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The role of self-reflexivity on the part of gay male academics on South African university campuses

The article reports on the findings of a qualitative sociological study conducted between June and December 2012 with 17 self-identified gay male academics on their experiences in South African tertiary education. Adopting a queer theoretical critique of the process of self-reflexivity, the research focused on how the participants experience homophobia and its influence on their choice to remain in the closet or to disclose their homosexuality. Based on the views of the 15 in-depth interviews and two self-administered questionnaires, three themes associated with gay male academic reflexivity emerged: assimilation, segregation and dualistic transgression. Assimilation assumes the subordination of homosexuality in relation to heterosexuality, segregation the distinction between hetero- and homosexuality, whereas dualistic transgression underlines the reciprocal interplay between the first two themes.

Keywords: heteronormativity; homophobia; homosexuality and academia; reflexivity; queer theory.

1. Introduction

The current International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association's (ILGA) *State-Sponsored Homophobia* report, which chronicles the legislative protection of sexual minorities worldwide, gives a troubling picture on those who identify other than heterosexual, particularly in many African countries. Meerkotter (2015: 101) notes that "...legal developments in parts of Africa took a turn for the worse in 2014, with the enactment of laws which not only increased penalties for same-sex sexual acts, but actually broadened the scope of criminalisation" in countries including Botswana, Malawi, Gambia and Tanzania, among others. Anti-gay rhetoric has resulted in arrests and imprisonment of, as well as imposing the death penalty on, those who engage in same-sex sexual acts (Meerkotter 2015). Many of these discriminatory tendencies may be associated with beliefs that homosexuality, as a so-called Western import, contradicts and defies traditional African culture (Dlamini 2006). Such claims have, however, been refuted by studies which document the existence of same-sex practices as part of African culture for centuries (Nkabinde and Morgan 2006).

In the years immediately preceding the legal acknowledgment and pro-tection of sexual minorities as part of the South African Constitution, an organised mobilisation for the rights of sexual dissidents facilitated an attempt by various organisations across South Africa to form the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality (NCGLE) in 1994. One of their objectives included highlighting the importance of retaining an explicit reference to sexual orientation in the Equality Clause of the final Constitution (Sections 9(3) and (4)), in order to campaign for a decriminalisation of homosexuality and to challenge discrimination (NCGLE 2005). In its wake, several legal judgments solidified the NCGLE's commitment to the advancement of lesbian and gay rights in South Africa. These included: abolishing the crime of sodomy in 1998 and affording same-sex couples equal rights pertaining to immigration regulations (1999), pension benefits (2002), recovering funeral expenses (2003), adoption (2002) and marriage (2006), whether billed as civil union or marital union (Reddy 2010).

These contextual dynamics may also have an impact on the experiences of sexual minority academics and students in South African academic contexts. Although not as extensively researched as its international counterparts, South African inquiries have mainly centred on the impact of physical violence (Msibi 2009), verbal abuse (Butler et al. 2003; Rothmann and Simmonds 2015) and homophobic academic contexts (Bhana 2014; De Wet, Rothmann and Simmonds 2016; Johnson 2014; Msibi 2012; 2013; Richardson 2004; 2006; 2008) on sexual dissidents. Recent scholarship has, however, also explored the

possibilities of agentic and collectivistic attempts at resilience and thriving on the part of sexual dissidents in educational contexts (Francis 2017; Francis and Reygan 2016). Msibi (2014) writes on the supposed "dirty work" label which has been attached to sexuality studies, insofar as such research may be considered by some as unimportant. He recalls a "...prominent scholar [who]...once told [him] to stop doing 'gay' work as there were other pressing issues in the country" (Msibi 2014: 671). Given such dualistic and mostly troubling views on the necessity of sexuality scholarship, the article engages a queer theoretical interpretation of Erving Goffman (1971) and George Herbert Mead's (1962) work on self-reflexivity and how it could potentially relate to self-identified gay male academics on South African university campuses and their decision whether to remain closeted or to disclose their sexual orientation. It problematises self-reflexivity as solely agentic and liberating, through a queer theoretical interrogation of the potential impact of heteronormativity on gay male academics in their professional contexts (Msibi 2012). I will argue that the varied experiences of the research participants highlight three central themes which characterise their experiences: a choice to *assimilate into*, or to *segregate from* or to *dualistically transgress* the underlying heteronormative principles which may inform the university campus culture.

2. A queer theoretical interrogation of self-reflexivity

2.1 Unmasking heteronormativity, homonormativity and homophobia

Queer theory developed towards the end of the 1980s through the academic activism of gender and sexuality theorists. It has been described as a politics of provocation (Epstein 1996), an inquisitive theoretical stance (Pointek 2006) and an elitist, individualistic reference to one's own unique and diverse orientation in the 'first person', rather than the collectivist and objective orientation that gay and lesbian imply (Sedgwick 2013). Embedded in poststructuralist and postmodern ideologies, Halperin (1995: 162) considers queer theory to represent "...whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant". He notes that its proponents seek to question taken-for-granted discourses which may favour heteronormativity and rather underlines the importance of an emphasis on sexual fluidity, plurality and contestability (Halperin, 1995). Plummer (2015: 121) argues that queer theory, "...provides a critique of mainstream, neoliberal or 'corporate' homosexuality, shunning all 'normalizing processes' including [not only heteronormativity, but also] 'homo-normativity'" (Plummer 2015: 121). Youdell (2010: 88) reiterates this thought by foregrounding queer theory's advocacy of deploying those processes "...that have been subjugated or disallowed". Writing from a South African perspective, Milani (2014: 207) typifies

queer theoretical thinking as means to realise so-called utopian ideals through "…longing for a world beyond identity categories, something which might never happen but is nonetheless worth striving for".

Notwithstanding its laudable ideals and its applicability to South African studies on the subject (see Bhana 2014; De Wet, Rothmann and Simmonds 2016; Milani 2013; 2014; 2015; Msibi 2012), social scientists have been cautioned against the monolithic application of the main premises of queer theoretical thinking that emanate from the Global North to the lived experiences of sexual minorities in the Global South (Barnard 1999). Francis and Reygan (2016) encourage academic inquiry informed by queer theory to redress attempts at studying those in the Global South by using a "…predominantly white global minority" theoretical lens (see Msibi 2014; Reygan and Francis 2015; Tamale 2011) without acknowledging the intersections between, among others, sexual *and* racial or gender diversity (see Milani 2014). Francis (2017), for example, critiques queer theory's inclination towards a solely agentic and individualised view of the construction and enactment of sexual identity on the part of LGB youth as either agents or victims of homophobia in South African schools. One should, according to him, take note of the contextually unique structural challenges and uniquely agentic and communal possibilities afforded to (in his study) sexual minority youth in navigating their way towards resilience and thriving. Milani (2015) too, has exemplified the unavoidable contextually-dependent intersections of gender, race and sexuality in his research on conflict which arose between participants in the annual Johannesburg Pride Parade March and protesting members of the One in Nine campaign in 2012. Such examples of social inquiry underline the necessity for an intersectional focus through a 'queerer sociology', as advocated by Colebrook (2009), Hall (2005) and Plummer (2003). In my own work (Rothmann 2012) this reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationship has been considered, which should enjoy elaboration in both theory and praxis – between the contributions of proponents of lesbian and gay studies and queer theory. A queerer sociology may manifest a merger of dualisms which include the modern and postmodern/poststructuralist, the homogeneous and diverse, the community and individual as well as subjugation with transcendence (Richardson and Monro 2012).

