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Exploring homophobic practices and acceptance of gay players among male basketball players in Johannesburg

By

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A research project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a degree of

Masters of Community-based Counselling

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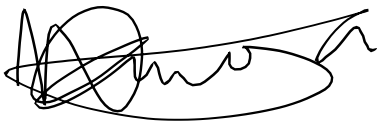
The Faculty of Humanities

University of the Witwatersrand

Date: March 2023

Declaration of Originality

I declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other university.

Signature:  Date: March 2023

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Abstract

In post-apartheid South Africa, sport has been positioned as a vehicle for social cohesion. This study investigated if this theory extends to issues of sexuality. It examines the experiences of players within the Johannesburg basketball environment to investigate the acceptance of gay players and the current attitudes towards homophobia. Bourdieu's theory of habitus is used as a theoretical framework and semi-structured individual interviews were used as the method of data collection. The study involved 10 active players of various ages above 18 years and a range of racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. Thematic data analysis was used to analyse the data. The findings of the study revealed that the Johannesburg basketball environment is one that subscribes to the principles of hegemonic masculinity and that forms of alternative masculinities are associated with gayness.

Keywords: sport, sexuality, homophobia, basketball

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Chapter 1: Background and Introduction

Sport in South Africa has been positioned as a means of promoting social cohesion. It is said to encourage communication, collaboration, and understanding across the lines of social division (Engh & Potgieter, 2015). Post-apartheid South African society has promoted sports as a vehicle for social change and as a means to help to cure various social ills while uniting the population across racial, class, gender, and geographical divides (Engh & Potgieter, 2015). The South African Sports and Recreation White Paper of 1996 argued that through shared sporting experiences, participants from conflicting groups could feel that they are more alike than different, and this paper further positions sport as an important means of promoting peaceful reconciliation in post-apartheid society (Engh & Potgieter, 2015). However, it seems to have also given rise to a narrative that enforces compulsory heterosexuality and narrow heteronormative gender regimes while fostering homophobic attitudes and prejudices (Engh & Potgieter, 2015). This research is aimed at contributing to creating environments where social cohesion can be allowed to take place within the sporting space beyond the issues of race and class by focusing on sexuality and encouraging that acceptance of differing sexualities be considered a key component of the mandate of social cohesion.

Aim of the Study and Research Question

The research study aimed to explore the hidden practices of homophobia among male basketball players in Johannesburg, South Africa. This includes unwritten rules and practices within the basketball space that may promote or perpetuate the ideals of a particular type of masculinity that allows for discrimination against gay male basketball players. It further examined the use of language as well as the overall culture of the basketball environment in Johannesburg in an attempt to determine whether or not players who identify as gay experience discrimination. The questions central to the research were:

a. Are there any hidden practices of homophobia within basketball?
b. What are the feelings of basketball players in Johannesburg towards other players within their environment who identify as gay?
c. Do basketball players in Johannesburg view their environment as being accepting of homosexual players?

d. Is the use of homophobic language commonplace within the basketball space in Johannesburg?

Rationale of the Study

Literature exists on different sports and their relationship with sexuality. For instance, women's soccer in South Africa is considered a safer space since it is recognised as having many non-heterosexual participants (Engh & Potgieter, 2018; Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2014). This is in line with the global narrative; the 2019 edition of the FIFA Women's World Cup had the largest group of out players to ever participate in an international sporting event, with 30 players who identified as either lesbian or bisexual (Villarreal, 2019). Women's rugby players have become unapologetic about their queer identity and appear to relish disrupting the heterosexual/homosexual binary (Ezzell, 2009). Men's rugby on the other hand, is known for stigmatising gay players, and homophobic language is common among players (McCormack, 2010; Schacht, 1996). There is however little research concerning basketball in particular and even less about basketball in South Africa. The South African literature in the realm of sports and sexuality is largely focused on female athletes. One of the studies conducted by Engh and Potgieter (2015) suggests that the exclusion in women's sport was sustained by heteronormative expectations of femininity and the homophobic attitudes that exist within the sporting environment. Another study by the same authors outlined how the lack of discussion around sexuality in women's sport served as a mask for the underlying homophobia and how public policy's failure to confront issues of homophobia has resulted in a narrow popular discourse that allows queer black female athletes to be brutalised, sexualised or made invisible (Engh & Potgieter, 2018). This study sought to help fill a gap in the existing literature, particularly in male team sports, and issues around sexuality, especially in the basketball environment.

