and experimental relationships.

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4.3.1. The University Space as Context for Exclusion, Persecution and Surveillance

There is a broad narrative that suggests that the university space may be a context for the exclusion, surveillance, and persecution of intimacy between gay students. The stories told by some participants display a general culture of exclusion and persecution that creates a barrier for embracing their individual sexuality. Through heteronormative scripts and hegemonic masculinity, the participants' sexual orientation assigns them a sexual minority

status. They negotiate their sexual orientation within the boundaries created by these exclusionary scripts.

On an interpersonal level, the participants shared stories of persecutory responses from their heterosexual peers towards openly displaying intimacy with their partners. This resulted in an advancement of hegemonic masculinity through femmephobia and led to some participants experiencing homophobia.

The stories narrated by some of the participants show that they experience a need for vigilance and feelings of surveillance of their sexuality i.e., a continuous monitoring of the expression of their sexuality and intimacy in public places within the university. However, there are also stories of resisting *coming out*, i.e., disclosing their sexual orientation, as a way of challenging heteronormative scripts and claiming the university space.

4.3.1.1.   Not Crossing Boundaries.

Cele, Eyethu, Grant and Dumisani narrated stories that portray gay students as outsiders who are restricted from fully embracing their sexuality in the university space. Their stories depict the university space as an unsafe space for university gay students to experience their sexuality freely. This is as a result of homophobic and femmephobic attacks of which they have directly experienced, witnessed, or heard.

During his first year, Cele reported initially feeling uncertain of whether he can openly express his sexuality or not in the university space:

> *I was quite sceptical in the beginning. I was like: **"I don't wanna be crossing boundaries** or getting hateful speech" stuff like that. Because as much you are liberated and stuff like that, you also just wanna keep your peace; at the same time and **you want to avoid all the drama.***

Cele suggests that, should he embrace his sexuality, he may face punishment through "*hate speech*" that can result from *"crossing boundaries"* imposed by a heteronormative

space. There are persecutory consequences of embracing a gay sexual identity and effeminate behaviour within a heteronormative space which holds hegemonic masculinity ideals.

For Eyethu, there was greater freedom to express his sexual orientation when he entered the university space, as compared to his experiences of homophobia in high school. However, Eyethu still described experiences of implicit homophobia via the "*negative energy and comments of people*":

> *In high school we were kids, so I used to get teased and all that. Here you don't get that,* **you just get negative energy from people and negative comments***, In a mature way but still negative but in high school they would like sing songs about you being gay and all that, so yeah.*

Eyethu noted that there was exclusion of same-sex sexuality during university discussions of sex and reproductive health. This made him feel isolated in discussing his sexual experiences as a gay man. He initially feared his peers' response to his questioning this exclusion, but later gathered the courage to openly question it during a class discussion. The responses from his peers were characterised by innuendos of stigma, marginalisation and discrimination towards same-sex sexual practices and health:

> *I felt like it was very difficult for me to talk about it, to talk about my sex life, about my sexuality to them and even in class people would like discriminate or make comments that I consider as homophobic if you get my point.* **Like they would not directly be homophobic but if someone who would hear what they said in an indirect way it would translate as homophobia***.*

Eyethu's story of implicit homophobic remarks made by fellow students during a lecture illustrates this prevalence of homophobia. Furthermore, this story depicts an exclusion of same-sex sexuality in lectures, which lead to Eyethu experiencing fear to discuss his sexual orientation due an uncertainty about his class's response. This further indicates the "outsider status" that a gay identity holds even in lectures related to sexual practices and sexual health.

Eyethu also shared stories of initially feeling alienated and isolated amongst his heterosexual female friends when discussing relationships. His conservative friends had difficulty accepting his sexuality. He explained that they later "processed" his coming out and they accepted his sexual orientation:

> *I felt like I had to speak about my relationships as well because she was speaking about her marriage, the other one was speaking about her relationship and the other was speaking about her relationship. So**, I felt left out.** So, I told them: "Listen, this is how it i*s". *But fortunately, one of them was my friend from high school so she knows everything. So,* **she handled the situation for me.** *But it was not as easy as I thought it would be. But they were very calm about it.* **But it took them two to three weeks to like to get over all that** *because* **they thought I was straight**.

Eyethu's story portrays an image of an outsider social actor who has a marginalised sexual identity within a heteronormative space. He seeks permission to tell stories about his sexual identity which is deviant from the norm. The social actors (his heterosexual friends) claim ownership of the university space and have always assumed that he is an insider. Through "representation" from a long-time friend, the claimants of the space deliberate, and after a few weeks, become tolerant of his sexuality.

Grant shared stories related to social alienation and stigmatisation from heterosexual peers over being gay. He explained that due to the university space not being fully welcoming and safe for all students, some gay students hid their sexual orientation. As a consequence, they would not form relationships with "openly gay" and effeminate students like himself:

> *[A]* **lot of people avoid you**. *So, it's kind of like* **you are stuck or limited to one group of people to be friends with**. *Nobody else is going to be interested to be friends with you. Uhm, I think that the other thing is finding love and finding relationships. Because* **a lot of students are so scared**. *Uhm I often say that I kind of understand you know, when people complain about you know, that they can't find love and also* **with my challenges I cannot find relationships**.

Dumisani shared this discomfort in being around effeminate gay students for fear of being associated with them. This, according to him, is because being gay is associated with being weak and falling short of a masculinity standard:

*I decided then that **I don't want to have anything to do with that certain group of people** [i.e., effeminate gay students] ... **There's this connection that if you are gay, then you're weak and if you're gay and you're less of a man***.

Grant shared a story that involved his experience of prejudice and discrimination at the university's residence in his first year:

*[T]he most challenges I found – experiences was within the res. Uhm my roommate was quite homophobic. Uhm, he did not sleep in the room for three weeks uhm and not because **I had told him that I am gay** just on the introduction he already uhm then – **because I am feminine presenting, he then jumped into his own conclusions**. He was so scared. I do not know of what. When we later spoke, he said it was because **he has never met a gay guy where he comes from** ...*

Grant's story regarding his homophobic roommate depicts the prejudice and stereotyped responses that associate gay men with femininity. Grant explained: *"because I am feminine presenting, he then jumped into his own conclusions"*. It appears that Grant's roommate was *"scared"* of Grant's *"feminine presenting"* behaviour which he associated with being gay. To account for his actions Grant roommate explained that *"he had never met a gay guy where he comes from"*. The novelty of experiencing sharing a private space (bedrooms and bathrooms) with an outside actor creates this image of these social actors fearing interaction with someone of a sexual minority.

Grant expanded on the types of homophobic encounters that he experienced from fellow university residents in his first year:

*[T]hey knocked at the door, it was like around 9 o'clock, and when I opened the door, there they all were, a group of about 30 to 40 students, **all with their phones out recording and laughing, gigglin**g ... and as a first year you know standing in front of me, and then he asked me to kiss him, would I kiss him or something like that*

*and uhhhh I was shocked … That escalated into the guys did not want to be in the bathroom when I am in the bathroom, uuuuuhm I did not have friends for a very long time; **I was very very lonely**.*

The stories regarding homophobic and femmephobic attacks that Grant endured in his first year by his roommate and other residents, illustrate the novelty, amusement, and prejudice that heterosexual students may experience from having an outsider social actor within their private space. However, heterosexual students claiming ownership of the university space is not restricted to just private spaces within the university. The story of Grant and his friends being verbally attacked and physically assaulted at the university pub, illustrates the discriminatory culture that may emerge even in public spaces within the university.

*[T]his group of **guys just walked past and called us names, "faggots", "stabane" and then "moffie"**…so I turn around and I looked at him and he said: "What are you looking at?!" And then I didn't respond and then he just came – one [of] my friends was choked, one was hit with a chair, I was punched on the arm … uhm. **So it finally got me sick real quick.** I think a lot of the things that I experienced with being [gay] has been verbal. I have never really physically you know, been attacked up until that night. So, **it was a very traumatic experience for me** … and since that night then I have decided that I will never set foot in [the pub] again … uhmm **I don't go to straight clubs anymore; one needs to eliminate those kinds of risks**.*

Grant explained how this attack caused him to have mental health challenges. As he continued with his studies, Grant explained that there is increased "tolerance" of different sexual orientations within the university residences. Grant explained that, at present, he felt free to be himself and express his femininity around campus and his residence. However, this freedom becomes short-lived and disturbed by hearing of incidences of homophobic attacks:

*[W]e had queer students who were again physically attacked, male students who were physically attacked – **feminine presenting gay men**, that was stabbed with a knife and those kind of stuff. Uhmmm, **I don't know all of the details around those things uhhm those events**, but I knew I was – I **remember I was quite disturbed by it***

*and **for a little while it kinda took away the sense of being safe in res**. Because this happened last year, being safe in res; it kinda threatened that. **So, at some point res did not feel safe anymore** and it was because that happened at my res. I was scared and like **"Maybe now I shouldn't be much of a woman, who knows what could happen, maybe they might stab me next"** and I am a dramatic so, uhm but – I think as time passed, **I have gotten comfortable with being comfortable at res again**.*

Although Grant has directly experienced homophobia, his trauma is perpetuated by second-hand exposure. He states, *"I don't know all the details...but I remember that I was quite disturbed by it and for a little while it kinda took away the sense of being safe"*. The experience of the university as a safe space becomes threatened by incidences of homophobia. Grant thought of preventing homophobic and femmephobic attacks by not being *"much of a 'woman'"* because "*who knows what could happen, maybe they might stab [him] next"*. This illustrates the continuous uncertainty and anxiety he may experience in fear of possible homophobic and femmephobic attacks.

Grant, Eyethu, Cele and Dumisani's stories indicate that there is direct, witnessed or heard homophobia and femmephobia within the university which is present in the university space. In defence of this persecution, the participants' stories indicate various strategies. For example, Dumisani dissociates himself from effeminate gay students and Eyethu initially withheld discussing his sexuality. Additionally, Cele would "*avoid all the drama"* by withholding his sexuality and Grant would avoid *"straight clubs"* to *"eliminate those kind of risks"*. According to Grant's stories, this often leads to social exclusion, mental health problems and uncertainty around physical safety for gay and effeminate students.

4.3.1.2.   Surveillance and Vigilance.

The stories by Eyethu, Cele and Dumisani show that a culture of surveillance impacts on the ability to express intimacy with their partners while in public. The public expression of

their intimacy is viewed as an open defiance of heteronormative scripts. This is then persecuted through homophobic responses to which the participants remain vigilant.