Given the primary focus of the article, I mainly engage one particular feature associated with queer theory which is implicit in the preceding definition of the theory: the two forms of supposed gendered and sexual 'normativities'. The first, *heteronormativity*, advocates the "…strict adherence to gender role stereotypes…[and] gender oppression" (Kitzinger 2001: 277). This is associated with what Butler (1990: 47) calls the "heterosexual matrix". Such a matrix supposes that one is born and subsequently socialised into adopting a given culture's compulsory prescriptions about gender and sexual orientation. The

sexual self, according to Butler (1990; 2013), is only formed and mobilised based on a predetermined social, sexual and gendered configuration set out by those who seek to retain power in such an interactive encounter. Butler (1990: 33) believes the construction of a gendered and sexualised self to be "...an ongoing discursive practice ... open to intervention and resignification" (Butler 1990: 33), thus open to a reconfiguration of sorts based on external social forces in a larger cultural scenario (Reddy 2010). This, according to Butler, is exacerbated by a constant reinforcement of "heterosexualised hegemony" through a repetition of unquestioned ritualised performances. Only through such repetition and subjection will one be recognised as social and sexual self by those with whom one performs (Colebrook 2009: 14). Heteronormativity thus denotes a highly structured arrangement which may facilitate the creation of a misappropriation of equal human rights and protection based on the supposed subordinate sexual orientation of, for example, gay men (Athanases and Larrabee 2003). In so doing, proponents of queer theory in fact reiterate Butler's (1991: 23) assertion that "...heterosexuality is always at risk in the act of elaborating itself is evidence that it is perpetually at risk...it 'knows' its own possibility of being undone". In her interpretation of Butler's contributions, Colebrook (2009: 14) argues that regardless of the heterosexist constraints to which individuals conform, the mere presence of a clear set of expectations signals the possibility of transcending it through so-called 'activation' and an introduction of difference and instability. The question then remains as to whether one could expect sexual minorities to transgress a subordinate position in relation to heterosexuality when they, and subsequently their voices and rights, are continuously silenced (Petrovic 2002). Such silence may be facilitated and exacerbated through *homophobia.* This is defined as a "...gender-specific type of bullying that is based on actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity" (UNESCO 2012) or a "...fear, hatred, or intolerance of, or discomfort with, people who are homosexual" (Sanlo 1999: xix). Examples may range from physical, sexual or verbally abusive behaviour, ranging from the use of derogatory nicknames to physical or sexual violence, psychological manipulation, social exclusion or negative attitudes, exerted on an individual or collective level (UNESCO 2012).

The second 'normalised' form of sexuality is *homonormativity*. Through *homonormativity* (Cooper 2004) heterosexuality is positioned as the dependent sexual variant in relation to homosexuality (Stein and Plummer 1996). Such normalisation may assign a homogeneous character to homosexuality. Citing the role of particularly gay and lesbian liberationists in America, Plummer (1998) notes that these groups sought to render their targeted and vulnerable identities (in relation to heterosexuality) as even more privileged and sacred, and as such confined their communities as separatist entities outside the realm of the

heterosexual domain. This ideological isolation may result in distinctions within and among members of the homosexual community themselves. These attempts of 'self-categorisation', according to Plummer (1998: 85), results in "...an ever-increasing self-imposed segregation" and, one could argue, reinforcement of their "gay sensibility". The latter assumes that one displays characteristics associated with stereotypical features of homosexuality in terms of certain innate "...insights, qualities, or sensitivities alien to others" (Altman 1982: 149) which manifest a gay culture based on a shared sense of sublimation or need for affirmation. Although this may be considered as constructive, due to these creations emerging from *within* rather than from external sources, it may however *retain* an essentialist and homogeneous depiction of homosexuality (Van den Berg 2016). Proponents of queer theory are critical of these "...old radical languages of liberation, identity politics, rights and citizenship" and rather seek to challenge such normalisation through "...a 'politics of provocation'" (Plummer 2015: 121).

The subsection that follows considers the role of self-reflexivity in attempting to transgress or retain such normalisation by gay male academics.

2.2 The reflexive gay male on the university campus

The main theoretical basis of this study is embedded in the seminal contributions of Mead (1962) and Goffman (1974). In order to explore and understand the role of reflexivity on the part of the gay male academic on his university campus, a brief elucidation and demarcation of their work is provided. Mead (1962) argues that the social 'self' is an "...object to itself". This assumes that the social actor has the capability to be reflexive and be both the subject and object during this reflexive endeavour. By distinguishing between a conscious and self-conscious self, Mead (1962: 137) argues that a social actor is constructed through an awareness of "...intense action, memories and anticipations". This, in turn, provides individuals with the opportunity to merge their experiences based on outside activity with internal reflection and establish an amalgam between internal and external worlds; social actors thus move outside themselves to reflect on their perception of social reality through "...the process of social conduct or activity in which the given person or individual is implicated" (Mead 1962: 138). Through consciousness, individuals take a somewhat objective position about themselves. They "[e]xperience [themselves] as such, not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same social group, or from the generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole to which they belong" (Mead 1962: 138).