At the dawn of its democracy, South Africa became the first country to protect the rights of LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning, intersex, and asexual) individuals through the inclusion of the equality clause in the Bill of Rights of the 1996 constitution (Da Costa Santos, 2013; Mutua, 2012). This clause for equal protection prohibits the unfair discrimination of individuals on the grounds of sexual orientation (Da Costa Santos, 2013; Mutua, 2012). However, despite this change in legislation, changes in the negative attitudes towards same-sex relations still persist (Matebeni, 2017; Msibi, 2013). It

has been shown that a human rights framework holds no guarantees of instant results (Reddy, 2001). An indication of this were the debates that took place in 2006 when South Africa became the first country in Africa to legalise same-sex marriage (Da Costa Santos, 2013). Opposition for same-sex marriage was argued largely on religious and cultural reasons; many argued that homosexuality is 'un-African' (Da Costa Santos, 2013). Other evidence of this broader lack of change has been the violence inflicted on members of the LGBTQIA community in South Africa (Da Costa Santos, 2013; Msibi, 2009).

The defence of the LGBTQIA community in the constitution was a threat to hegemonic masculinity (Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2014). Although the constitution does not allow for the discrimination of individuals based on sexual orientation, this does not seem to have translated into practical measures that allow for inclusion within the sporting fraternity (Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2014; Van der Walt, 2007). Studies have also highlighted how the fear of stigma and the discrimination experienced during sporting activities has prevented members of the LGBTQIA community from enjoying participation in sports (Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2014). With this in mind, this research aimed to contribute to creating safe spaces for gay athletes by shifting people's attention towards the everyday experiences of gay people within the basketball space. Policies that uphold the constitutional ideals of the country need to be developed and put in place to deal with issues of homophobia within basketball and other sporting codes. The study strives to contribute to creating playing environments free of homophobia and spaces where gay basketball players can be themselves and not feel the need hide to their sexuality.

Theoretical Framework

Bourdieu's theory of Habitus habitus is used as a framework to further conceptualise the study. Jenkins (1992, p. 95) explains habitus as a theory that looks to bridge the gap between the subjective and objective and describes it as follows: "Bourdieu develops the concept of Habitus in an attempt to provide a bridge between the subjective and the objective, which is considered an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted." In essence, habitus can be seen as a cultural background where a range of tastes, styles and manners are established as a form of cultural identity (Wellard, 2003). Bourdieu (1984) speaks of habitus as a collective identity due to the fact that it is a collective who share the same beliefs and habits and not just an individual.

Habitus speaks to members' internalisation of the tastes of their group and establishing a position of class within a group through the presentation of a particular taste as natural or second nature (Wellard, 2003). The dominant group expresses their power through the ability to determine what the society holds in distinction (Wellard, 2003). As a result, rather than means of production being at the centre of domination, it is socially recognised taste that has the power to determine the terms of distinction (Wellard, 2003). Habitus is maintained through habits, behaviours and schemes of perceptions that guide individual perspectives along predetermined boundaries (Hanks, 2005).

The study makes use of the theory of habitus with the idea that the basketball community in Johannesburg are a group with a cultural identity that has determined tastes, styles and manners that have been established by the dominant group. It aimed to determine whether being homosexual goes against the tastes of the group and whether or not there is a loss in class or cultural capital within the group for those who identify as gay.

Structure of the Report

This report is made up of five chapters: an introductory chapter, literature review, research methodology chapter, discussion and analysis of findings, and the concluding chapter. The introductory chapter introduces the research topic, while the literature review discusses the available data that is relevant to the topic. Chapter three is the research methodology, which explains the methods that were used in conducting the research. The fourth chapter provides the analysis of the data and the discussion, which addresses the central themes and how they relate to the research topic. The final chapter provides a reflection on the research process while also evaluating the findings and what they may mean. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion on limitations, future research endeavours and recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review defines the major concepts under scrutiny and explores existent and relevant research central to the questions addressed in the study. After providing definitions and an elaboration of the main thematic concerns, an in-depth exploration of homophobic violence in South Africa and the literature around homophobia in the education sector is explored. The study also delves deeper into the existing literature on the relationship between masculinity, sport, and sexuality before exploring hegemonic masculinity and its implications for sexuality alongside how these phenomena have contributed to shaping the sporting environment. Basketball and masculinity are also discussed, followed by basketball culture and the boundaries set and enforced on the court and in the social environment. Further, the literature review discusses the reporting of homosexuality in sports media, focusing on how the media handled the coming out of the first active basketball player in the National Basketball League (NBA).