In the interview, Eyethu was asked whether he feels that the university is a safe space for him to openly express intimacy within his relationships. He responded that his feelings about the acceptance and safety shifted after he heard a story about a gay student who was perceived to be heterosexual receiving homophobic remarks after kissing a male student. He responded:

> *I thought it was until, the scandal that happened recently at [university pub] where one gay first year student kissed a so-called* **"straight acting" guy.** *And the reaction from people was very surprising. They were like:* "Wena moffie, *you kissed this guy,* sis*!" and all that. And I was like* "People are actually homophobic here" *… A lot of people kiss on campus every day,* **but this was a different story because a gay was involved***. That's point number one. That why I was like:* "Why are people fussing over one kiss of two guys? It's normal". *And then they are like:* "**No it's not normal; it's gay,** imoffie*...*" and **they thought the guy was straight***. I was like:* "What if the guy is bisexual? He doesn't need to disclose his sexuality to anyone". *They're like:* "No man what-what-what". *So, I was like:* "People here are actually very homophobic". *They are not accepting; they have not accepted yet. They need more education.*

Eyethu's story portrays the way in which hegemonic masculinity and heteronormative scripts are present in the university space. Due to the fact that a male student was "s*traight acting"* the heterosexual students in this story "*thought the guy was straight"*. It becomes *"surprising"* for the heterosexual students to witness a defiance of heteronormative scripts and hegemonic masculinity. Heterosexual couples kissing within this space would be acceptable, but it is *"a different story"* and *"it's not normal"* when it is two male students.

Exclusionary and persecutory scripts against same-sex intimacy created experiences of surveillance and vigilance amongst some of the participants and their boyfriends. Cele reported that there are some students who openly express physical and psychological intimacy within their romantic relationships within the university space. He acknowledged

that although gay students may feel liberated to openly express physical intimacy, there is a risk of pejorative attitudes to which they should not be oblivious. He explained:

> *[Y]ou definitely get intimacy by seeing people kissing and holding hands you know. Uhm literally you even have some people who share their rooms together and stuff like, those who do the typical stuff together. Do laundry, share a meal together and all of that. So, I feel that is where intimacy is as pointed out in terms of students at [the university]. I feel like **being intimate is being able to express yourself to a point where you are vulnerable**, **and you are ok with it**. That for me is intimacy. To a point where you are like ok, "this may make or break me". **It's a risk that you are willing to take but you are ok with it** because you want to be comfortable to that extent with that person.*

Additionally, Cele narrated being cautious of experiencing homophobia when being intimate with his boyfriend in the public university space:

> *To some extent **you to need to be cautious, you can't be oblivious** to the fact that people are not willing to learn. So, it took months for us to get to that point, but I think we were literally intimate…we got comfortable to the extent of walking each and feed each other at the cafeteria without receiving anything, anything.*

Similar experiences of surveillance and vigilance are noted in Dumisani's stories. Dumisani explained to have recently felt comfortable openly expressing intimacy in public. He however remains vigilant of the negative consequences of this. Dumisani narrated two stories. In the first story he was at the university pub dancing with another male student. However, he became uncomfortable and stopped dancing when he saw students from his accommodation:

> *[W]e were busy dancing and what-not, and I enjoyed the dance but the minute I saw guys from where I stay… I was like I, I kind of stopped dancing and I withdrew from the dance.*
>
> *I'd say things like public display of affection uhm things like if I'd kiss a guy, or I'd hold hands with a guy in public or hug a guy in public sometimes **it's just like a trigger** and then I'm like: **"No don't touch me in public. Don't do this in public".***

In another story Dumisani narrated that he was comfortable holding his boyfriend's hand while walking in the public university space. However, upon seeing a security guard with whom he regularly interacts, he brushed off his boyfriend's hand. He narrated:

> *I remember, I was walking with my boyfriend and we were somewhere here on campus and you were walking and then he started holding my hand, I didn't mind [until] there was a security guard approaching us and I know him, but I do not know him personally, I just know that when I pass him to search my bag I greet him and then I go past and then there's a small chitchat ...So* **when he came I quickly – like I let go of his hand** *and I was like* (whispers): *"***Don't touch me,*** please wait, like please move,* **don't be so intimate***".*

In reflecting on both these stories, Dumisani explained that he is more conscious of being negatively evaluated by people within whom he would continuously have to interact. *"So, I feel like when it comes to people that I know personally or people that I know I will see every day then I refrain from that open person".*

The experiences of vigilance and surveillance over displaying intimacy public spaces within the university is illustrated in Dumisani's diction: *"it's just like a trigger", "No don't touch me in public. Don't do this in public", "please move, don't be so intimate".* Cele, Grant and Dumisani's stories indicate that these participants often chose to publicly express physical intimacy within their relationships. As confirmed by Cele, within the university public space; *"you definitely get intimacy by seeing people kissing and holding hands…".* This manner of physical intimacy is similarly described in Eyethu, Dumisani and Grant's stories. Cele's diction points to a "psychosocial form" of intimacy that is created through a shared risk of persecution that comes from defying heteronormative scripts and hegemonic masculinity ideals. He uses words that are associated with shared vulnerability, risk, and willingness. This is described by Cele: "…*being intimate is being able to express yourself to a point where you are vulnerable, and you are ok with it"; "It's a risk that you are willing to take but you are ok with it".*

This emotional form of intimacy is illustrated by Grant's story regarding his

"masculine presenting" gay lovers who would openly want to prove their affection for him

by displaying intimacy in public spaces within the university. However, he explained that he

would feel uncomfortable with this:

> *[T]he guys I have been with have been quite **masculine presenting** and I – and you*
> *would never have been able to pinpoint you know, and say: "oh that one", **unlike my,***
> ***my case** ... these guys that I dated - have been with, **they were never ashamed to be***
> ***with me in public** ... I am often the one that is kind of uncomfortable with having to*
> *do that, having to hold hands, kissing in public, being affectionate in public, even if it*
> *is on campus, because **I am always cognisant of how people are going to respond.***
> *And that beautiful moment – we – **I feel you are trying to show your love to me**, and*
> *you are so comfortable doing it, you know, and it makes me even love you more. **It's***
> ***kind of them**, but like people are going to problematise that…*

Due to his effeminate behaviour being associated with being gay, Grant may be at a

"higher risk" of homophobic attacks. His boyfriend's masculinity does not publicly deviate

from hegemonic masculinity ideals, *"unlike in [his] case"*. From Grant's diction: "*they were*

never ashamed to be with me in public", *"I feel you are trying to show your love to me..."*,

and *"It's kind of them…"* illustrates that for Grant his boyfriend's sharing of the risk for

homophobia by publicly being intimate with him, is a form of intimacy. Grant's use of words

such as *"presenting", "kind of **them**", "ashamed", "**my case**"*, illustrates possible inferiority

that he experiences for his gender non-conforming performance. He and his partner negotiate

their displays on intimacy with masculinity scripts that are present in the university space.

Notwithstanding their willingness to express intimacy, the participants' stories

illustrate evidence that this leads to experiences of surveillance from other students and

vigilance for homophobia. This is illustrated in the the following phrases, for example*: "you*

to need to be cautious, you can't be oblivious", "*you are vulnerable"*, "*it's a risk*" (Cele); "*I*

am always cognisant of how people are going to respond" (Grant); or "*it's just like a trigger*" (Dumisani).

Therefore, although there is a presence of intimacy between the gay students, this intimacy is not fully enjoyed due to a continuous awareness of its normative defiance and the risk of persecution it presents. There is continuous surveillance of their displays of intimacy and vigilance against persecutory reactions from their peers.

4.3.1.3.   Normalising Same-Sex Sexuality.

Some of Dumisani, Cele and Buhle's stories depict an awareness of the heteronormative scripts within the university that denies them a sense of ownership of the university space. Nonetheless, they attempt to resist these heteronormative scripts by rejecting the notion of coming out and claiming the university space as equally theirs. Their resistance to heteronormative scripts is seen as an attempt to normalise their sexuality within a space that has marginalised same-sex sexuality.

To contrast the university space and his home, Dumisani explained that at the university he does not conceal his relationships. Instead, he explained that he is carefree. He gave an example that he and his boyfriend would be in bed together in the presence of his boyfriend's heterosexual residence roommate and his friends. Dumisani narrated:

> *[T]here were times whereby his roommate would walk in, or we are in bed, not doing anything, but you can see* moes *when someone is just lying-in bed, or you can see when somebody is cuddling in bed all day watching a movie. His roommate would come in maybe with a bunch of friends. There was this one time he came with three of his friends and it was like, it was like they came in, **they saw, but we didn't care**...*

The attempt to challenge heteronormativity not only occurs as individuals but also collectively as gay couples in their interactions with heterosexual peers. This is through not concealing intimacy within their same-sex relationships. Dumisani states: *"they came in, they saw, and we didn't care"*. This shows that Dumisani and his boyfriend were aware that they

were breaking boundaries by being visible about their relationship but responded
indifferently.

Buhle narrated that he entered the university space in the closet and formed a
relationship with another gay student who was in the closet. By being in the closet, he
explained to have initially viewed the concealment of his relationship as necessary within the
university as a large space. However, he narrated that he later found the concealment of his
relationship as unjustified and instead he chose to openly express intimacy with his
boyfriend. As they became more confident in their sexuality, they found the concealment of
their relationship as an *"issue"* and chose to defy the heteronormative scripts by openly
expressing intimacy. He narrated:

> *[I]t was a very discreet relationship at the time because were both in the closet at the
> time so yeah. We never like showed affection in public, like we are in a relationship
> or all of that …* **I didn't see it as an issue at the time** *because I was still also in the
> closet and this person was in the closet, and we were both like in the closet for the
> same reasons of not being comfortable around people. Because the university was
> like such large numbers of students and stuff can happen…*

Cele narrated that his masculinity is not linked to his sexual orientation or his sexual
preferences. He related that he feels like he needs to educate people about same-sex
relationships, but he gets annoyed when people ask him questions that he describes as
ignorant:

> *So also, the questions that people ask like "who is the man?" and stuff like that and*
> **as much as you are trying to be accommodative** *(chuckles), I just like to believe that
> sometimes people really don't think their questions thoroughly and all of that.
> Although* **we are in a position of wanting to educate people** *and you know and* **we try
> by all means to inform them and all of that and be accommodative but some of the
> questions like as I mentioned "who is the man?" are ignorant and annoying**. *The
> mere fact that you guys are in a same-sex relationship means that you don't want a
> woman if you guys wanted a woman you would opt for a woman.*

*I literally don't think that me **being a man has anything to do with my sexual orientation** the same way that I don't think that me **being a man has anything to do with my sexual preference** and all of that because literally I am able to start express myself as accordingly and all of that.*

Cele narrated a story where two female students approached him and his friend and applauded them for being open about their sexuality. These students assumed that he and his friend are gay, and a couple, based on their effeminate behaviour. He explained to have been irritated by this, because there are effeminate men who are heterosexual or homosexual. He narrated:

*…in as much as that was ok, **it's intrusive to some extent**. **You are like intruding because of the perception that you have.** You know, it's not that it's written on a person's face that: "hey I'm gay" so sometimes you get that out of the way because **you have flamboyant heterosexual men and thingy straight-acting homosexual men and all that***…*

*…because my thing is you don't do the same thing you – you don't give the same energy to hetero- heterosexual couples that "oh no you guys are, are representing this and this and this" and **the only way to be normal I believe, is to act normal**. So, same as here on the thingie, on campus, you get homosexual couples that are kissing, and people would applaud. As much as that is cute and all of that, I just feel like **"why applaud? because if the same thing were to happen to heterosexual couple, it it wouldn't be given the same reaction as that"**.*

Cele's story shows that there are instances of peer acceptance of relationships of gay students in the university. Based on the *"perception"* that gay men are *"flamboyant"*, he was assumed to be gay. For him, other students being intrigued or being overly supportive in their response to gay relationships, is 'othering'. Cele asks: *"why applaud because if the same thing were to happen to heterosexual couple it, it wouldn't be given the same reaction"*? This is because the novelty of same-sex relationships being visible becomes an entertainment factor through its deviance in a heteronormative space. Therefore, applauding may be a guise of being supportive of same-sex relationships that however can feel patronising and othering.