Given the significance attributed to the impressions of those with whom they interact, sexual minorities may not necessarily enjoy a sense of unbridled

freedom in self-reflexivity. Jackson and Scott (2010) and Smuts (2011), writing from British and South African perspectives respectively, caution an uncritical view of reflexivity as being only redeeming. One should consider the particular context in which one finds oneself which may necessitate the social (and sexual) actor to engage in a critical self-evaluation and efforts of "impression management" (Goffman 1971). This, according to Goffman, necessitates the performance of a particular 'acceptable' role which conforms to ritualised heteronormative prescriptions through which one seeks to impress one's "generalised other" (Mead 1962). Here one should observe Connell's (2007) emphasis on the importance of the specific social context in which social actors are embedded in order to "...qualitatively explain social phenomena in the Southern experience beyond fixed and simplistic explanations" (Francis and Reygan 2016: 80). In keeping with Mead and the later contributions of Butler (1990) on gender performativity, it was Goffman's (1971) work on the so-called dramatic performances of social actors in their everyday life which is of significance here. The self, in such circumstances, becomes

> ...a performed character...not an organic thing that has a specific location...it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented...In analysing the self then we are drawn from its possessor, from the person who will profit or lose most by it, for he and his body merely provide the peg on which something of collaborative manufacture will be hung for a time. And the means of producing and maintain selves do not reside inside the peg; in fact these means are often bolted down in social establishments (Goffman 1971: 223)

According to Goffman (1971), one's social self is not an autonomous construction on the part of the individual social actor. It is rather produced through a constant interaction between the actor and his/her social environment. His main argument underscores the fact that power is afforded to the actor to attempt a secure and stable self through presenting certain images and performances as expected by his/her audience. His work is thus in accordance with Mead's (1962: 135) reference to the way in which individuals' conceptions of themselves result as part of a process in which they enter into social relations with others who provide them with a multitude of experiences and activities, which shapes their understanding of themselves. As such, the actor seeks to *express* himself in order to *impress* the audience through what he explicitly expresses and more implicitly *gives off*. This is done through the noted reference to impression management (Goffman 1971: 183).

He, like Mead, suggests that a social actor, as performer, "...must act with expressive responsibility, since many minor, inadvertent acts happen to be well

designed to convey impressions inappropriate at the time" (Goffman 1971: 183). Goffman (1971) thus conceptualises the social self as dramatic performance between a social actor and his audience. According to him, "...the individual offers his performance and puts on his show 'for the benefit of other people'". In many ways, what was of importance to him was an investigation into the degree to which the social performer himself also 'buys' into his own projected image of reality, something which, in most of the cases, was evident in his social interactions (Ritzer 2012). Therefore, the social actor in fact, through an attitude of suspicion of his audience, deceives, misdirects or manipulates others in order to present a self which will most likely be accepted by others (Manning and Smith 2010). In doing this, an 'idealization' (Goffman 1971: 30) arises where an individual performance is "...socialized, molded, and modified" in accordance with the larger cultural scenario. This emphasises the incongruence between an individual's more personal self, in relation to his "...socialized" self, in so far as his/her agency may be inhibited (Goffman 1971).

Writing from a British perspective feminists Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott (2010:129-130) apply Mead's (1962) work on the construction of the social self through intense efforts of "reflexiveness" to women in predominantly patriarchal contexts and gay men in a presumed heteronormative cultural setting. Consider their argument in this regard: "...heterosexuals rarely ask themselves why or how they 'got that way', whereas a lesbian or gay man might be expected to give such an accounting, and can usually tell a story of 'becoming'...gay or lesbian". They argue that gay men in a heterosexist context, for example, may display the necessary capacity to reflect on their circumstances and what they wish to attain through the disclosure of their sexual identity. If they are able to do this, Van den Berg (2016: 39) believes that such reflexivity may afford gay men (and other sexual minorities), the opportunity to "...challenge and undermine the social and political power regime" enforced through heteronormativity. Given its centrality and dominance within certain social contexts, gay men may, for example, choose to refrain from enacting their true selves through disclosure (Francis 2017). One thus needs to acknowledge the "...situations of authoritarianism" whereby individuals are "...products of the social structure" (Msibi 2012: 528). In keeping with the primary focus of the article, the role of self-reflexivity in the academic context is considered next.

2.3 Reflexivity as potentially transgressive

Canadian teacher-educator André Grace conceptualises what he calls "writing the queer self" as a link between his personal and professional self. He recommends that educators engage in such a process to explore, as he did, "...the self [he]

often hated, a self whom others...taught [him] to hate...It is an opportunity to grow as a teacher educator no longer bounded by the toxic politics and pedagogy of heterosexism and homophobia" (Grace 2006: 827). In doing this, he attempts to uncover an implicit heterosexual hegemony that may underlie mainstream educational contexts. This process requires the interrogation and exploration of one's past to constructively engage with one's present circumstances (Grace 2006). It implies moving beyond a mere focus and eradication of the heterosexual/homosexual binary and homophobia, towards a transformation of dominant and oppressive strategies and ideologies in favour of a critical interpretation of diverse experiences in a given context (Wallace 2002). One does this, according to Msibi (2012), to establish so-called "resist-stances" (Grace and Benson 2000) towards homophobic inclinations in academia.

Such a process is exemplified in Chang's (2005) recommended focus on a "critical pedagogy". This approach attempts to interrogate the dominant heterosexual discourses in education (Francis 2017; Francis and Msibi 2011; Francis and Reygan 2016; Msibi 2013; Rothmann 2016) through critical efforts of self-reflexivity. Although doing this may be advocated by proponents of queer theory in general (Warner 1991), it is also extremely important in the context of academic institutions (Cooper 2004; Jones and Calafell 2012). Chang (2005: 173) argues that a "...critical pedagogy is important in challenging traditional pedagogies, which domesticate, pacify, and deracinate agency...[and] harmonize a world of disjuncture and incongruity". Athanases and Larrabee (2003) comment on the importance of including self-identified and 'out' gay male academics as imperative when courses on gender and sexuality are presented. Of interest in their study was the fact that their participants considered it important to engage with a critical pedagogic approach in their classes in order for their students to be presented with a first-hand, "insider's" perspective on the meaning of and experiences associated with being gay through a relation of the lecturer's own personal experiences, adversities and views in a self-assertive, credible and proud way (Rothmann and Simmonds 2015).

For individuals to take a collective stance against exclusionary patriarchal and heteronormative principles, Maxey (1999) argues for an emphasis on using reflexivity in uncovering the underlying performances of rituals that we ourselves adhere to and reinforce, sometimes unknowingly. Maxey (1999) does, however, contend that complete or "transparent reflexivity" is nearly impossible, since we all form part of this larger context of gendered and sexualised performances, which assumes the difficulty in distinguishing or clearly establishing a wedge between our academic and social self as well as between academic and activist self. As such, he believes that through "critical reflexivity" the academic is given

the opportunity to consciously reflect on the discursive power relations between himself and others.

Academics are thus left to choose either to disclose or foreclose their sexual orientation within their particular academic context. Participants, according to Grace and Benson (2000), had insightful views about this choice. One American lesbian educator felt less authentic in hiding her sexuality, since the "privatization of her lesbian identity" reinforced her performance as professional teacher and role model and, in effect, stifled any positive "resist-stance", since her secrecy fuelled ignorance, prejudice and homophobia among her students. A history teacher communicated the necessity to publically disclose his sexual orientation to colleagues and students in an attempt at realising freedom from his own internalised homophobia. He notes, "…'I simply could not participate in my own oppression one more time'", for others must be aware of the "… histories, relationships, and connectedness to the world" (quoted in Grace and Benson 2000: 92).