Homophobia in the Globalised Era

The term homophobia speaks to the negative feelings, thoughts and behaviours that individuals have towards those who are perceived as gay or lesbian (Osborne & Wagner, 2007). Undeniably, in the era of globalisation, sexuality and gender neutrality are central concerns of inequality campaigns and activism agendas. Resultantly, societal norms have changed globally to embrace diversity in gender and sexuality, and so too have scholarly definitions of related terms evolved. Today, sexuality and preference are 'openly addressed', and scholars like Li (2009, p. 5) "straight out" call homophobia "the hatred, hostility, and disapproval of homosexual people." Undisputedly, positive changes in laws and societal norms globally concerning homosexuality generally have been noted. However, Poushter and Kent (2020, p. 3) claim public opinion, acceptance, and condemnation "remains sharply divided by country, region and economic development." In agreement, Li (2009, p. 8), referring to the concept of the 'African homosexual rhetoric', claims that African society, including its religious leaders and politicians, condemns LGBTQIA people contrary to their advocates. Li (2009) claims that although adultery, fornication, and homosexuality are sinful acts according to dominant religious beliefs (for example, Christianity and Islam), homosexuals are treated more harshly and even subjected to exorcisms. Attempts to attain or maintain power in African countries are facilitated by the approval of politically desired

culture(s) where sexuality is an excuse or cause of violence, hatred, and persecution (Li, 2009, p. 9).

In the same vein, Sanderson (2016) claims, to date, LGBTQIA people are still persecuted, especially in formerly Muslim countries. Eight nations still consider homosexual acts as crimes punishable by death (Sanderson, 2016). In agreement, the Reality Check team (2021) also elaborates that globally, 69 nations still have laws that criminalise homosexuality, and almost half of them are on the continent of Africa. Resultantly, LGBTQIA people in Africa are subjected to mortification alongside limited access to sexual and reproductive health services (Lishivha, 2020) He also claims that while over thirty African nations still consider LGBTQIA people criminals, where countries like Uganda and Kenya are constantly reviewing and 'harshening' LGBTQIA laws and punishments (Lishivha, 2020). Therefore, the assertions mentioned above, among others, lay the groundwork for analysis of homophobia in South Africa, proving that despite current efforts, there is still a long way to go in ensuring neutrality and freedom for LGBTQIA individuals, especially in sports.

Homophobia in South Africa

According to Vu et al.'s (2012) study on homophobia in South Africa, at least twenty per cent of South Africans have experienced internalised homophobia. However, greater levels of internalised homophobia were facilitated by HIV-related conspiracy beliefs and misinformation or low education levels. Francis (2017) further claims that post-apartheid South Africa witnessed a significant increase in research concerning sexual diversity and gender issues. In response to gender and sexuality diversity activism, he elaborates that South African education institutions insist their curricula, culture, and pedagogy advocate for the embracement of heterosexuality and embodies heteronormative gender expression (Francis, 2017) Still, homophobic crimes taint the progress of South African democracy, and their continuation is evidence of the limitations of the rights-based approach to providing freedom to marginalised groups (Bhana, 2012; Msibi, 2009). Violence is used to enforce and regulate sexualities and tries to maintain patriarchy and heteronormativity (Matebeni, 2017; Msibi, 2012). In previous years, the Human Rights Watch of South Africa has been accused of not stopping the surge of violence against members of the LGBTQIA community (Bhana, 2012). In an attempt to rectify this, in October 2011 a national task team was established by the Department of Justice and Constructional Development with a mandate to develop strategic

interventions to deal with homophobic crimes (Bhana, 2012). Despite this, recent literature shows that homophobic violence continues in South Africa. Almost all members of the LBGTQIA community experience discrimination and are victims of violence because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or biological variance.

The experiences of black lesbians, in particular, has been documented as being largely negative, demonstrated by high incidences of social exclusion, 'corrective' rape, murder, and other violations (Msibi, 2013; Pinheiro & Harvey, 2019). Sexual violence is understood to be aimed at the abuse of power over female bodies and for black lesbian women there is an additional layer of vulnerability because of their rejection of black heteronormativity (Matebeni, 2017). This violence is seen as being further perpetuated by the system even following death (Matebeni, 2017). As a result, members of the black lesbian communities have lived in horror and perpetual fear (Matebeni, 2017). Between February 2006 and September 2014 there were at least 42 known murders of black queer women in South Africa, all of which were considered brutal (Matebeni, 2017). These killings brought further attention to the well-known concept of corrective and curative rape aimed towards black lesbian women (Matebeni, 2017).