When asked during the interview if he is openly gay, Cele responded:

Yes but– well it depends on how you define "openly gay" because some people would say that they are people who are in the closet and all of that. But, but by "openly gay" if you mean like, like a public announcement "hi I'm gay" then then no I'm not. But "openly gay", as in I'm able to express myself and **I believe that me expressing myself does not warrant people an, an, an explanation of some sort.** *Because accepting yourself is a mission that you go through for years and years so the last thing you wanna do is to have somebody who can come and take you back even though it is not your fault.*

Cele explained that he preferred that other people find out his sexual orientation by asking him or inferring from his responses that he is gay:

I believe everyone who wants to know will know, like my friends know uhm … I didn't have to tell them that I'm gay; they assumed. But in a one conversation they asked: "Are you in a relationship?" and I would answer "Yes I have a boyfriend". They were like: "Oh you have a boyfriend?" and I'm like: "Yeah". **So, it's not something that I had to be like: "Ok listen guys I'm gay", no it's like uhm it's just something that comes off naturally.**

Similar to Cele, Dumisani explained to have a problem with the term "openly gay". He believes that gay students should not have to disclose their sexual orientation or announce that they are in relationships but instead just freely express them. He explained:

I do not believe in being closeted. *I think that's why because as I said before if a straight guy does not need to sit down and say, "hi world, I date girls" then why should I as a gay a person have to "hi world I date guys" and when it comes to be openly gay,* **being openly gay most of the time is associated – now** *I'm speaking generally – is associated* **with a gay guy that would be feminine** *…* **I do not believe that is what it means to be openly gay** *…* **What I understand is to be openly gay is basically being comfortable about saying- about conversing and expressing yourself as a gay person.** *Not having to say, "my partner", instead of "my boyfriend" not having to say uhmm… yeah* (chuckles) *"my partner" instead of "my boyfriend". So that's what I understand about being gay, it's, it's having – it's being comfortable*

*with with speaking as a gay person and **not shying away from from anything that would get you associated with being gay***.

Cele and Dumisani reject the idea that same-sex relationships and sexual preferences are based on heteronormative scripts. Coming out is argued to propagate the heteronormative expectation that gay students have to provide *"an explanation of some sort"* and instead of being *"something that comes off naturally"*. Similarly, Dumisani appears to reject the notion of *"being closeted"* and coming out of the closet. By not coming out and instead openly expressing their sexuality, Cele and Dumisani seek to claim ownership of the university space by normalising same-sex relationships within a heteronormative space.

These participants seek to position themselves as social actors who do not passively respond to heteronormative scripts. They instead actively challenge heteronormativity by including their sexuality in everyday interactions notwithstanding its marginalised and persecuted standing. Cele asserts this by stating: *"the only way to be normal I believe is to act normal"*. One way of doing this is in every day conversation; an example of this is illustrated in Cele's dialogue with his friends. His friends asked, *"Are you in a relationship?"* to which he responded, *"Yes I have a boyfriend"*. The inclusion of the word "boyfriend" indicates to the other actor that Cele is in a same-sex relationship without him directly explaining. This inclusion represents an active attempt to heteronormativity by including same-sex sexuality in a casual conversation. Dumisani explains this point: *"...openly gay is basically being comfortable about saying – conversing and expressing yourself as a gay person"*, *"not shying away from anything that would get you associated with being gay"*.

Both Cele and Dumisani also reject being openly gay and thus claiming the space to be based on the stereotyped notion that effeminate men are gay. Dumisani explains *"being openly gay most of the time is associated…generally with a gay guy that would be feminine … I do not believe that is what it means to be openly gay"*, and Cele states *"you have flamboyant heterosexual man and…straight-acting homosexual men"*, *"I literally don't think*

being a man has anything to do with my sexual orientation". By having such knowledge regarding gender and sexuality, Cele positions himself not only as equal to his heterosexual peers but as being more empowered. This is indicated in his diction using adjectives such as *"intrusive"* and *"ignorant and annoying"* when describing some of his heterosexual peers. He uses clauses such as *"trying to be accommodative"*, *"wanting to educate"*, *"inform them"* in relation to his position.

4.3.2.   *The University as a Positive, Enabling, and Supportive Space for Intimacy Between Gay Students*

In contrast to the previous narrative, many of the participants portrayed the university as a space where they gained acceptance of their sexuality. Some of the participants' stories depict a shift from concealment of their sexuality and relationships at home, towards greater visibility at the university. There are stories of enjoyment of the university space for sexual minority students that comes from LGBTQ+ activism, support groups and by gay students who insist on the visibility of their relationships, regardless of the homophobia that may be present. Gay students make use of digital technologies and create online spaces within the university space. Within this online space, the gay students were able to connect with other gay students and form relationships. Therefore, there is a second dominant narrative that describes the university context as a positive, enabling, and supportive space for gay students to negotiate intimacy.

4.3.2.1.   **Freedom and Visibility.**

Ryan, Dumisani, Cele and Buhle narrated stories of their home and high school spaces as silencing the expression of their sexuality. This was due to femmephobia from their family, childhood friends, and most members of their home communities. Upon moving to the university space in their first year, participants described some freedom to express their

sexuality openly. Furthermore, in the university space they could form and experience their same-sex relationships fully.

Ryan stated that at the university he could express his sexuality openly without fear of judgement. This, he explained, is because his home environment is dominated by Christian views that reject his sexuality. In the university space, he felt free to express his sexuality and relationships openly.

> *I actually tend to be more myself in this environment,* here on university as opposed to at home or anywhere else.
>
> [H]ere at university *I have more freedom as opposed to at home where I have to consider the fact that I am dependent on my family* and because *I come from a Christian family, and they are extremely against homosexuals*. The fact that *I am still closeted*, *the relationships that I have been in were kind of kept under the radar*. Uhhmm *even the fact that I had* uhhhm sexual relations with other gay men that's also kind of kept under the radar *as opposed at here on university where I can speak about anything. My friends actually know more* …

Ryan's story highlights the effect that different spaces have on his freedom to explore and express his sexuality and identity. As he explains "*I actually tend to be more myself in this environment, here on university as opposed to at home or anywhere else.*" Furthermore, different spaces also impact the visibility and discourse of his relationships. Ryan feels the need to keep his same-sex relationships and sexuality *"under the radar"* and be *"closeted"* within his home context. Within the university space, Ryan feels the freedom to *"speak about anything"* and his sexuality is not silenced by fear of rejection. Dumisani narrates similar stories.

Dumisani described the university as being a safe space for him to express his sexuality and relationships openly. This is in contrast to Dumisani's story about needing to conceal a same-sex relationship he had in high-school because homosexuality is frowned upon by his religious family and home community. He narrated that pictures of him and his

boyfriend were posted on social media, and he was subsequently isolated by some of his peers at home and family.

> *[T]he pictures like went viral in my community. So, everyone was like "heye!". Because it was like a nice picture and then somehow it got to [my stepfather] right? So, when it got to him, my cousin overheard him speaking to his wife about this picture ... He is such a huge homophobe**, he is so against homosexuals – not even starting with the relationships.** If you're homosexual yoh it's bad for you.*

Both Ryan and Dumisani's homes are dominated by parents who hold rejecting views of same-sex sexuality which is based on religious beliefs. This space thus becomes more restricting of the expression of their sexuality based the social actors with whom they are *"dependent on"* as described by Ryan. Dumisani states that his stepfather is *"against homosexuals – not even starting with their relationships"*. This indicates extreme intolerance only of Dumisani's sexual identity, notwithstanding the expression of this through same-sex relationships.

Cele explained that he became fully aware that he is interested in males in his matric year. He explained he had troubles in accepting his sexuality and felt he needed to lie to his family and friends at home. He expressed to not have felt free to explore a relationship until he moved to the university. Cele explained that he felt free to have his relationships be visible at university and express his sexuality openly. He contrasted this with his home community, where he felt that homosexuality is rejected, resulting in him hiding his sexuality:

> *So [at home] **you have to like constantly lie to yourself and others**. **It is a battle.** So once you get to the point where you are liberated you would not trade places for anything. Being gay is frowned upon, sometimes **you need to be cautious of the spaces you are in** like like when you uhm in townships and all of that those places. But like places like university, **you are just like "whatever"** and the given environment you can be open about [your sexuality], **you can say "let me be open about it".***

Cele's home environment, similar to that of the other two participants, seems to have restricted the acceptance of his sexual orientation, leading him to have to *"constantly lie to [himself] and others"*. The university space offers him a space to be *"liberated"* from this *"battle"*. The university space appears to more tolerant of gay students' sexuality than the home space. However, Cele's narration indicates a need to continuously negotiate his sexuality with other students who, like his parents, have the potential of silencing it. In response, he consciously make the decision to either conceal or choose to be indifferent and say *"whatever"* or *"be open about it"*.

Buhle explained growing up in a home environment that does not understand same-sex relationships as normal. Upon moving to the university, although he accepted his sexuality, he would often question its normality based on his same-sex relationship. This resulted in him initially concealing his sexuality. However, as he engaged with more people within the university space, he began to feel more comfortable with accepting his sexuality as normal.

> *[L]ike some family members who actually still now does not understand, like they always tell me like they don't understand how a man can be in a relationship with another man. So, then sometimes when I'm with my boyfriend it has me thinking like:* ***"What if they are right, this is not supposed to happen?"*** *and because yeah, they consider it as not normal …*

Buhle's story highlights that heteronormative attitudes held by family members can influence the visibility of his sexuality, even within the university space. He often questions the normality of his sexuality even in a space he perceives as more tolerant of same-sex relationships. The heteronormative scripts upheld by his family appear to have been entrenched into his mind so much so that even in spaces he feels safe to be openly express his sexuality, questions: *"what if they're right"*?