2.4 Reflexivity inhibited: The role of heteronormativity

Notwithstanding support from heterosexual faculty members, other studies have shown that homophobia is in fact directed towards homosexual academics (Barnfield and Humberstone 2008) which may necessitate the gay male academic to reflexively 'closet' himself through a self-imposed censorship. In such instances, the gay male academic may not be afforded the opportunity fully to master a sense of self-reflexivity, which presumes freedom to proclaim his homosexuality publically.

Research has revealed that the supposed significance of heterosexuality and, in turn heterosexism and homophobia, characterise much of the experiences of gay male academics (Grace 2006). Rather than positioning heterosexuality as a dependable sexual variant in relation to homosexuality, studies on the subject matter have shown that the position of sexual minorities in the academic context is typified in a pathological and assimilationist manner: homosexuality adapting to heteronormativity (Fox 2007). The political economy of gender and sexual orientation may therefore be left unchallenged by positing a supposed tolerance (masked as acceptance and support) within and on university campuses. Athanases and Larrabee (2003) contend that the ideological undercurrents of such an anti-homosexual inclination may further inhibit access to structural privileges such as legal rights, social provisions or even just the safety of sexual minority academics.

Reasons to foreclose on coming out of the closet in the academic context include that disclosure through, among others, a declarative life-narrative approach (Grace and Benson 2000) may be interpreted as an act of retaliation directed towards students who are held 'captive' in classes during such presentations. This may result in a static pedagogical relationship between educators and students, since these pedagogies "...often elide both the complicity of the teacher and the students' *resistance to resistance* in order to reduce the...classroom to a site of a teacher-liberator/student-empowered" relationship (Monson and Rhodes 2004: 87), rather than a reciprocally discursive and transformative experience. Owing to their potentially 'captive' position, students may adopt a minorities logic in their interpretation of the narrative which only reinforces the 'us' versus 'them' or the 'otherness' stereotype associated with sexual minorities (Grace and Benson 2000). Gust (2007: 59) notes in this regard that "...'[c]oming out', for all its assertion of self-determination, can always be perceived as reifying the subordinate status of a non-normative sexual identity". It may also eradicate any efforts at safeguarding academics in terms of their personal safety and professional integrity or occupational mobility, as evidenced in Slagle's (2007) research. Msibi (2014: 671), writing from a South African perspective, for example recalls having been "...told by a student that young men shy away from coming to my office for the fear of being characterised as 'gay' as it is assumed that all men who walk into my office are gay". Kopelson (2002: 29) cites the words of one academic who noted, "I am not the text in my class." This is attributed to the fact that disclosure of one's homosexual identity may lead to one's becoming "...quite literally, a focal point in that...classroom...to be gazed upon, interpreted, anticipated, predicted, and 'sized up'...to be speculated and gossiped about" (Kopelson 2002: 29).

Grace and Benson (2000) contend that although an attempt at transgressing the limitations of heteronormativity may be laudable, it engenders certain risks. The academic may experience emotional inner turmoil, social exclusion, ridicule or threat. Contextual factors may warrant secrecy and foreclosure on the part of a gay lecturer (Newman 2007). Censorship in this regard could be attributed to the fact that potentially discouraging behaviour may come through courtesy of non-supportive peers and colleagues, with the supportive contingent only passively and covertly expressing their pro-gay attitudes (Renn 2000). This supports studies which indicate that disclosure of their homosexuality may, particularly for junior and/or non-permanent postgraduate students or academics, prove to be an unwelcome impediment to development, promotion and even retaining their jobs (Evans 2002).

In many respects this reiterates Jackson and Scott's (2010) argument that marginalised individuals, such as gay men, may be prone to more self-reflexivity

concerning the disclosure or foreclosure of their sexual orientation within a probable hostile hegemonic environment. As such, "…roles are performed in a strategic, calculated way, with attention to self-presentation and in pursuit of impression management" (Scott 2015: 83). This may result in sexual minority academics using coping strategies, as evident in Barnfield and Humberstone's (2008) study on the experiences of gay and lesbian practitioners in outdoor education in the United Kingdom. Through explicit impression management, as explained in the preceding elucidation of Goffman's (1971) work, participants sought to remain completely closeted or pass as heterosexual by using so-called "covering strategies". Two lesbian educators indicated that they did this in an attempt to 'pass' as heterosexual, by inventing false narratives for their personal lives: "…I told everybody that he [a colleague] had made it [that she was lesbian] up and that it wasn't true and that I had been going out with my boyfriend for five years…people went 'Yeah, OK' and took my word for it and that was it" (quoted in Barnfield and Humberstone 2008: 36). In so doing, they sought to remain closeted and *impress* the "generalised others" (see Mead 1962).

3. Research design and methodology

For the purpose of the study, I observed the epistemological principles of interpretivism and ontological approach of social constructionism. Proponents of interpretivism emphasise that one's social reality is constantly constructed, reconstructed and potentially deconstructed through interpretation (Bryman 2016). Rooted in Max Weber's *Verstehen,* one abandons the positivists' "…monistic" preoccupation with merely explaining social phenomena (Seale 2000: 21). One should rather acknowledge that our perceptions and thematic interpretations of social phenomena "…are filtered by a web of assumptions, expectations and vocabularies" (Alvesson 2002: 3). Social researchers who ascribe to constructionism seek to emphasise the unique constructions of social actors of their own subjective, complex and relativistic meanings of social reality. In so doing, I was able to inductively explore the subjective understandings and meanings the self-identified gay male academics ascribe to their social lives at home and on their respective campuses. Pertaining to homosexuality, Halwani (1998) asserts that sexual orientation is culturally and relationally dependent, as opposed to proponents of an essentialist and positivist paradigm who presume a more deterministic, homogenised and generalised understanding of homosexuality. As such, the study employed a qualitative research design. Such an approach sought to gather detailed narratives in order to "…convey the complexity of the situation" through an immersion (Brown and Gortmaker 2009) into the field of study and generating detailed accounts from the gay male participants. Purposive and snowball sampling methods were used.