The education sector is an example of an environment in South Africa that does not uphold the rights afforded to the LGBTQIA community by the constitution (Bhana, 2012). South African schools are seen as binding sites for the enforcement of heterosexuality and are considered homophobic (Bhana, 2012; Msibi, 2012). In the classroom environment, homosexuality is rejected, and heterosexuality is reinforced through jokes and other forms of outright discrimination; gay and lesbian students are made to feel excluded and less than normal (Bhana, 2012). Teachers have been shown to display prejudice shaped by their patriarchal constructions of gender and sexuality (Bhana, 2012; Msibi, 2012). Queer students face social, emotional, and cognitive challenges and experience verbal abuse and physical violence (Msibi, 2012). The learners also experience rejection, discrimination, isolation, marginalisation, and harassment from teachers, peers, and school administrators (Msibi, 2012). Consistent with the findings of global studies, a study conducted within South African township schools found that language was one of the main ways to discriminate (Msibi, 2012). Other ways in which the educational system demonstrates a betrayal of the democratic rights of the LGBTQIA community are the denial of their existence in the curriculum through religious discourse and the sexual silencing, which works in the interests of heterosexuality

(Bhana, 2012). This homophobia in the schooling system is a contravention of the constitution and a threat to the principles the Department of Education has identified as being key to educational transformation (Bhana, 2012). These principles are social transformation, human rights, and equality (Bhana, 2012). The level of discrimination outlined in the schooling system inevitably has an impact on the culture that exists within the sporting environment.

Hegemonic Masculinity, Sexuality and its Impact on Sport

From a social perspective, hegemony implies predominance in terms of influence and power of a dominant group in society over others in social, cultural, ideological, or economic concerns (Osborne & Wagner, 2007). Hence, hegemonic masculinity is associated with the institutionalisation of men's dominance over women and certain groups of men. According to Jewkes et al. (2015), hegemonic masculinity's foundations lie in Raewyn Connell's studies on gender differences initially referred to as "the patriarchal dividend." It is considered a cultural stereotype of masculinity that subjugates women and men with masculinities deemed subordinate (Demetriou, 2001). Drawing from the gender equality perspective mentioned earlier, elaborates that although men are assigned or assume superior positions over women (or men), each individual has a 'choice' to adopt an oppressive position. However, individual choices, conformity, and resultant opinions are determined by the exposure to certain information (Jewkes et al, 2015). Still, Jewkes et al. (2015) argue that despite evidence of more than one hegemonic masculinity within a societal intervention, efforts aid in curbing stereotypes, especially harmful masculinities. This assertion stems from the psychological association of empathetic or violent actions or behavioural manifestations arising from hegemonic ideals. In agreement, Mehta's (2006) study on hegemonic masculinity in India, Mexico, and South Africa suggests that psychological effects of exposure to negative stimuli concerning particular sexual orientations are manifested in individual opinions and reactions.

Heterosexuality is an important component of hegemonic masculinity since it rejects homosexuality and gay men and views heterosexuality as the only acceptable sexual identity (Langa, 2012; Van der Walt, 2007). Hegemonic masculinity tends to assimilate gayness with being feminine, and among men, homosexual masculinities are situated at the bottom of the gender hierarchy (Connell, 2005). Hegemony contributes to shaping how gayness is perceived, and negotiating the relationship between gay masculinity and heterosexuality

often revolves around establishing distance, both culturally and physically (Connell, 2005). Connell (2005) also claims that due to language associated with femininity, some heterosexual males deny the legitimacy of their masculinity; some popular homophobic words include *wimp, nerd, ladyfinger, cookie pusher*, among others (Connell, 2005).

These views of hegemonic masculinity on homosexuality can be argued as manifesting the sporting realm. Hargreaves (1986) argues that in the later stages of the 20th century with the decline of heavy manual-based industry as well as that of large-scale wars, it was the sporting field became the social space for a form of masculinity that was rooted in the ethos of muscular Christianity, which is a form of masculine behaviour that is rooted in action and heroic deeds (Wellard, 2003). Sports is still perceived as a space that is not welcoming to those who are not male and/or heterosexual and is seen as a place where images of an ideal masculinity are constructed and promoted (English, 2017; Symons et al., 2010). Often the type of masculinity that is idealised is associated with being tough and heroic, and even with the changes over time in the way men present their bodies, the ideal has remained of what is regarded as a 'tough guy' (Wellard, 2003). Organised sport continues to be exclusionary and re-enforces a narrow version of masculinity that is rooted in aggression, competitiveness and intolerance (Wellard, 2003).