4.3.2.2. Peer Acceptance and Tolerance.

Ryan, Buhle, Cele, and Grant entered the university space in the closet, but after a few months they all formed friendships, became freer to express their sexuality, and felt a sense of validation for their sexual orientation. There was acceptance of their sexuality by their peers. This is, in part, facilitated by on campus support groups and formal dialogue regarding sexuality from LGBTQ+ activism groups.

When Ryan started studying at the university, he was able to form positive friendships and peer networking with fellow gay students. These networks offered him a sense of emotional support and validation for his sexual orientation by association with other gay students. He explained:

> *[T]he few [gay friends] that I have, **they're very uuhmm accommodating** and they include me in things and understand me you know. And if I go through some type of uhmmm psychological or just a mental issue or something surrounding me **but only a gay male can understand,** I can actually go to one of my friends and I know they will support me and help me through that.*

Ryan speaks of being "*accommodated*", by gay friends who then provide him with psychological support. This communicates that being gay is something that needs to be negotiated with different people, who may then be *"accommodating"* or rejecting of his sexuality. From the peer acceptances he gained, he was able receive support for challenges that come with being gay, that *"only a gay male can understand"*. These challenges can include homophobia, heteronormativity, heterosexism, and other social narratives that affect gay students.

In his first year, Grant was introduced to the university's sexuality education programme. The programme aims to advocate for the rights of LGBTQ+ students on campus and to create dialogue about gender and sexuality to facilitate peer understanding and

acceptance from students. From joining this programme, Grant found purpose, comradeship, peer acceptance and psychological support.

> *[It is] a social justice activism kind of group, so it's like you come into yourself, you learn* **how to become more assertive, and you understand the politics** *that uhm underline the LGBTQ community and uhm yeah, "***it's no longer just me, it's not just a me experience***" you know, like "***ohhh I am not the only who goes through this kind of thing***".*

Grant explained the university space as reforming, in there being support structures in place for gay students to mobilise and express their sexual orientation. He credited the university administration in responding to some of the calls from the activism organisation. Grant explained that support programmes for gay students would be limited to those students who would be comfortable in having their sexuality known to the other members of the group.

> *It kind of gave you the kind of support that you need. And then again that's why I think the most supportive most gay friendly structure uhmmm yeah structure on campus is definitely [the university gender and sexuality unit]. But you have to be in a space where you can allow yourself to tap into that, because* **everybody in the place is out in the open and "unapologetically queer" and if you are not there yet, then the space is going to frustrate you** *and* **it's going to challenge you** *and can just cause a whole lot of other issues.*

The involvement in the LGBTQ+ organisations allowed Grant to understand more about his sexuality and the responses from other social actors in the university space. As Grant explained, gay students gain acceptance and a sense of belonging, as the struggles they endure are shared with their peers. As he explains: *"it's no longer just me, it's not just a me experience you know, like 'ohhh I am not the only who goes through this kind of thing'"*. However, the organisation tends to advantage the *"open and unapologetically queer"* students. Those gay students who are still negotiating their sexuality and disclosure, may not

gain the benefits of comradeship and belonging and it may instead *"frustrate", "challenge"* and *"cause a whole lot of other issues"* as Grant explains.

Coming from a home environment that was intolerant of gay people, Buhle narrated that he remained in the closet during the first term. He had no gay friends, and he was not open about his sexuality. Later in the year, he was given the opportunity to come out by a female housemate who questioned his sexual orientation and assured him that she will be supportive if he were gay. Buhle confirmed that he is gay. Buhle's friend introduced him to other gay students at the university. Buhle was then able to form gay friendship networks and be introduced to his first boyfriend at the university. He narrated:

> *When I just came here from the beginning of the year, it was bit of an issue because I was, yeah, I was hiding my identity like quite a lot. But **I've met friends who have now made me uhm comfortable with who I am**. So, it's not much of an issue engaging with different people and different students around campus.*

Buhle further explained:

> *[S]he was like: "Maybe if you hang around with us, maybe you can just also get to be comfortable with who you are" and so uhmmm I actually did that, and we have been like spending a lot of time together and it uhmmm it has made me who I am.*

Similar to the other participants, Buhle highlights the negotiation of having a gay identity. He entered a space where he felt it was unsafe to be open about his sexuality. It was through the assurance of a female friend that he was made *"comfortable"* with who he is. He was subsequently able to be open about his sexuality and form a network with other gay students. From this group identification he developed the support and confidence to negotiate his sexuality *"with different people and different students around campus"*.

Cele expressed that he accepted his sexual orientation due to his experiencing the university as an accepting, diverse, and safe space for gay students to express their sexuality and relationships. Cele narrated that activism groups, as well as other university structures,

continue to create a safer space for gay students at the university through dialogue and activism. He explained that during his first-year orientation, peer facilitators encourage students to have an open mind and to note that the university is "queer friendly". He stated:

> *At [the university] you are able to dress according to however you see fit to present yourself, you don't have to like be mindful of how you act, how you walk or all of that receiving nasty comments and all of that **'cause we would like to believe that everyone is insightful that this is a queer friendly environment** and stuff like that … that's one of the compulsory things [university peer facilitators] say – 'cause of the uhm gender workshop and stuff like that. So, the minute you have your two feet inside the university you are already told that **"This is a diverse university, so you need to keep your mind open"**. So that kind of helps…There's not even looks that you know what you doing is strange or weird so that's why it is a safe space you can fully express yourself.*

Cele's story displays the important role that LGBTQ+ organisations and university policies have in facilitating peer acceptance of gay students' sexuality and relationships. However, even though the university is claimed to be *"a queer friendly environment",* there is a prerequisite from the other social actors in the space to be *"insightful"* and *"keep [their] mind open".* It is evident that this comes across as a request for acceptance and that these social actors can simply reject the acceptance of "a diverse university". Cele states: *"So that kind of helps"*, this highlights the sense of security that he can gain from relying on LGBTQ+ organisations to advocate for the acceptance of same-sex sexuality and relationships with the university management.

4.3.2.3. Online Spaces and Experimental Relationships.

Upon moving into the university space, Dumisani, Buhle, Cele, Eyethu and Ryan, all coming from different backgrounds, formed experimental relationships that allowed them to explore intimacy with other gay students. This was enabled by the university space having different gay students from different backgrounds interacting with each other. Additionally,

use of the digital platform called Grindr made it easier for the participants to find other gay students and explore their sexuality with them. Grindr is a location-based digital application, designed to facilitate dating, friends or sexual partners, specifically among those interested in men who have sex with men. Therefore, using the application within the university premises is likely to identify students in the direct vicinity who are interested in same-sex relations.

The online space allowed the participants to interact with other gay students, first within the online space, and then meet in person at the university to form friendships, engage in sexual encounters, and pursue romantic relationships. In doing so, participants created an alternative space within the university to explore and learn more about their sexuality and experiment in various forms of intimacy with other gay students. Digital platforms such as Grindr offered a convenient method for gay students to meet each other.

Upon arriving at the university in his first year, Dumisani discovered Grindr and downloaded the application. He did this in order to find friends and engage with other gay students, learn more about his sexual identity and become more comfortable expressing his sexuality. In the interview, he narrated a story that begins with him battling with his sexual identity towards meeting other gay students with whom he could befriend and have experimental relationships with. He narrated:

> *[I]t shows people that are closer to where you are so most of the people that were on the site were people here at [the university] ...I went into Grindr looking for friends and **just to get people that are in the same community as me so that I can learn more about myself and become more expressive of who I am** and that was that was what I got because I did. Most of the friends that I have now and my boyfriend I found from Grindr ... It also **showed me a side of myself that I could say I didn't know** in the sense that uhm you see on Grindr you find like a variety of people.*

As an online space, Grindr became a more useful platform for Dumisani who comes from a restricting home environment to explore his sexuality. The online platform became a space where Dumisani could learn more about the intimacy between gay men, and where he

fits in within the roles that come with it. He stated: "*I went on to Grindr up so that I can find suitable people or people that have the same questions*". On the online spaces, gay students interact with one another and learn more about themselves from "*suitable people*", and other gay students who are exploring their sexuality. These suitable people can be interpreted as other gay students who may have more exposure or have similar "*questions*" with which they may have been *"battling"*.

Dumisani narrated that in the beginning of the year, he experimented with different sexual roles because he questioned which role to identify with.

> *So, **these were the questions that I was asking and battling with myself** so then **I went on to Grindr so that I can find suitable people or people that have the same questions, people that have the same doubts** when it comes to their sexual roles. And then **with that, I, I became more expressive of what my role was** and finally I could classify myself as a versatile guy.*

Unlike the broader university space, the online space allowed Dumisani to learn more about himself exclusively from other gay students. Through experimenting in different relationships, Dumisani became more secure is his identity as a versatile gay man. Consequently, he was able to *"become more expressive"* of his sexuality and the sexual role he is comfortable with in expressing sexual intimacy with other gay men.

Dumisani further narrated that towards the end of the year he stopped experimenting with short-lived relationships with other students on Grindr and instead sought to experiment in forming a romantic relationship and exploring other forms of intimacy.

> *[A]t this time [I realised] Grindr wasn't just about hookups that was – it was, it was mistakes I made. I was like: "This is not me, I'm not gonna do this to myself. I'm only gonna engage in sexual intercourse people- with someone that I'm in a relationship with and so I'm done with that…**let me start afresh and be like intimate in other ways**".*

When questioned about the other forms of intimacy he wanted to explore, Dumisani explained:

> *[F]or me personally if – in order for me to have some type of attraction towards you physically then you would need to make me…want to be with you. How? By* ***connecting with me on an intellectual level*** *… which leads to the second type which is the physical one of which it would be anything. Anything other than the sexual intercourse or* ***not even the sexual intercourse itself but just being in within each other and holding each other and showing each other affection*** *…*

Like Dumisani, Buhle was able to form a relationship online with another student and learn more about how sex roles influence physical intimacy between gay men in his first year. In one story shared, Dumisani's first boyfriend was also experimenting in forming a relationship using an online platform. As the two better understood sex roles and were comfortable in their sexual identity, they realised they both have the same-sex role. Confused with what to do, Buhle sought advice from a more "knowledgeable" gay student:

> *[T]here is, is this one friend of mine who believes err uh who believes that a bottom can be (chuckles) in a relationship with another bottom. So uhmm I have tried to get him to explain to me how that would work, and he has explained, and I have understood. So now what I was thinking was if at least if he came to me and told me he was bottom, maybe we could have maybe...just...uhm yeah.*

Buhle's story highlights the experimental nature of gay students' relationships with each other upon entering the university space. Dumisani's understanding of intimacy involves a sexual, emotional, and intellectual connection. By engaging sexually, socially, and romantically with other gay students he met online, Dumisani moved from questioning his sexual identity as a gay man within a culture that labels gay sexual intimacy towards understanding other forms of intimacy; *"physical"* and *"intellectual"*. Furthermore, Buhle and Dumisani are offered a space where they can form friendships and networks initiated through digital platforms. They are consequently enabled to share their experiences and the knowledge they gained from their relationships

Through Grindr, Cele was able to meet another student with whom he formed a relationship on a platform he characterises for "hook ups". He criticised gay students as being promiscuous in their relationships and not exploring other forms of intimacy other than sexual intimacy.