Participants had to be self-identified gay male academics in order to qualify for participation and the use of purposive sampling seemed most appropriate as initial entry into the community. Gay male academics known to me were contacted and requested to participate. While five academics agreed to do so, others declined. Rumens (2011: 163) notes in this regard, that "...gay men are one example of a social group often characterised as 'hidden' and 'hard to reach' because, in large part, sexuality is not always 'visible' or 'obvious' to the researcher". In addition to this likely limitation, a fear of public identification as gay and the corresponding anxiousness associated with the possible homophobic consequences based on 'coming out' of the closet, also proved to inhibit sampling procedures (Sanlo 1999: 24). Two gay academics, for example, were known to me from their lauded contributions in their particular field of study. A female colleague of theirs said she would request them to contact me if they were willing to partake in the study, but later informed me that both had declined to participate. Their decision, according to her, was based on impending academic promotion in their department, and their concern and fear that an association with me would negatively affect their careers. This corresponded with accounts by Evans (2002) and Francis and Msibi (2011) of academics in both America and South Africa, respectively, who expressed the same fear. Given such limitations, the snowball sampling method duly complemented purposive sampling to gain access to other men (Holt and Walker 2009: 249). Data collection methods included in-depth interviews and self-administered questionnaires comprised of open-ended questions. The length of the interviews varied from one to three hours depending on the detail of the feedback provided. Fifteen self-identified gay male academics employed at South African universities were interviewed over a six-month period (June 2012 to December 2012). Two of the academics requested to complete self-administered questionnaires[1]. In addition, the geographical location of the academics, their ages, subject department and university were not directly linked to them, an approach also favoured by other researchers (Sanlo 1999). The researcher adhered to a strict ethical code of conduct prescribed by North-West University's ethical practices protocol. This included observing the importance of the principle of voluntary participation, whereby the participants were given the opportunity to autonomously decide as to whether they were willing to be interviewed or to complete the questionnaire. In order to realise this ideal, the interview schedule and self-administered questionnaire were accompanied by a written Informed Consent Statement outlining the purpose of the study, the roles of the researcher and participants and the protection of the anonymity, privacy and confidentiality of the latter (Bryman 2016).

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1   It should be noted that these interviews are not cited as part of the Reference List given the sensitivity of the subject matter (i.e. the precise place of interview and organisation may not be cited).

The questionnaire was identical to the interview schedule in its thematic structure and question content. Both were comprised of four subsections. Subsection A centred on the biographical background of the participants, subsection B on their academic background, whereas C and D included the opinion-related questions. Both these sections were designed according to the themes of the study, being opinions on their private gay identity in subsection C, and their professional gay male identity in academia in D. The latter subsection had questions on the experiences of gay men within their university contexts. Here themes included: discrimination, the university as safe environment and the need to remain closeted. Questions on particular discrimination included, '*Have you experienced any form of direct/personal discrimination at your university based on your sexual orientation?*', '*Do(es) your university/faculty/classes provide a safe environment for you to "live out" your gay sexual orientation?*' and '*Have you ever willingly censored yourself during classes/presentations/ colloquia pertaining to statements associated with your own sexual orientation or homosexuality in general?*' Participants were requested to elaborate on their answers by providing reasons and/or examples. Given the particular scope of the article, primary emphasis is placed on the experiences of the participants in their academic contexts as they relate to their experience of discrimination on their campuses. The analysis of the transcripts and completed self-administered questionnaires was informed by open and selective coding. The first was used to identify the first-order concepts which comprised the views of the academics. These included: the role of 'the closet' and the gay male in the academic context. The latter comprised a focus on the subthemes of discrimination and safety.

The average age of the participants was 43 years. As regards their *nationality,* all but one (who was born in Europe) were South African. All the participants were white, with only one who identified as coloured in terms of the *racial* category[2]. The subject departments of the academics were part of four *academic faculties.* These included one participant in the natural sciences faculty (Don), the faculty of education with two participants (Colin and James), arts with four (Hugh, Phillip, Robin and Warren) and social sciences with 10 members (Alec, Anderson, Christopher, Greg, Ian, Matthew, Rick, Ridge, Stanley and Steve). Their *areas of interest or expertise* also varied greatly, regardless of them being grouped within and across the four faculties. The men's *number of years in their occupations* ranged from 40 years to one year, with 15 being the average number of years in the academic profession.

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2   I am aware of the potential critique pertaining to the inclusion of particularly white participants which may inhibit the realisation of an intersectionality concerning race. Regardless, I was mostly dependent on referrals to potential participants through, among others, snowball sampling and could not merely contact individuals without their consent.

Given my personal identification as gay male, in general, and gay male academic in particular, I needed to display what Schütz (1932) refers to as "... inter-subjectivity". I decided, like Fine (2011) and Roggow (2003), to disclose my homosexuality to my male interviewees to construct a "...solid interview relationship" (Jones and Calafell 2012: 962) and to encourage them to relate intimate and private details about their sexual orientation within their personal and academic lives. I embraced Schütz's (1932) recommendation rather than privileging my personal gay male identification shared with the participants. Jones and Calafell (2012: 962), on the one hand, contend that if the researcher were to elicit his personal narrative as part of the research, he in fact "...engages the politics of voice [and]...talk back to hegemonic, heteronormative...discourses". On the other hand, the researcher may "...unduly influence...the interviewer-respondent relationship", since little attention may then be afforded to the narrative of the participant (Fine 2011: 529). Such disclosure did, however, establish a rapport between myself and the participants (Fine 2011). To refrain from emphasising my own homosexuality as pre-eminent factor during my interviews (which informs the discussion to follow), I opted to use the direct quotes of the interviewees and those included in the self-administered questionnaires to provide validity to my findings and avoid "overidentification" with the participants (Castro-Convers et al. 2005: 53). This is attributed to the fact that the thematic analysis centres the contributions of the participants as products of interaction *between* the men and myself, rather than solely emphasising my *personal interpretations or beliefs*, as will be evident in the subsections to follow.

4. Findings

This section provides an in-depth account of the views of the research participants on their experiences in the academic context, their experiences of homophobia and their views on their respective campuses as 'safe'.

4.1 Different gay male 'selves'

The *hidden lecturer self,* also termed the "...career" (Christopher), "...management" (James) or "...professional" (Anderson, Don and Phillip) self was cited as a preeminent label by Colin, Matthew, Rick and Robin. Regardless of their difference in age, all commented on establishing a clear distance from their students within the university context. Matthew (a social scientist) noted that he is "...another type of gay at work" but remains true to who he is, although he does not flaunt it explicitly, particularly towards his students. Colin (an educationalist) also attempts at keeping his gay identity hidden from his students, although his colleagues are in fact aware of his sexual orientation. But, as was the case with

Matthew, he attempts to distance himself from stereotypical gay traits, including the presumed effeminacy of gay men. In line with these two responses, Anderson and Robin also work at keeping a responsible and professional distance from their students, by insisting that the students refer to them by their academic titles. Regardless of the fact that Rick's colleagues are aware of his sexual orientation, he remains cautious in entering into debates on sexual orientation. Rick shared this perspective by also separating his gay identity from his lecturing role, since he argues that the main impetus should be placed on the "...excellence" of his work and not his sexual orientation; the latter should not have any bearing on his professional work.