This hegemonic masculinity has also been said to impact the culture of violence against women and homosexuals directly. Numerous writers have outlined the vile misogyny and homophobia in sports locker rooms (Luisi et al., 2016; McLaughlin, 2004). A study conducted in a rural South Africa university found that those who identified as part of the LGBTQIA community experienced verbal abuse and discrimination from their peers and coaches were excluded from sporting events with their heterosexual peers (Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2014). A study in the United Kingdom (UK) also found that homophobic language was common in sports and used by over 70% of the group studied, mostly heterosexual participants (Englefield et al., 2016). They elaborate that the use of this type of language was largely seen as 'banter' and regarded as a 'part of the game' and therefore not seen as offensive or discriminatory.

Basketball and Masculinity

As with other sporting codes, the game of basketball is considered to be one of the places where men learn to navigate their masculinity (McLaughlin, 2004; Wellard 2003). It is

an environment where masculinity is seen to be taught and learnt (McLaughlin, 2004). However, drawing from the gender differences 'pool' in sports, it is evident that bias in societal norms and lack of exposure undeniably facilitate homophobic discrimination. For instance, athletes like JayCee Cooper (the powerlifter) and Caster Semenya (an Olympic champion) have had their genders questioned despite undisputable credibility (Ennis, 2019). Semenya was subjected to criticism and abuse for more than ten years, and her gender was questioned despite medical and legal evidence.

Similarly, in basketball, homosexual athletes are subjected to criticism and abuse. Central to the notion that sports teach masculinity is the assertion that masculinity is not natural and cultural, but rather learnt attitudes (Connell, 2008; McLaughlin, 2004). The lessons of sport having to be frequently repeated and drilled would suggest that masculinity is a result of teaching and not a natural state (McLaughlin, 2004). When boys enter the basketball space, they are primarily surrounded by males, and the process of learning happens largely through modelling, observing, and doing (Mahiri, 1991). Some argue however that masculinity is natural and that sport is a way of restoring the masculinity that has been depreciated by modern culture (Connell, 2008; McLaughlin, 2004). There is recognition however that the advancements in the LBGTQIA movement and the increased visibility of the community is helping to transform sports, although in the early 2000s there was little research that showed mainstream sport being a welcoming environment for those who are not heterosexual (Pronger, 2000; Wellard, 2003).

Sports is presented as a hyper-masculine practice in the media that focuses on competitiveness and masculinity displays. Some examples are the high fives, chest bumps, and sometimes sexualised dances on display after a victory, which is seen as a space that reinforces patriarchy and heterosexual power (Bass et al., 2015; McLaughlin, 2004). It has been said that sport subscribes to a form of masculinity that is considered as hegemonic masculinity (English, 2017; Luisi et al., 2016; Symons et al., 2010). However, it is important to note that there is no essential "masculinity", and different sports, like different cultures, teach other modes of masculinity. Basketball, in particular, practices coded masculinity that lies within the current cultural binaries (Connell, 2008; McLaughlin, 2004).

Basketball Culture and Boundaries

When thinking of basketball as a discourse, it can be considered to include specific

language terms as well as abstract concepts and feelings that, at times, are unconsciously preserved like a sense of belonging, accomplishment, affirmation as well as the sense of being in the game and being alive (Mahiri, 1991). Basketball is a space that provides a comforting experience of orientation and belonging in a complicated but understandable environment. Although it does not exist in a space that is geographically and socially cut off from the rest of the world, part of its appeal is that it gives participants the feeling that it does; for those who play the game, basketball is considered to be a social institution (Brooks, 2004; McLaughlin, 2004). As with other subcultures, the culture within basketball teaches its participants a complex range of lessons; it promotes a characteristic ethical style along with a specific way of thinking and making decisions and a particular range of emotional responses (McLaughlin, 2004). The lessons of the game and the other everyday practices surrounding basketball are so deeply entrenched in the culture that they play a role in shaping players' identities. The community members recognise each other through the subtle embodiment of the lessons of the game, and there is a unity of nearness and remoteness among the players (DeLand, 2012; McLaughlin, 2004). In addition to this, players are able to recognise one another through bodily gestures and techniques that are associated specifically with the sport of basketball (Wellard, 2003). Examples of these gestures include walking with a stooped gait with arms hanging low in the way that basketball players do (Wellard, 2003).