> *I'd hate to bash them, but they are kind of promiscuous and so it's just like "whatever" [...].* ***It is like just some sort of transaction*** *if I can put it like that. But at the same time there is some truth to the fact that who you sleep with, who you share your emotions, intelligence, and your ideas with is also a form of intimacy.*

Eyethu and Ryan similarly highlight the experimental nature of relationships between students that are formed via online platforms. They echo similar criticism over the short-lived relationships that are based on sex that gay students form on online platforms:

> *[I] personally feel like gay people. I don't know what's wrong? First of all,* ***if you meet up, if it's not for sex or anything related to intimacy then it must, it must be for drinks*** *or whatever,* ***there are no stable relationships*** *...* ***based on my past experiences*** *you know; hence I have eliminated them.* (Eyethu)

> *I find that* ***the gay students on [Grindr] are not really looking for a stable relationship or emotional kind of intimacy.*** *I find that a lot of them are looking for if I can put it in layman's terms just a fuck buddy. And I actually also found that* ***a lot of them are promiscuous.*** *So that's kind of off putting also to know that the guy you are currently in a relationship with, has been with your friend, because I have actually been in such a situation.* (Ryan)

Ryan narrated how he established his first romantic relationship at the university. By using Grindr, Ryan was able to chat with other gay students in a platform that he was comfortable that the other users were gay. Meeting his boyfriend in person then introduced him to other gay students and so they formed networks amongst each other.

> *I used [Grindr] as a tool for me to meet particularly homosexual males because for me* ***it's not always easy to uhm meet or should I rather say to go up and or speak to other homosexual males.*** *So, while using the application, it was kind of a tool of bypassing that. The application is for homosexuals, and* ***you know that the other***

person using the app is homosexual, so you kind of feel comfortable like that, *and it is also more comfortable because it is done over the phone and when you meet up and now obviously the actual bonding and actual stuff like that happens*.

Cele, Eyethu and Ryan admit that sexual intercourse is a form of intimacy. They however emphasise other forms as intimacy as more agreeable. Due to the experimental nature of same-sex relationships amongst the gay students, their relationships can be characterised as short-lived and promiscuous. The relationships become *"some sort of transaction"* where the students get to experiment with different online users to explore their sexuality and intimacy. The experimental nature of the gay students' relationships is especially evident in the initial period where they transitioned from their home communities into the university space. This leaves little room for *"stable relationships"* to form; as the students are still exploring their sexuality.

Ryan highlights the importance of an online space for gay students to form friendships, sexual partners, and romantic relationships safely. He highlights the challenges of gay students forming relationships in the public space because it is a space that is shared with heterosexuals and other sexual identities that are not gay. The use of digital platforms helped the participants to foster a community within the broader university, which allowed them to facilitate a connection within a new undefined space.

4.4. Conclusion

The participants' stories in this study indicate that the negotiation of intimacy and same-sex relationships are a characteristic of different interactional contexts. Some stories show that there are differences in the way the participants' negotiate intimacy within the context of private versus public space, home versus campus, and in-person versus online spaces. The stories indicate that the participants are more comfortable in exploring their sexuality within private places and via digital platforms within the university. Within their

homes and some public spaces on campus, the participants appear to feel more threatened to express their sexuality openly.

The current study's narrative analysis has found two broad narratives that depict the university space in a positive and negative light. The romantic relationships of gay male students were found to be informed by the dominant social scripts related to gender and sexuality within the university space.

The first narrative suggests that the relationships can be characterised as unsafe and policed. This is because there are stories of gay students experiencing their sexuality within a university space where exclusionary and persecutory scripts of heteronormativity, hegemonic masculinity ideals and homophobia prevailed. This had negative and positive implications on their relationships. The students had to negotiate physical intimacy in their relationships while experiencing marginalisation, fear, and a sense of surveillance. However, in resistance to these social scripts, some gay students were able to enhance psychological intimacy through collective support and protection.

The second narrative suggests that, in comparison to their experiences prior to entering the university, the university space is a more open and supportive space for them to freely explore intimacy within their relationships. This was enabled by peer acceptance, group identification and digital technologies. Therefore, there are narratives that gay male romantic relationships can be characterised as safe and accepted.

In conclusion, the findings of this study indicate that the university space is an ambiguous space for gay students to negotiate intimacy. This ambiguity is evident in the two contrasting narratives that emerged from an analysis of the participants' stories. Consequently, the university space cannot be understood from a binary view; i.e., the space is neither safe or unsafe, nor is it accepting or rejecting for same-sex relationships. Therefore,

the narratives of gay male students' romantic relationships reflect a negotiation between the

expression of their sexuality and the social scripts that are present within the university space.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions

5.1. Introduction

The aim of this study was to enquire on the narratives of gay male university students' negotiation of romantic relationships within a Western Cape university space. The stories that informed the two contrasting narratives that emerged from the study are discussed in this chapter. An analysis of the participants' stories indicate that gay students individually confront the negotiation between embracing their sexuality and the exclusionary scripts that are present within the university space. There are thus differing romantic relationship narratives that are influenced by the acceptability and safety of exploring the gay students' sexuality. There are stories that depict a relatively accepting university space, but others that depict the space as persecutory of their sexuality and thus an ambiguous university space is created. Within their relationships, gay students negotiate this ambiguity together through their individual experiences of social scripts that inform their comfort with expressing intimacy within the university space.

5.2. Exclusionary Scripts in the University Space

5.2.1. *Heteronormativity and Hegemonic Masculinity*

Upon moving to the university, gay students find the university space as a microcosm of the broader South African context which adheres to hegemonic masculinity (Henderson & Shefer, 2008; Morrell, 2001; Ratele, 2008; 2006; Ritcher & Morrel, 2006), and holds heteronormative views (Francis, 2021a; Henderson & Shefer, 2018; Kiguwa & Nduna, 2017; Lesch et al., 2017). Most of the participants' stories in the current study illustrate the exclusionary scripts of heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity ideals that prevail in South African universities, as found in other studies (Brown, 2018; Francis, 2021a; Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Lesch et al., 2017; Matthyse, 2017; Munyuki & Vincent, 2018; Ngabaza et

al., 2018). As a result of these exclusionary scripts, gay students by virtue of their sexuality, and for some their effeminate behaviour, have their sexual orientation specified an outsider status and feel marginalised by their heterosexual peers (Francis, 2021b; Rothmann & Simmonds, 2015). This marginalisation excludes them from "experiences of belonging" within the university space, as described by Ngabaza et al. (2018, p. 146). Additionally, it drastically undermines their experiencing a sense of home, power, and ownership of the university space (King & Noelle, 2005; Munyuki & Vincent, 2018; Ngabaza et al., 2018). As such, gay university students are denied the experience of the university space as a place of "comfort, mutual recognition, support, intimacy, privacy, safety, being 'oneself' and a sense of belonging" (Munyki & Vincent, 2018, p. 67).

5.2.2. *Homophobia and Femmephobia*

Numerous scholars from different universities in KwaZulu-Natal, Western Cape, Gauteng, North West, Eastern Cape, and Limpopo provinces also report South African university students experiencing or fearing homophobia (Brown, 2018; Jagessar & Msibi, 2015; Munyuki & Vincent, 2018; Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Mavhandu-Mudzusi, & Sandy, 2015; Ngabaza et al., 2018; Matthyse, 2017). Homophobia and femmephobia can be interpreted as a form of persecution and punishment that gay students endure due to their sexuality and gender expression challenging heteronormative attitudes and hegemonic masculinity ideals (Francis, 2021b; Rothmann & Simmonds, 2015; Tshilongo & Rothmann, 2019).

The participants in this current study have reported either directly experiencing homophobia or hearing of stories about other gay students being victims of homophobia, within the university space. The awareness of heteronormativity, hegemonic masculinity and homophobia that exists within the university reinforces their outsider status. As such, gay students experience surveillance within themselves and from their peers over the breach of

heteronormative conventions that their expressions of intimacy would represent within the university space (Brown, 2018; Munyuki & Vincent, 2018; Pryce, 2000; Šević, 2016). Self-surveillance as described by Pryce (2000), involves an individual's "reflexive observation of their 'self' for signs of contamination, disease or dysfunction within cultures increasingly constructed as morally, socially, environmentally, and biologically dangerous or 'risky'" (p. 104). This form of interaction with the university space is illustrated by most of the participants' evaluation of their acceptability of openly expressing intimacy with their boyfriends in the public university space. These dynamics of "heteronormative and hegemonic surveillance" (p.58) within gay relationships is similarly found by Siswana and Kiguwa's (2008) study.

Munyuki and Vincent (2018) found that for gay university students, "everyday life becomes a constant process of having to decide whether to resist, accommodate, ignore or report heterosexism rather than simply being able to get on with living" (p. 73). The current study's findings demonstrate that gay students have to negotiate through surveillance of their expression of intimacy in accordance with adherence or defiance of heteronormativity, heterosexism and hegemonic masculinity ideals that exclude or marginalise their relationships.

As with the participants in this current study, Tshilingo and Rothmann (2019) and Van der Toorn et al. (2020) argue that each decision the gay students take in response to heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity, indirectly maintains these exclusionary scripts. Gay university students' adherence to these scripts is through self-preserving mechanisms such as the concealment of their sexuality by not publicly expressing intimacy, dissociating themselves from effeminate gay students, or performing masculine behaviours. These are mechanisms of adherence, as noted in previous literature by Lesch et al. (2017),

Miller and Behm-Morawitz (2016), Nel and Judge (2008), Ngabaza et al. (2018), and Taywaditep (2002).

A participant in the current study illustrates another self-protective mechanism which displays adherence to heteronormativity through avoidance of persecution. Avoidance by gay students of leisure areas or activities that are deemed to be exclusively for heterosexual male students in fear of discrimination is similarly found by Kiguwa and Langa (2017), Lesch et al. (2017), Munyuki and Vincent (2018), and Ngabaza et al. (2018) in various South African universities.

Some gay university students, such the participants in Matthyse (2017), Munyuki and Vincent (2018) and Ngabaza et al.'s (2018) studies, defied heteronormative or heterosexist attitudes and hegemonic masculinity ideals. Some gay students, similar to the current study's participants openly show a similar defence within their relationships. However, one of the participants highlights that through the surveillance of gay students' practice, this defiance often reverts back to adherence, due to the risk of persecution.