Hugh said that the way in which he exudes his gay identity differs substantially between the two contexts. Christopher, Colin, Matthew and Robin, however, said their identity did not change when they moved between their private and professional contexts. Colin and Robin underlined the importance of discretion and relevance associated with "outing" oneself in a professional public arena, as did Greg who recommended a "...testing of the waters" before coming out. Others, including Alec, Don and Steve, directed attention to the fact that the inherent differences associated with the two contexts imply adjustment of gay men in adhering to more formal and strict codes of conduct within the professional sphere, regardless of one's sexual orientation. A "...gay-only space" according to Steve, provides the opportunity for more relaxation and "...play... but I believe my core is the same". Robin also identified with the idea of freedom in his residential and social contexts, and stated that he avoided acting in a "...controversial manner at work [by not]...flaunting his homosexuality".

Ridge and Steve (in social sciences) and Warren (in the faculty of arts), however, assigned more importance to an *openly* gay lecturer self within the work context. Steve states that he uses his sexual orientation "...as a teaching tool around discrimination, stigma, respect [and] diversity" and exudes high levels of confidence and assertiveness. Ridge also sees no need to divorce one's gay identity from one's professional role as colleague and lecturer, mainly because his courses lend themselves to themes which centre on gender and sexuality. He notes, "... I'm very much queer with friends ... and my students and at the university and anywhere else ... there are shades of queerness, some aspects become more salient and others more grounded, but definitely when I arrived at [my current university] ... it was clear that I was a self-proclaimed gay man". Although younger than Ridge and Steve, Warren echoed their views through his exemplification of a convergence of all his different selves as part of his courses in the faculty of arts.

4.2 Diverging experiences of homophobia

Given the divergent responses as to adopting a more invisible or visible gay lecturer label, four responses typified views on questions related to homophobic practices directed at the participants on their respective campuses. These included recollections of *explicit, subtle* or *no* examples of homophobia as either interdependent or separate. The fourth subset of responses posited the participants as being more *conflicted* on the issue of homophobia.

Explicit homophobia. Two men regarded discrimination as being *explicit*. Anderson recalled two instances. The first took place during an initial interview as undergraduate student to continue his postgraduate studies at his then university. Members of the particular department lambasted him with religious and heteronormative rhetoric and questions in an attempt to impress upon him their non-acceptance of homosexuality. The most recent incident occurred when he was criticised for focusing on research which dealt with homosexuality and gay rights, rather than other forms of social inequality and exclusion in South African society, which include class, ethnicity and race.

Like Anderson, James, an educationalist, argued that his participation in a series of discussions on diversity at his university provided examples of homophobia. He attributed this to the fact that although institutional management requested such discussions as an attempt to sensitise university staff and students to sexual diversity on campus, these managers failed to attend the sessions. Such behaviour, according to him, rendered homosexuality and the plight of sexual minorities as insignificant for mainstream academic debate, and by implication, "...meaningless and insignificant" in general. He notes in this regard: "...I'm not part of the norm, when I try to do it [participate in workshops on sexual diversity or lecturing courses on LGBT issues, for example] on your own, you will be left on your own and to your own devices".

Subtle homophobia. The subtler example of homophobia, faced by Rick, centred on the "...implicit" heterosexual norms which govern behaviour in his university context in general, as well as specifically in his department. These behaviours are subsumed in subtle examples of formal criticism by his colleagues during departmental meetings, rather than explicit verbal or non-verbal homophobia. Such so-called constructive criticism was, according to him, examples of underlying "... personal vendettas" founded on his sexual orientation. Stanley provided an example of his colleagues citing departmental objectives and need for course material as examples of the manner in which debates, which he included as part of a course which dealt with, among others, sexual diversity issues, were curtailed in mainstream courses. He noted that some of his colleagues probably thought him to be "...eccentric or just silly" in

wanting to present the course. He continues, "… I tried to fight for the course … but you know the department felt it was peripheral, non-essential, eccentric and non-sensible for [the] mainstream".

Such accounts could arguably lead to the justification given by one of Rick's colleagues for positioning himself as "… self-proclaimed gay academic" in his institution and specific department. This could exacerbate the polarisation of the heterosexual and homosexual ends on either side of the sexuality continuum in academia. In doing this, Rick questions the meaning of such a self-proclamation and the particular academic's degree of acceptance if he expresses the need to explicitly disassociate and distinguish himself from heterosexuals.

Conflicted homophobia. Six participants expressed their *conflicted* perspectives on homophobia. Although no one has ever explicitly discriminated against him, Hugh argued that people make assumptions before they have met you. This makes it all the more difficult to change their eventual perspectives. Greg and Stanley also ascribe a more subtle and covert quality to prejudice. According to Stanley, gossip persists about those individuals who are different from the mainstream, whereas Greg regards himself as "… lucky to choose my career as lecturer, most of my colleagues are female, which makes it easier, it provides a 'different feel'". Nonetheless, he is very cautious in his overt behaviour on campus because of the likelihood of homophobia in his department. In terms of his own experiences as a gay lecturer, Ridge contended that he was informed by his students that certain lecturers in his department "… struggled" with his emphasis on 'non-heterosexual' themes in his professional life. He noted that "… if you are a formal [academic], or you do formal research, they do not fully understand the practical reasons or implications of why I do what I do. There was never … overt discrimination, but sometimes what is not said, or the sighs, rolling of the eyes at certain meetings are more telling than any words."

He did however contend that it would be "… unfair" of him to equate his colleagues' behaviour as evidence of their disdain for homosexual individuals. Ian noted that his work environment provides a "… touch of okayness" for being gay, since many of his colleagues are also gay or lesbian.

No homophobia. Finally, seven men noted that they *did not* experience any direct or indirect personal discrimination. Based on his mostly *ad hoc* involvement in academic work at several universities over the last few years, Alec expressed the view that his sexual orientation was not relevant. Many of these universities, on requesting his services, explicitly request presentations on LGBTQ issues, during which he purposefully delved into his own life experiences to supplement the academic content. Steve expressed a similar perspective when he stated "… my work is about sexuality, gender, identity and discrimination, so my being gay

is not a surprise to anyone!" In agreement with Ian, Christopher wholeheartedly conveyed his appreciation for the freedom and "... tolerant" context his academic department facilitates "... through the pursuits of creativity". Warren who, like Christopher, is in the faculty of arts, also reflected on the ease associated with his immediate academic context based on other lecturers also being gay. He believes that this liberating environment affords him the opportunity to serve as role model for his gay students, something he, as a student, would have cherished. Matthew, on the other hand, expressed a greater inclination of self-critique (or what one could consider as internalised homophobia) in the manner he manages himself in public, especially towards colleagues and students. Robin, like Matthew, also seeks to keep his private life to himself and does thus not experience direct threats, whereas Don, in natural sciences, has opted to remain "... famously blind for certain things ... I don't allow my being gay to interfere with my work, I'm one of the team".