Basketball as a game takes place in a carefully defined space. Even in casual games or pick-up games, the players engage in a particular negotiation of the spatial practices, and certain territorial rules and boundaries are accepted (McLaughlin, 2004). Basketball enforces its rules with precision; if even just a small part of a player who has possession of the ball, such as their toe, touches the sideline, the ball is considered to be out of bounds and the ball has to be turned over to the other team (McLaughlin, 2004). This enforcement of boundaries extends to where those who are not players can and cannot go and can also be seen as a metaphor to the close watch kept on the cultural aspects accepted and rejected within the community (McLaughlin, 2004). Even in the environment of pick-up basketball, which is a space where the game is played without referees and coaches, players use the norms to regulate and coordinate the interactions that take place both on and off the court (Mahiri, 1991).

In essence, basketball teaches that playing the game is made possible by limits and that the space of play is a place that is meant to be defended. However, it is evident that in

the background a conservative force that teaches what can be considered traditional male values exists (McLaughlin, 2004). In addition to this, basketball is considered a 'cool' sport and as such in western contemporary culture, cultural capital is achieved through performance (Wellard, 2003). This not only speaks to performance on the court but also performance of the specific bodily gestures and techniques associated with the sport that let others know they have been involved in it (Wellard, 2003).

Reactions to Openly Gay Professional Team Athletes

Despite neutrality and freedom claims, homophobic discrimination in sports in Western nations, especially in English-speaking countries, is still a dominant concern. Therefore, despite the relevance of information and activism, even among developed nations, variations are still prevalent. For instance, although Canadians were more inclined to acceptance and inclusion of LGBTQIA people in sports among English-speaking nations, "Canada also reported the highest number of physical assault claims among LGBTQIA athletes" (Denison & Kitchen, 2015, p. 72). Thus, although most nations claim advocacy for sexual preference, individual athletes are victimised, resulting in hindrance in potential exploration due to homophobia. Undoubtedly, there have been few openly homosexual players in major sporting leagues worldwide, particularly while they are still competitive.

Former NBA player John Amaechi came out as homosexual after he had already retired from playing basketball; the media reaction from his announcement suggested that those who wrote about it held the belief that the NBA locker room was not yet ready to have an openly homosexual player and although the writers called for greater acceptance of homosexuality within sports, there was the use of homophobic language in their writing (Bass et al., 2015; Luisi et al., 2016).

Ian Roberts was an Australian professional rugby player who came out publicly in the later stages of his career. The LGBTQIA community regarded him as an athletic man who happens to be gay, however, Probyn (2000) outlines how his body was used as a beard, a term used to describe the ability to hide the possible shame of being gay (Wellard, 2003). In his case, any homophobic slurs geared towards his masculinity were overshadowed by his ability to outwardly demonstrate hegemonic masculinity (Wellard, 2003).

Jason Collins became the first active player in the NBA to come out as homosexual on April 29, 2013. The media reaction to his announcement was largely positive, and he received

support from his past teammates and other superstars across the league (Luisi et al., 2016). Collins went from being an average player within the league to a figure of interest to the media. The reaction from his announcement was considered less negative than the previous research had suggested it would be (Luisi et al., 2016). In contrast, when Michael Sam became the first openly gay prospect of the National Football League (NFL) in February 2014, the reaction was largely negative. One official of the league was quoted as saying, “in the coming decade or two, it’s going to be acceptable, but at this point, it’s still a man’s-man game” (Luisi et al., 2016, p.1329). His words reflect stereotypical masculinity, which can be considered the larger issue regarding reactions towards openly homosexual players (Luisi et al., 2016). Clearly, beyond geographical boundaries, athletes, including basketball players, are required to conform to masculine societal expectations to garner support from their team, management, and supporters. Considering that sports are embodiments of both individual and teamwork ability to facilitate individual free expression and utilisation of talent, homosexual athletes are forced to suppress their identities or are subjected to conformity to set ideals inconsiderate of diversity in preference.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed suggests that the influence of hegemonic masculinity in sports, particularly basketball, created an environment that allowed everyday homophobic practices to occur. Presumably, the basketball community as a whole tended to be protective of the space and the people within the space become enforcers of the set boundaries. The boundaries are used to access and assess social capital and they alienate those who do not fully subscribe to the unwritten cultural norms. Those who do not conform are therefore not considered ‘full’ members of the community. This further suggests that the homophobia that exists in broader society, such as in schools, impacts the attitudes within sports.

Chapter 3: Method

The researcher is a former basketball player and has been a coach of the sport for several years. As a female coach who has worked with male teams as a head and assistant coach at the high school, university, and semi-professional level in South Africa; she relied on her knowledge of the basketball environment, her access to the community, and existent relevant literature to help navigate the research process.