In disclosing his sexuality and relationship to his heterosexual friends, one participant's story illustrates another mechanism that is employed by gay students in seeking to express their relationships. By seeking acceptance and "permission" from heterosexual peers to openly express their sexuality, gay students are adhering to heteronormative attitudes that demand an explanation for defying the established norm. Similarly, a heteronormative space would require gay students to disclose or come out, thereby to allow heterosexual students to accept or reject same-sex sexuality or relationships. The phenomenon of gay men coming out is discussed in various studies (see Belous et al., 2015; Cass, 1984, Etengoff & Daute, 2014; Graziano, 2004a; Herdt & Boxer, 1993; Kekana & Dietrich, 2017; King & Noelle, 2005; Legate et al. 2012).

What is highlighted in the current study is that gay students coming out to their heterosexual peers may have been normalised in heteronormative spaces as seeking permission to express their sexuality (Francis, 2021a; 2021b; Legate et al. 2012; Tshilongo & Rothmann, 2019). Not doing so is viewed as betrayal and can consequently be victimised through homophobic remarks, as described in one of the participants' stories.

Some participants' stories in the current study display the persecutory nature of homophobia and femmephobia that is prevalent in the university residences and entertainment areas such as the university pub. This contests the idea of the university being a safe space for gay students to freely express themselves and their relationships without fearing persecution. This finding is consistent with previous studies by Graziano (2004b), Hames (2007), Jaggessar and Msibi (2015), Kiguwa and Langa (2017), Ngabaza et al (2018), and Tshilongo and Rothmann (2019) who found the homophobic or femmephobic attacks on gay students in various South African university residential and entertainment areas. The experience of these attacks suggest that universities may not be a safe space for students to express their gender and sexuality.

A *safe space* for gay university students is a place where they feel free to experience and explore their sexuality and gender without fear of discrimination nor physical or psychological harm that is based on their being sexual minorities (Tshilongo & Rothmann, 2019). Tshilongo and Rothmann's (2019) study found that gay students define a safe space as not merely limited to a physical space but include other people or programmes within the university. A safe space allows open discourse and protection against the broader societal persecution faced by gay students through homophobia, femmephobia and marginalisation.

The current study indicates that there is a prevailing awareness of the exclusionary scripts and homophobia that exists within the university space. However, not all gay students view the space as completely unsafe for gay students to have relationships (Jagessar & Msibi,

2015; Ngabaza et al., 2018; Tshilongo & Rothmann, 2019). This is because similar the findings of this study, some gay students remain vigilant but weigh up the risk and choose to openly express their sexuality, while others witness gay couples being openly intimate.

The absence of direct, witnessed or reported persecutory attacks towards same-sex physical intimacy, for a duration of time, creates within the gay students the perception of the space being safe. However, as illustrated by some of the participants' stories, this sense of safety is never complete, and the university space remains volatile due to homophobia towards gay students. These feelings of vigilance and uncertainty about safety can result in mental health challenges (Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2017; Oginni et al., 2018) and a decrease in emotional intimacy within relationships (Guschlbauer et al., 2019).

Not all stories depict gay students as mere recipients of discrimination, violence, and marginalisation. Regardless of the awareness of the surveillance and vigilance experienced by gay students within the university space, some gay students like in the current study attempt to claim the space. Claiming the university space can be characterised as a rejection of heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity scripts which would otherwise exclude the visibility of same-sex relationships and gay students' experiences of belonging (King & Noelle, 2005; Munyuki & Vincent, 2018; Ngabaza at al., 2018; Tilsen & Nylund, 2010). Visibility of physical intimacy within gay students' relationships and the performance of gender non-conforming behaviour can challenge the fear of defying inclusion norms within the university space (Lesch et al., 2017; Munyuki & Vincent, 2018). Some gay students like this the current study, strive to have their sexuality and relationships being experienced as normal and no different from those of their heterosexual peers. This would diminish the expression of intimacy within their relationships being perceived as a form of activism which can further reinforce difference and exclusion (Francis, 2021a; Tshilongo & Rothmann, 2019).

As discussed above, there are positive implications that the visibility of gay student relationships can bring forth, such as challenging exclusionary societal scripts that deny gay students freedom to express intimacy and feelings of safety, protection and belonging. However, as found in Tshilongo and Rothmann's (2019) study, the visibility of gay students within university spaces created a "dualistic experience" which they describe as "the absence *yet* [emphasis in original] presence…" (p. 4). That is to say, although some students experience the university space as a safe space, due to the absence of discrimination, it may not be perceived as safe for those who have experienced discrimination. This, according to Tshilongo and Rothmann (2019), is determined by what each gay student defines as a safe space. Some students define safe spaces from a microlevel; i.e., a certain classroom, interactions with certain lecturers, social media, gender and sexuality support groups and therapy sessions.

The benefits of visibility can be seen in these smaller spaces. However, as argued by Tshilongo and Rothmann (2019), visibility within the broader university space comes with a greater risk of harm in the form of homophobic attacks. Additionally, as argued by Munyuki and Vincent (2018), the burden of creating an inclusive and safe space for gay students should not lie with the students but instead with university management. Therefore, visibility and resistance against heteronormativity as envisioned by some of the participants in the current study, may perpetuate surveillance, feelings of vigilance, and a burden of responsibility for safety amongst gay students within the broader university campus.

5.3. Freedom and Peer Acceptance in the University Space

5.3.1. *Moving from Home to the University*

Some gay students enter the university space uncertain whether or not the social scripts that required them to conceal their sexuality at home exist (Munyuki & Vincent, 2018; Nduna et al., 2017; Thobejane & Mohale, 2018). Munyuki and Vincent's (2018) study found

that familial approval and acceptance of their sexuality was a resource from which gay students draw on upon entering the university space. This then influenced how gay students "experienced residence life and their ability to find friends and intimate partners" (p. 75). For the participants in this study who lacked familial support, the university spaces became "the place where they hope to be less isolated, less lonely, to be able to experience intimacy and acceptance" (Munyuki & Vincent, 2018, p. 75).

In the current study, the participants have reported the university space as a comparably safer space for them to express their sexuality and relationships than their home communities, especially in non-urban areas as explained by one of the participants. This finding is consistent with the findings of Kiguwa and Langa (2017), Lesch et al. (2017) and Tshilongo and Rothmann (2019) who found that although gay students continue to experience some level of discrimination and homophobia within the university, they experience an element of freedom which is limited in comparison to outside the university space.

For most of the participants in this study the transition from their home space towards the university allowed their once concealed relationships to be potentially more visible. This is because South Africa remains a socio-culturally conservative country that is dominated by these religious and cultural scripts that are intolerant of same-sex relationships (Resane, 2020; Thobejane & Mohale, 2018). These cultural and religious scripts propagate heteronormativity and promote homophobia within many home communities, especially in non-urban areas as explained by Cele (Collier et al., 2015; Msibi, 2012; Resane, 2020; Thobejane & Mohale, 2018). Consequently, as found by Thobejane and Mohale (2018), these domestic spaces limit the visibility of same-sex relationships through many gay people concealing their relationships and sexuality.

As some stories in this study depict, the concealment of their sexuality is driven by their dependence on homophobic parents and family members. Gay youth have been found to conceal their sexuality from their parents due to the fear of losing the financial, emotional, or social support they receive from them (Green & Mitchell, 2008; Kekana & Dietrich, 2017; Livingston & Fourie, 2016). Some participants in the current study show that moving to the university allowed them to receive alternative support through friendships and relationships. This is consistent with the findings of Etengoff and Daiute (2014), Green and Mitchell (2008), and Guschlbauer et al. (2019).

5.3.2. *Peer Acceptance*

Ngabaza et al. (2018) found that although the broader university space may be dominated by heteronormative scripts and hegemonic masculinity ideals, not all spaces were hostile towards sexual minority students. One contributing factor towards gay students perceiving the university space as safe, is peer acceptance. Peer acceptance has been found to be a significant factor that influences gay students' perception of the university space as safe for them to express their sexuality and relationships openly (Lesch et al., 2017; Munyuki & Vincent, 2018). The findings of this current study mirror those of Munyuki and Vincent (2018), that South African university spaces consist of students who become from diverse backgrounds in which the attitude towards gay students either mirrors or deviates from the dominant heteronormative scripts in the country. Therefore, there are some university students who are accepting or tolerant of same-sex sexuality and gay students (Ardnt & De Bruin, 2006; Francis, 2021a; Munyuki & Vincent, 2018).

The current study's findings show the important role that peer acceptance has on the exploration and acceptance of same-sex sexuality within the university space. Through peer acceptance, gay students have been found to explore their sexuality, find affirmation of their sexual identity through group identification, create a network of gay friends, and gain a sense

of security to be intimate within their relationships. This is consistent with the findings of Lesch et al. (2017) and Munyuki and Vincent (2018). This peer acceptance has in part been facilitated by LGBTQ+ advocacy groups within the universities, as described by one of the participants in the current study. These advocacy groups have been found to advocate for the creation of university policies that seek to protect the rights of LGBTQ+ students against homophobia and fight against heterosexism by educating and promoting awareness about different genders and sexualities (De Wet, 2017; Matthyse, 2017; Munyuki & Vincent, 2018; Tshilongo & Rothmann, 2019).

Some stories in the current study highlight that over and above the activism that LGBTQ+ organisations stand for, they also allow for gay students to find acquaintanceship with other sexual minority students and sympathetic heterosexual students. However, this benefit is limited to those students who have developed a sense of confidence about their sexuality. These findings are similar to that of Graziano (2004b) and Tshilongo and Rothmann (2019). The participants' stories illustrate the importance of university management implementing policies that aim to create the awareness of different sexualities and genders, challenge heteronormativity and heterosexism, and transform the university space to be an inclusive space for all students. The participants also indicate mental health challenges that are caused by exclusionary scripts. Psychotherapeutic interventions can be beneficial in this regard to support for the gay students already distressed by the persecution and marginalisation. The implementation, effectiveness and reliance of such protective and inclusive university policies has been found lacking in numerous South African universities that have them (Francis, 2021a; Munyuki & Vincent, 2018; Tshilongo & Rothmann, 2019).

5.4. Negotiating Intimacy within an Ambiguous University Space

It has been established in the current study that gay university students may experience marginalisation and homophobia, resulting in trauma, mental illness, vigilance,

and surveillance. Conversely, in comparison to the broader community and the absence of homophobia, the university space may be experienced as a relatively safer space by some gay students to embrace their sexual identities. This is consistent with Lesch et al.'s (2007) argument that gay university student couples may experience the space as ambiguous. This is due to conflicting stories of both safety and vulnerability that is created by an evolving South African social context (Lesch et al.,2007).

The ambiguity of the university space creates uncertainty and anxiety within each gay student regarding their individual comfort in expression of intimacy within the public university space. This is evidenced by the stories of some of the current study's participants. The ambiguity of intimate relations amongst gay people is similarly found by Canoy (2015), who describes how competing socio-cultural discourses about sexuality creates uncertainty around intimacy between gay people. Guschlbauer et al. (2019) argue that because romantic relationships are interdependent, stressors experienced by one partner, most likely negatively affect the other partner. These social stressors are undoubtedly shared by gay students within their romantic relationships and impact on the comfort of expressing intimacy in their relationships (Canoy, 2015; Rincón et al., 2021).