The perceptions of the participants regarding their experience of homophobia in the academic environment based on their sexual orientation also related to the ideologies they ascribe to in their professional lives, with a principal focus on their views pertaining to safety in the academic milieu.

4.3 Safety as a 'fettered ideal'

Here too the participants provided a variety of responses as to whether they regarded their academic context as a *safe environment.*

The academic milieu as safe

Seven of the men believed their university campuses *to be safe.* Among them was Alec who noted that his own department, after all these years, has not requested any academically orientated contributions from him on the subject matter of lesbian and gay studies, whereas other departments have. Christopher again underlined the definite safety *within* his department, while he still censors himself during his lectures, "... It is wrong to push the gay agenda. People are too sensitive for it." Although Phillip answered 'yes', he still hesitated seconds later with a "... I think so. It is necessary to include these issues in the curriculum for students to be exposed to it, so that they are exposed to diversity ... It provides more freedom to the lecturer." Anderson, Colin, Matthew and Warren also answered affirmatively. For Colin, the fact that he is not out to everyone makes this inconsequential. If he were out, however, he believes that it could become a problem. Although secretive, Matthew referred to his ability to use the university's computer system (Internet) to navigate between various gay dating

sites during work hours, whereas Warren attributed the "… incredible openness" of his campus to gay people to the fact that he receives several Facebook invites from gay students a week. As an academic, he believes the world to be more "open" and that he is "… super comfortable" in expressing his sexual orientation. Much of this, for him, is based on his access to academic literature, courtesy of proponents of queer theory.

The conflicted experience of safety

The responses of seven participants signalled more of a *conflicted* rather than an 'either-or' view on the issue of safety. Although Ridge's responses are an example of mastering an identity pride of sorts, he is still nervous when meeting students during their first-year studies, since he does not know what their views on the subject may be within a more generic module. He contrasts this feeling with a greater sense of assertiveness when interacting with postgraduate students, since they have made a conscious decision to continue with their research in his particular field of expertise. Rick echoed Ridge's approach insofar as he is cautious in his interaction with colleagues and especially with students. He deems discretion as imperative, since you will never fully know how others will react or act towards you if they were aware of your sexual orientation, regardless of the "… gay-friendly" nature of his university. "Tolerance", according to him, "… is context specific" (Ridge). The role of context also figured in Steve's account. He commented on gay men's intrinsic ability to denote possible underlying prejudices, because "… spaces where homophobia may be covert, or hidden, or implied and I believe one learns, as a gay person, to pick up these vibes and act accordingly". In addition, Don, Hugh and Robin also adapt to their particular class or departmental contexts, to avoid any possible identification and resulting discrimination.

The academic milieu as unsafe

Only two participants, James and Stanley, thought their academic contexts did *not* provide a safe environment. Stanley's views complemented James's cynicism about his university management's lack of constructive input to safeguard sexual minorities. Building on the post-1994 climate in the new South Africa, Stanley started to write academic articles which provided a "… way of coming out … you were labelled, but you didn't care". The evident incongruence between his private and public identities was expressed in his statement that such research was "… encouraged" but that the "… default position in my personal life is to be more cautious". James in turn regards the notion of safety as a "… fraught idea" because of the "… tenuous position you as a lecturer have in relation to

your students. ... How do you [as a gay man] lead by example? How do you intervene to create a safe space? This is very difficult." He emphasises the relative ease that black individuals may have in dealing with racial discrimination, since issues of race and racism have been given primary importance in the national discourse. "Sexual minorities", according to him, "... are not provided with this preferential treatment, you are not regarded as a designated minority in the country. To normalise your sexual orientation, you have to put yourself out there, but again the question remains to what extent you have to put yourself out there to make a difference." His argument recalls several academic references to the incongruence between the South African Constitution's protection on the basis of sexual orientation, and the actual everyday experiences of sexual minorities as reflected in (the absence) of policies and practical procedures put in place by, among others, institutional managers of universities.

5. Discussion of findings

Three themes typified the participants' reflexivity concerning their choice to disclose or foreclose their homosexual identity on their respective university campuses. They include: a choice to *assimilate into the heteronormative campus culture,* to *segregate into a homonormative campus context* or to choose to manifest a *dualistic transgression of a heteronormative campus culture.*

Assimilation is embedded in *heteronormativity; segregation* may be associated with *homonormativity,* while a *dualistic transgression* implies a constant interdependency, interplay and overlap between hetero- and homonormative principles (as part of *assimilation* and *segregation,* respectively). All three depend on the contextual constraints and possibilities on a South African university campus. This recalls Jackson and Scott's (2010) critique of an unfettered degree of reflexivity and the way in which the gay male academic may need to negotiate his performance.

5.1 Assimilation

Assimilation was evident in the feedback of those participants who opted to display the more "professional" rather than "open" gay self in the work context. Implicit attempts at avoiding prejudice exemplified the contributions of those who recalled subtle or explicit institutional homophobia, based on the underlying ideological values of their institutions or subject departments (Silverschanz, Cortina, Konik and Magley 2008). In so doing, these academics inhibit any attempt at overtly critiquing heteronormativity, since assimilation rather accommodates than transgresses and, as such, may be "...potentially dangerous because it may

further marginalise sexual minorities and may encourage silence and self-denial on the part of gays" (Van den Berg 2016: 29). Participants noted, among others, how institutional homophobia manifests in the actions of colleagues in subject departments as well as the apathy of a university's management. The absence of managers or assigned representatives from forums on sexual diversity reaffirms the impression of their lack of support for issues faced by sexual minorities. Their behaviour reflected Msibi's (2014) emphasis on the so-called eccentricity or "silliness" certain heterosexual academics assign to courses dealing with sexuality (other than race and gender); thus, as an unnecessary 'add-on' and something expendable, rather than academic necessity. This posits homosexuality as an unimportant component of academic debate (Burn, Kadlec and Rexer 2002), even implicitly lambasting those academics who wish to make a constructive contribution in this regard.

The importance of management and academia in general, to act in a proactive, constructive and autonomous way to disseminate a message of support to their sexual minority constituents, supports similar arguments forwarded by Chang (2005) and Rankin (2005). Justifications provided by the gay male academics to assimilate (and remain closeted) mainly centred on safeguarding their career prospects and jobs (Evans 2002), refuting the need to publically disclose their sexual identity to others (Barnfield and Humberstone 2008), avoiding identifiable (or stereotypical) gay behaviour (Halperin 2012) and to refrain from inciting controversy through "resist-stances" (Grace and Benson 2000; Monson and Rhodes 2004) by pushing the 'gay agenda'.