Research Design

The research was in the form of a qualitative research design. The purpose of using this type of design was to obtain an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the research topic rather than a quantified analysis. Qualitative research also seeks to report participants' views in a particular context and seeks to understand their viewpoints (Stuwig & Stead, 2001). It further allows participants to elaborate freely and express subjective views when answering questions, and their feelings and behaviours are respected and acknowledged (Struwig & Stead, 2001). Furthermore, data is not presented in a reductionist, static, or decontextualised manner.

Procedure

Due to the researcher's access to the basketball environment, participants were approached independently and on an individual basis to have the nature and the purpose of the study explained to them. This meant that there was no permission that was required from their respective teams or league management. All participants were above the age of 18 and represented different teams that play in Johannesburg Basketball League (JBL) and the Inner-City Super League (ICSL). Once they expressed interest, the ethical considerations were discussed and they received a participant information sheet (see Appendix A) and were offered the opportunity to ask any questions they had about the study. Once appointments had been scheduled for interviews at a convenient time for them, consent forms were emailed and signed prior to the start of the interview (see Appendix B). Participants were required to provide consent for participating in the interviews and as well as providing consent for the interviews to be recorded (see Appendix C). Interviews lasted between thirty minutes and an hour and were conducted using a semi-structured interview schedule. They were recorded and transcribed for further analysis.

Participants

Participants for this study were competitive basketball players within the Johannesburg area. The requirements were that they were male, residents within the Johannesburg area and currently competing in one of the major basketball leagues. Participants were of any age over 18, and ethnicity was not a factor for inclusion in the study. A non-probability convenience sampling method and snowballing were utilised to obtain 10 participants for this study. Non-probability convenience sampling is a method where the researcher approaches the most accessible participants, while snowballing refers to a process where a participant recommends to the researcher other individuals they know who could qualify as suitable participants (Davies & Mosdell, 2006). Six of the ten participants of the study were found using non-probability convenience sampling, while four participants where obtained through snowballing.

Interviews

The study made use of a semi-structured interview schedule with open-ended questions (see Appendix D and Appendix E). Individual interviews were conducted with each of the 10 participants who were of various ethnicities and ages. The purpose of using this method to collect data was its ability to allow for a guided discussion of predetermined topics while also allowing for participants to elaborate on topics they wanted to engage in with more depth. This framework for structuring and conducting interviews was used to increase the credibility and effectiveness of the interviews; the schedule helped guide the interviewer (Lyons & Coyle, 2007). It further allowed for the interviewer to explore interesting areas that arose from the participants' responses (Lyons & Coyle, 2007). Semi-structured interviews consider participants as experiential experts and, as such, encourages that they are allowed maximum opportunity to tell their story (Lyons & Coyle, 2007). The schedule also received a supervisory review with recommendations before it was used. Due to the global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions put in place by government to combat its spread, interviews were conducted using a video conferencing tool of the participant's choice. This required that participants had access to a video conference-enabled device and a stable internet connection to effectively conduct interviews. Participants took part in interviews from a quiet and comfortable location in their homes.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data that was obtained. The objective of thematic analysis is to determine themes or patterns in the data, and it involves identifying, analysing, and reporting those themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is regarded as an easily accessible and flexible method for analysing qualitative data because it allows for the interpretation of numerous aspects of the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic content analysis can be used in an essentialist, realist or a constructionist method (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An essentialist or realistic method reports on the meanings of the experiences and reality of participants, while a constructionist method examines how events, realities, meanings, and experiences are constructed by discourses operating within a society (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It can also be a contextualist method that harmonises essentialist and constructionist methods (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Contextualism acknowledges how individuals give meaning to their experiences and how the larger social context impacts those meanings while maintaining focus on the material and other limits of reality (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, thematic analysis can be a method that reflects reality and unravels beyond its surface (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For the purpose of this study, the researcher made use of the contextualist method of analysis.

Thematic content analysis involves six steps, namely reading transcriptions of the data, generating codes, assembling codes into potential themes, generating a thematic map, defining and naming each theme, and producing a report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The study utilised phenomenology, which allowed the use of the lived experiences of several individuals to derive the meaning of a concept or phenomenon. Favourably, phenomenology seeks to analyse what the participants have in common and reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to describe a universal essence (Creswell, 2013).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Witwatersrand. At the time of the interviews, participants were informed both verbally and through the participant information sheet that participation in the study was voluntary. They were also informed that they had the option to withdraw from the study at any time during the data collection without any negative consequences. Participants were further notified they could choose not to answer any questions they were

uncomfortable with and that they could withdraw responses at any time. Although anonymity could not be guaranteed because participants were known to the researcher, confidentiality was ensured in that no identifying information was used in the transcripts or the research report. Participants were referred to by pseudonyms (for example, Participant A) in the transcripts and the research report.