As discussed earlier, the transition from their home environment to the university space enables a relatively safer space for some gay students to explore their sexuality through intimacy in same-sex relationships. Most of the current study's participants explained to understand intimacy between gay students as physical or sexual practices and emotional and intellectual connections. However, the comprehension of various forms of intimacy in same-sex relationships is complicated by its intersectional nature with gender and sexuality in social spaces (Herek, 2006; Kiguwa, 2015; Lesch et al., 2017; Stacey, 2005). Canoy (2015), Guschlbauer et al. (2019), Henderson and Shefer (2008), Henderson, (2010, 2017), Kiguwa and Nduna (2017) and Mantell et al. (2016) have found that intimacy between gay men is

convoluted by the influence of social scripts of hegemonic masculinity, heteronormativity, and homophobia. The hegemonic masculinity ideals and heteronormative scripts influence how gay men label and identify themselves in accordance with linguistic constructions of gender roles, pleasure, and power within their sexual experiences (Bosco et al., 2022; Canoy, 2015; Henderson & Shefer, 2008; Henderson, 2012; Kiguwa, 2015; Kiguwa & Nduna, 2017). Relatedly, homophobia and heteronormativity influence the visibility of physical intimacy such as holding hands or kissing in public within same-sex relationships as discussed earlier. While navigating these scripts psychological or emotional intimacy can be formed by enhancing mutual support in relationships in navigating these persecutory scripts (Frost, 2013).

Findings from Bosco et al. (2022), Canoy's (2015), Guschlbauer et al. (2019), Peplau's and Fingerhunt's (2007) and Resane's (2020) studies signify that social contexts that are dominated by heteronormative scripts and hegemonic masculinity ideals create the additional psychosocial stressors unique to same-sex couples as individuals and couples. What is highlighted in the analysis of the stories collected in this study, is a form of emotional and psychosocial intimacy that is created within same-sex relationships by collective support against the stressors from exclusionary scripts.

Individual characteristics of each gay student makes them more at risk and vulnerable to persecution and marginalisation. These can be gender expression and the individual journey of self-acceptance, and the psychological readiness towards visibility and disclosure of their sexual orientation. Femmephobia is argued as persecution for deviating from hegemonic masculinity ideals (Pascoe, 2012; Taywaditep, 2002), thus making effeminate gay men like one of the current study's participants more vulnerable for attacks than masculine performing gay men. Similarly, their masculinity can serve as a concealment strategy to guard against perceptions of being gay and thus homophobia (Taywaditep, 2002). Regardless

of the possible risk of homophobia, some gay students are willing to be open about their

sexuality, while others continue to be guarded against direct homophobia by concealing their

sexuality. The findings of this study show that there is a willingness to share the risk of

possible persecution amongst different individual gay students represents a form of

psychosocial intimacy amongst gay students. An illustration of this can be witnessed by the

support that less vulnerable gay men (e.g., those who perform traditional masculinity)

provide to their partners, who by virtue of effeminate behaviour, are more vulnerable to

social persecution. This finding is consistent with the findings of Kiguwa's (2015), King and

Noelle's (2005) and Šević et al.'s (2016) studies in relation to the intimacy and disclosure of

same-sex sexuality.

The current study's findings illustrate that the complexity of negotiating social scripts

can be overwhelming for some gay students who have just moved to the university space.

These participants demonstrate the importance that digital platforms have in assisting gay

students, especially those new to the university space. Within these digital platforms, an

exclusive community is created within the broader university space. This allowed participants

to collectively understand, explore, and support each other in how to negotiate intimacy in the

context of exclusionary social scripts. Through this alternative space, gay students have

created an even safer space that they can claim as their own to the exclusion of heterosexual

peers (Tshilongo & Rothmann, 2019). The creation of alternative and exclusive spaces for

gay students within the broader university is similar to the findings of Munyuki and Vincent

(2018).

Within South African university spaces, there are various gay students who come

from different backgrounds with varying knowledge and experience of how to negotiate the

various forms of intimacy in same-sex relationships (Munyuki & Vincent, 2018; Nduna et al.,

2017). Digital platforms such as Grindr have become an alternative space within the

university space where these different gay students meet and form social networks (Tshilongo & Rothmann, 2019). The current study's participants described the usefulness of digital platforms for new university gay students. These students use the platform to acquire friendships and relationships. There are different motivations and reasons for gay individuals using digital platforms such as Grindr (Chan, 2018; Ives, 2018; Lope, 2019).

Consistent with the findings of Conner (2019) and Koch and Miles (2021), Some stories in the current study show that digital platforms afford gay students the opportunity to negotiate social scripts that influence sexual identities, roles, and forms of intimacy within their relationships. These interactions therefore become experimental and can lead to the relationships that gay students form as being short-lived, overly sexual, and promiscuous, as critiqued by some the participants in this study. This critique of the nature of gay men's sexual experiences has been reinforced by research in the context of HIV and AIDS, and gay men's sexual practices in South Africa (Knox et al., 2021; Lane et al., 2011; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021, Okafor et al., 2018). Consistent with Canoy's (2015) findings, in this current study, some participants discovered through experimental relationships, not only sexual intimacy but other forms of intimacy that are negotiated amongst gay students.

The current study concludes that intimacy within same-sex relationships of gay university students can be viewed as a dialogue about the fulfilment of desires and needs of individuals in specified spaces (Gil, 2007). They each have their individual stories about the social experiences of same-sex sexuality. Romantic relationships allow gay students to form a connection in which they negotiate their desires by interacting with the social scripts that prevail within different ambiguous spaces (Lesch et al., 2017). This negotiation involves strategies that either disconnect or strengthen the intimacy in their romantic relationships (Frost, 2013).

5.5. Implications

As established in the theoretical framework, narratives are informed by social scripts from which individuals draw their stories. Therefore, although the current study was qualitative in nature, the six gay student participants' stories provided a rich account of the social and cultural context in which gay students negotiate their sexuality and intimacy in their relationships within a South African university located in the Western Cape. The findings and conclusions of this study provide some knowledge of the socio-cultural scripts related to same-sex sexuality and relationships within these geographical contexts.

Consistent with previous research, this study has found that in a Western Cape university, as with other South African universities, there are social scripts of heteronormativity, hegemonic masculinity ideals and homophobia. These social scripts have been found to negatively impact gay students' experiences of belonging, safety and acceptance of their sexuality and relationships.

This study has found that there is a presence of sexual diversity, inclusive university policies, LGBTQ+ organisations and a certain level of peer acceptance within the university. However, the stories of homophobic and femmephobic attacks indicate that greater responsibility needs to be taken by South African universities' managements to create safe and inclusive university spaces for all students, irrespective of their sexuality or gender identity. This can be done through the formation, effective implementation and promotion of university policies that protect all students against discrimination, marginalisation, and psychological or physical harm. The awareness and inclusion of education of sexualities and genders needs to be incorporated in relevant university curricula. University mental health support structures should be equipped with knowledge and the appreciation of contextual factors that uniquely affect sexual minority students' mental health.

The stories of homophobia and heteronormative attitudes in South African high schools and home communities indicate that more work needs to be done to challenge these exclusionary and persecutory scripts in the broader South African society. These scripts appear to restrict the visibility of same-sex relationships and the openness of the sexual orientation of youth with their parents. Therefore, greater interventions should be implemented to promote the protective legislative rights of LGBTQ+ people than are present in the country. The violation of these rights through hate speech or physical attacks needs to result in harsher punitive measures.

5.6. Strengths and Limitations

In a South African context, race and socio-economic background are important intersectional factors that have momentous implications in the understanding of any university student's experiences. This study does well in considering these intersectional factors that are under researched in relation to gay men's experiences of their sexuality. However, it falls short of including stories related to the significance of the participants' race, as people of colour and the intersectional implications on the experiences of their sexuality. This was because racial identity was not a factor that was considered in the planning of the interview questions, nor was it brought up by the participants.

The sensitivity of the participants potentially being a vulnerable population due to the possible stigma is a factor that was appreciated in this study. Therefore, a great effort was taken to improve the anonymity of the participants. This included efforts in this report to conceal the name of the university the participants attend. This unfortunately restricted a thorough engagement in the contextual implications of the geographical location and history of the university.

5.7. Recommendations

The current study did not focus on exploring intersectional factors such as race, culture, and socio-economic status. Future research on gay university students' romantic relationships should include diverse racial groups, cultures, genders and socio-economic background as predominant factors in their research objectives. The study utilised a sample from one Western Cape university, the exploration of this study's topic is encouraged in other universities to broaden knowledge of the topic within other university contexts. The study limited the sample to be gay men, the exploration of the romantic relationships of lesbian, transgender or queer identifying students is also recommended in future research to further knowledge of sexual minorities. This study's qualitative findings provides a rich knowledge base. Therefore, future quantitative research can form hypotheses and explore the relationship of the intersectional factors such as culture, gender, socio-economic status on gay students' experiences at universities.

5.8. Conclusion

Similar to other universities' studies, the current study found that a Western Cape university reflects exclusionary scripts of heteronormativity, heterosexism and hegemonic masculinity which may deny gay students the experience of a true sense of belonging within the university space. Gay students have been subjected to persecution through implicit and explicit forms of homophobia and femmephobia. They show an awareness of the exclusionary scripts and therefore negotiate the expression of their sexuality, relationships and gender through surveillance and vigilance. Negotiating their relationships through disclosure or concealment of their sexuality is argued to be perpetuating these exclusionary scripts.

However, the current study, as with previous studies, has found that the spatial transition from home to university also represents an opportunity for the visibility of same-

sex relationships. In other words, although the heteronormative scripts that are dominant in the country are still present within the university space, the university space may feel comparably safer for gay students to express their relationships. Similar to the experiences of gay students in previous studies, some of the participants have found acceptance or tolerance of their sexuality from their peers. This has been found as a contributing factor towards gay students perceiving the university space as a safe space to explore and express their sexuality. This peer acceptance and tolerance of gay students has been found, to be in part, facilitated by LGBTQ+ student organisations through the advocacy and promotion of university policies that promote protection and awareness of diverse genders and sexualities.

As discussed in previous literature, intimacy within same-sex relationships is comparably more complex than heterosexual relationships due to the influence of heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity. This complexity has been found to be threatening for some gay students to negotiate physical intimacy in the university space. Two participants argue for greater visibility and normalisation of same-sex relationships within the Western Cape university space. However, this visibility risks gay students being harmed through homophobia and shifts the burden of responsibility of the safety of gay students away from university management structures.

Digital platforms have created an alternative and exclusive space where these gay students can share their knowledge and experiences with each other. Some students were able to form relationships where they were able to experiment with various forms of intimacy in same-sex relationships.