5.2 Segregation

Three academics highlighted normalisation of homosexuality through segregation, akin to the underlying bases of homonormativity (Cooper 2004). These included positive accounts of the university as safe. Such views were mostly based on there being other gay men in their particular departments, creating a sense of safety through its gay male constituency. Given this, being gay is afforded a supposed "… touch of okayness". As I have argued elsewhere, this may result in three potential consequences Rothmann (2014; 2016). Firstly, a homonormative (Cooper 2004) approach is adopted, where heterosexuality may assume the subordinate configuration of sexuality in relation to homosexuality because most of the colleagues are gay. Secondly, such segregation further exacerbates homogenisation by positing sexual minorities as exhibiting a particular "gay sensibility" (Altman 1982), which assumes that they display homogeneous characteristics. Finally, such an approach reaffirms the belief that safety afforded by the university campus in general and the subject departments

in particular, will also be evident in an external heterogeneous community comprised of varied and diverse sexual orientations. Being surrounded by mostly gay individuals, one may be provided with too much of a safe space without the necessary critical reflection on one's position as a potentially victimised sexual minority (Fox 2007). As such, segregation may presuppose an uncritical assimilation into a homonormative academic culture (Grace and Benson 2000).

5.3 Dualistic transgression

This theme assumes an overlap between *assimilation* and *segregation*. Such an overlap reiterates Mlani's (2015: 436) argument that an "... orderly assimilation into the body politic and alienating disorder can be seen as two poles of a continuum of tactics employed by individuals to come into being as political subjects". The gay male's personal accounts during classes, for example, may be used as a means to sensitise those ignorant about matters related to sexual orientation, a thought forwarded by Macgillivray and Jennings (2008) and Msibi (2013). Academics in their twenties, forties and fifties emphasised the manner in which they either sought to do this, or had in fact done it in their respective courses, including those in the faculties of arts and social science. This afforded participants the necessary agency to exert subtle influence over their students. In so doing, the lectures might in fact stress the understanding that gay academics might display for the distress experienced by sexual minority students, which could result in a more critical reflection of campus life, an approach favoured by Chang (2005), Francis (2017) and Rothmann and Simmonds (2015), among others.

Such open contexts may also, dualistically, assume less rigidity or as a participant argued, a "...more sensitive, attuned...nuanced and...more insightful analysis of society". One of the social scientists, for example, uses his lectures as a means to manifest Grace and Benson's (2000) "autobiographical queer life narratives" to "... unsettle common sense" (Chang 2005; Robinson and Ferfolja 2008) among students. Common sense may result in an uncritical inclination by heterosexuals, since they may not notice the taken-for-granted dominance of hegemonic heterosexuality. As such, participants echoed Grace's (2006) call, termed as "...a thoroughly political act" to be open about one's homosexuality. In so doing, academics in fact display a critical and reflexive consciousness through a degree of agency about their current 'membership' of a supposed "... stigmatised collective" which results from a heteronormatively informed social and sexual cultural scenario, from which they could potentially "... liberate themselves" (Van den Berg 2016: 40).

Although this could be interpreted as progressive, the accounts of the participants were embedded in assimilationist, essentialist and heteronormative

themes (Gust 2007; Warner 1991). Regardless of emphasis on the importance of sensitising students to sexual plurality in issues on sexual orientation, participants suggested that sexual fluidity, as part of the perceived heterosexual campus culture, needed to be normalised. Much of the participants' views in this regard echoed Namaste's (1996) argument on the 'engendered paradox' of coming out of the closet. Her argument assumes that a gay lecturer in fact subsumes it into an already existent (and presumed normal and central) gendered and sexual cultural arrangement (Butler 1990; 2013). Given the presumed acceptance and safety afforded on their respective campuses, these academics may actually be tokenised based on their publically asserting their homosexuality, only further marginalising them as objectified spectacles (Kopelson 2002).

Even those who explicitly stated their transgressive inclination are rendered passive because of their initial nervousness on meeting first-year students which, according to one of the social scientists, may necessitate gay men acting in a cautious manner to avoid potential prejudice, as per Bhana (2014) and Jackson and Scott's (2010) consideration of the highly reflexive and negotiable quality of identity disclosure on the part of sexual minorities, such as gay men (see Goffman 1971; Mead 1962). This requires gay men to create a disjuncture between their 'true' selves and the selves their immediate context necessitates (Goffman 1971). Such a careful demeanour underlies the statements of others who thought their campuses safe. One only needs to consider participants' references to adapting to their respective academic departments, through secrecy and remaining closeted in their immediate environments as examples of care taken, manifesting a "tyranny of silence" (Atkinson 2002) on the part of the gay male. These examples also serve to reiterate the way in which the participants have clearly been indoctrinated into reflecting on (and potentially conforming to) heteronormative principles on their university campuses.

These men, as such, navigate their performance of different selves during which they take on the "… attitudes of an organized social group" and thus attain "…a complete self or possess the sort of complete self" that their generalised other requires (Mead 1962: 155). Reflexivity therefore does not necessarily liberate gay male academics, but potentially posits them as dependent on the predetermined and prescribed cultural configurations associated with gender and sexually orientated performance of the campus culture.

6. Concluding remarks and recommendations

The preceding discussion considered the role of self-reflexivity on the part of self-identified gay male South African academics in choosing to disclose or foreclose their sexual orientation on their university campuses. Subthemes

in this regard focused on the participants' distinction between several selves as a mechanism to negotiate and navigate their 'gay performances' in varied contexts. The discussion of safety presented a dualism of sorts. This was because participants would (and possibly could *only*) obtain and retain protection through assimilation into either a heteronormative context or, on the other hand, a separate homosexually-segregated academic community. As such, regardless of whether the participant decides to emerge from 'the closet', he remains a 'captive' member of what Goffman (1971) would term the "peddlar class", insofar as his self-reflexivity does not necessarily afford him the required 'unbridled' agency within a potentially heteronormative environment.

As such, my article sought to reiterate the importance of an expanded focus on sexuality studies in South Africa (see Msibi 2014) in order to redress a solely Northern application of queer theory to the Global South (see Francis and Reygan 2016). The views of others, who may consider such research as insignificant, underline the importance of incorporating a *homosexual and/or queer pedagogical component* as part of either an exclusive or mainstream university course and/or curricula, encouraging autobiographical life narratives on the part of willing sexual minority academics and engaging in theoretical and/or empirical inquiry. This could facilitate the creation of a critical inclination in the academic community in order to render the supposed centrality of heteronormativity as fallible and open to critical contestation, insofar as the "...study of sexualities cannot be abstracted from power and political interests. It is a dialectical, circuitous process [which] recognises the fusion between sexualities and various structures of power" (Tamale 2011: 30). Although mainstreaming may risk a further minoritisation of sexual minorities as 'the other', a lack thereof may rather render the voices of sexuality scholars silent and insignificant.

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