In conclusion, the Western Cape university space is an ambiguous space for gay students to negotiate the expression of intimacy with exclusionary social scripts. When compared to the broader South African context in which these scripts are dominant, different spaces (public or private) within the university afford gay students an opportunity to explore

sexuality and negotiate intimacy within relationships with each other. The visibility of intimacy within gay students' relationships is facilitated by the perception of different spaces as either supportive or rejecting of same-sex sexuality or same-sex relationships or the open expression of these. The discussion of the current study's findings illustrates various implications that can inform interventions to positively enhance the experiences of sexual minorities. The study's limitations and recommendations open a door for further research to explore and augment academic knowledge on topics that involve sexual minorities.

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Appendix A: Interview Schedule

This study aims to find out about stories of how gay male university students experience having romantic relationships at [the university][4]. In this interview, I would like to give you the opportunity to tell your own stories about your experiences.

1. Please tell me about your student experience at [the university], so far.
   Probes: year of study, courses, view of the cultural context, on- or off-campus residence

2. From the time you started studying here, up until now, what have your interactions with other students been like?

3. How would you describe your openness about your sexuality at the university?
   If yes, open: Please tell me about how that is like for you.
   If not open: Is there are any specific reason, why not?
   If open to some people but not others: probe on the reasons.

4. Describe your romantic relationships at [the university]
   Probes: Current/past relationships; the nature of meeting; relationship roles

5. How would you describe the openness about your relationship?
   If yes, open: Please tell me about how that is/was like for you, and what happened? Tell me about other people's (peers, family) attitude towards your relationship.
   If not open: Is there are any a specific reason, why not? How do you think people (peers, family) would react if you were to tell them about your relationship?
   If open to some people but not others: probe on the reasons

6. What is it like for same-sex couples to be in relationships, as university students?
   Probes: own experiences, benefits/challenges, view of the cultural context

7. What do you understand by 'intimacy' in a romantic relationship?

8. How do gay university couples negotiate intimacy? How about in your relationship?
   Probe different definitions: emotional, intellectual, physical

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[4] The name of the university is omitted in this appendix. The participants were asked questions that included the name.

Appendix B: Participation Information Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa
Tel: +27 21-959 2819 / Tel: +27 21-959 2283
E-mail: : 3964099@myuwc.ac.za

Participant Information Sheet

Dear prospective participant,

My name is Putuke Kekana. I am currently doing my Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology at the University of the Western Cape. I am conducting research to obtain this degree, under the supervision of Dr Leigh Adams Tucker. The research is entitled: *The negotiation of romantic relationships amongst gay male students in a Western Cape university.*

Please read through the information on this sheet. You are welcome to pass the information to any other student who could participate. The details of the study are below.

What is this study about?
The aim of the study is to explore narratives of gay male university students in negotiating romantic relationships and how they experience their sexuality within a Western Cape university space. We are inviting you to participate in this research project as you may be able to report on experiences of a current or previous same-sex relationship with a peer at the university. This study may shed more knowledge of gay men's social experiences and their relationships. Knowledge in this area will be beneficial for the development of various intervention strategies, including on-campus support services.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate?
In order to participate in the study, you will be asked to participate in a once-off, audio-recorded interview with the researcher. Audio recordings will be transcribed word-by-word by the researcher. The audio recordings and transcripts of interviews will be kept in password-protected files on the researcher's personal computer for the duration of the study, for research publishing purposes. Upon completion of the study, research data will be transferred to the Psychology Department for secure storage, for a period of five years. Research data shall be destroyed at the end of this period.

The interview will require you to share personal stories about yourself, your social experiences at the university, and stories about your relationship with another [...⁵] university student. Each interview should take approximately one hour and will be scheduled at your convenience at a private venue in the university. The interviews will be conducted solely in English. The findings from the research will be written up as a research thesis to be submitted for examination and will be published on the UWC Library website. Before beginning the interview, it is required that you read through and sign an

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⁵The name of the university is excluded for the purposes of this report.

informed consent form, that will be explained to you. The form simply confirms that you are aware of everything that we have discussed concerning confidentiality, feedback, privacy, and other rights for participation.

Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

Direct quotations from the transcripts may be used in research outputs. However, if we write an article or give a presentation about this research project, participant anonymity will be maintained by using different names. Your identity will not be disclosed and identifying information will be removed or disguised.

In accordance with legal requirements and/or professional standards, we are obligated to disclose to the appropriate individuals and/or authorities any information that comes to our attention concerning potential harm to self or others. In this event, we will inform you, that we have to break confidentiality to fulfil our legal responsibility to report to the designated authorities.

What are the risks and benefits of this study?

Participation is voluntary, and you will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to take part in or decline the research. You may withdraw from participating at any time during the interview, without any negative consequences. You may also choose not to answer any question if you do not feel comfortable answering.

All human interactions and talking about self or others carry some amount of risks. We will nevertheless minimise such risks and act promptly to assist you if you experience any discomfort, psychological or otherwise during the process of your participation in this study. After the interview there will be a debriefing session where we discuss how you felt. If you feel distressed after the interview you can contact me for a referral or you can get free face-to-face or telephonic counselling from the organisations listed below.

Some of the organisations focusing specifically on challenges experienced by gay persons include:

Out Well-Being telephonic counselling	Tel: 012 430 3272	Website: out.org.za
The gay and Lesbian Helpline.	Tel: 021 712 6699	Website: triangle.org.za
LifeLine Western Cape.	Tel: 021 461 1111	Website: lifelinewc.org.za
SADAG:	Tel: 080 012 1314	Website: sadag.org
UWC Centre for Student Support Services:	Tel: 021 959 2299	Website:
uwc.ac.za/students/csss		

What if I have questions?

Please keep *this* information sheet for your reference, as well as the contact details of the researcher, Putuke Kekana; e-mail: 3964099@myuwc.ac.za; and Dr Leigh Adams Tucker (UWC Research Supervisor); email: ltucker@uwc.ac.za

Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

Dr Maria Florence   Prof Anthea Rhoda
Psychology Head of Department   Dean: Faculty of Community and Health Sciences
University of the Western Cape   University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17   Private Bag X17
Bellville 7535   Bellville 7535
mflorence@uwc.ac.za   chs-deansoffice@uwc.ac.za

This research has been approval by the University of the Western Cape's Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC).
Private Bag X17Bellville, 7535
Tel: 021 959 4111
research-ethics@uwc.ac.za   Ethics Reference number: HS19/6/46

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa
Tel: +27 21-959 2819 / Tel: +27 21-959 2283
E-mail: : 3964099@myuwc.ac.za

Participant Consent Form

Title of Research Project: *The negotiation of romantic relationships amongst gay male students in a Western Cape university.*

I, _____ consent to taking part in the research project being conducted by Putuke Kekana. I understand that:

- Participation in this study is voluntary.
- I may refrain from answering any questions.
- I may withdraw my participation and/or my responses from the study at any time during the interview, without any negative consequence.
- There are no risks or benefits associated with this study.
- None of my identifiable information will be included in the research report.
- I may be quoted in the research report; however, a fake name will be used.
- All extraneous persons referred to in the research interview will be given a fake name.
- I am aware that the results of the study will be reported in the form of a research report which forms part of the requirements for the completion of a Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology degree.
- The research report will be available on the University of the Western Cape's library website which is accessible to the public and may also be presented at a local/ international conference and published in a journal and/or book chapter.
- The audio recordings will not be seen or heard by anyone other than the researcher, while the full interview transcripts will not be seen or heard by anyone other than the researcher and his supervisor.
- The audio recordings and transcripts of my interview will be kept in the researcher's password-protected personal computer for five years, for research publishing purposes, and will be destroyed thereafter.
- In accordance to legal requirements, the researcher is obliged to disclose to the appropriate individuals and/or authorities any information that comes to his attention concerning potential harm to myself or others.
- I have read the above information and the researcher has explained it to me.
- I have been given an opportunity to ask any question about the research, if I had any.

Participant's signature…………………………   Date…………

Appendix D: Ethical Approval Certificate

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR: RESEARCH
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION DIVISION

Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535
South Africa
T: +27 21 959 4111/2948
F: +27 21 959 3170
E: research-ethics@uwc.ac.za
www.uwc.ac.za

UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE

29 August 2019

Mr P Kekana
Psychology
Faculty of Community and Health Science

Ethics Reference Number: HS19/6/46

Project Title: The negotiation of romantic relationships amongst gay male students in a Western Cape University.

Approval Period: 29 August 2019 – 29 August 2020

I hereby certify that the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape approved the methodology and ethics of the above mentioned research project.

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval.

Please remember to submit a progress report in good time for annual renewal.

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse event and/or termination of the study.

Ms Patricia Josias
Research Ethics Committee Officer
University of the Western Cape

HSSREC REGISTRATION NUMBER - 130416-049

FROM HOPE TO ACTION THROUGH KNOWLEDGE.

Appendix E: Permission from the Office of the Registrar

UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE

DEPUTY REGISTRAR:
Academic
Administration
Administration Building, 1st Floor
ashaikjee@uwc.ac.za, nschoeman@uwc.ac.za
021 959 2110

10 September 2019

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE
WESTERN CAPE

Name of Researcher	:	Putuke Kekana
Research Topic	:	The negotiation of romantic relationships amongst gay male students in a Western Cape university
Date of issue	:	10/09/2019
Reference number	:	UWCRP100919PK

This serves as acknowledgement that you have obtained and presented the necessary ethical clearance and your institutional permission required to proceed with the above referenced project.

Approval is granted for you to conduct research at the University of the Western Cape for the period **10 September 2019 to 29 August 2020** (or as determined by the validity of your ethics approval). You are required to engage this office in advance if there is a need to continue with research outside of the stipulated period. The manner in which you conduct your research must be guided by the conditions set out in the annexed agreement: *Conditions to guide research conducted at the University of the Western Cape.*

The University of the Western Cape promotes the generation of new knowledge and supports new research. It also has a responsibility to be sensitive to the rights of the students and staff on campus. This office will require of you to respect the rights of students and staff who do not wish to participate in interviews and/or surveys.

It is also incumbent on you to first furnish this office with a copy of the proposed publication should you wish to reference the University's name, spaces, identity, etc. prior to public dissemination.

Please be at liberty to contact this office should you require any assistance to conduct your research or specifically require access to either staff or student contact information.

Yours sincerely

DR AHMED SHAIKJEE
DEPUTY REGISTRAR
OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR

UWC

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE
PRIVATE BAG X17, BELLVILLE
STUDENT ADMINISTRATION

10 SEPT 2019

This document contains a qualified electronic signature
and date stamp. To verify this document contact the
University of the Western Cape at
researchperm@uwc.ac.za.

UWCRP100919PK
Page 1 of 3

FROM HOPE TO ACTION THROUGH KNOWLEDGE