Furthermore, recordings and transcripts of the interviews were stored on a password-protected device and only available to the researcher and supervisor who is obliged and legally bound to abide by similar strict confidentiality. There were no risks or benefits associated with the study. With regards to the results of the study, participants were notified of the results in the form of a one-page summary sheet that was availed upon request; they will also be able to access the full report after it is uploaded to the Wits library online portal. Participants were welcomed to contact the researcher or supervisor with any further queries or questions. Discretion was ensured, considering individual contact details were noted only on the informed consent sheet, which participants were requested to keep after signing the participant information sheet. Also included on the participant information sheet was the contact information for LifeLine for instances where participants may have felt distress due to the interview and required counselling.

Due to sexual preferences of participants being unknown before the interview, participants who may have been vulnerable to the topics that arose in the interview may not have noticed negative experiences within the basketball space concerning their sexuality, and the interview may have been a trigger. With this in mind, all participants received two informed consent forms before the interview presented together with the participant information sheet. The first form required consent for the interview to be conducted, and the second form required consent for the interview to be recorded. Both forms were collected from the participants before the commencement of the interview. When making use of video conferencing to conduct interviews, absolute confidentiality and anonymity were inevitably compromised due to limited control over privacy and data security ensured by the video conferencing platform.

Reflexivity

When conducting research, there are instances where the researcher may find it difficult to separate their own personal experiences from the study (Creswell, 1998). It is

therefore important that the researcher be well aware of their own experiences to maintain objectivity and avoid bias. Researchers are also required to be aware of how their experiences may be introduced into the study (Creswell, 1998).

Reflexivity is regarded as a method of validity for qualitative research design and seeks to address the potential issues that have been outlined. It helps to make the researchers more aware of how their personal histories can influence the manner in which they listen and write (Pillow, 2003). Reflexivity draws attention to any issues of subjectivity and therefore acknowledges that the researcher's background is bound to influence the study and the research process.

The researcher being a female member of the basketball community and having worked with male players as a coach meant that there were undoubtedly some preconceived ideas of the community and how it operates. Her identification as queer in the space further contributed to those ideas and, as a result, it was imperative that she be vigilant of her own potential biases throughout the course of the study. Being a female, however, helped to guard against overly identifying with the research study because it is focused specifically on men who play basketball.

Due to the familiarity between the majority of participants and the researcher, she had to be careful to guard against the conversation becoming too casual and stick to asking questions relevant to the study and not those that served her own curiosity. The researcher found that at some point within the process, she was somewhat fixated on the use of language and what she thought it revealed about the players' true beliefs, and so she had to guard against making judgement and assumptions.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

This chapter analyses and discusses the data that was obtained in the study. Thematic data analysis was used to generate various themes. The analysis begins by examining the participants' inspiration to play basketball, which included enjoyment of the game, attraction to its competitiveness and creativity, and influence from family members. The analysis then proceeds to examine the benefits of playing basketball, which are broken down into social, psychological and life lessons. It then takes a deeper look into the social environment and the activities that take place beyond the four lines of the court. Issues of sexuality are analysed including how basketball players who identify as gay are seen and experienced. The chapter further examines behaviours that are associated with being gay in the space, including both physical and emotional attributes. The chapter concludes by discussing dominance as the key attribute of masculinity within Johannesburg basketball. This speaks to physical as well as psychological dominance over others and dominance as a protective factor for gay players.

Theme 1: Inspiration to Play Basketball

There are various motives for why athletes become involved in sports. Decathlon (2022) asserts that basketball, apart from its physical and mental health benefits, is a sport that is exciting and fun to play and is achievable at a low cost.

An Enjoyable Experience

The study findings revealed that some of the participants were inspired to start playing basketball because they enjoyed how the game is played. Research has shown that an enjoyable sporting experience is linked to increased participation, commitment and effort as well as improved performance (Al-Yaaribi & Kavussanu, 2018). Participants 3 expressed that his continued effort despite a tough start was driven by his enjoyment of the game: *"I didn't grasp the game very well in the beginning, but I enjoyed it so much that I just stuck with it".* Similarly, other participants expressed the same sentiment:

> *It's fun. I mean, it's hard to put into words, you know, it's just when you're on the court, you just feel so good.* (Participant 2)

> *I just picked basketball, and I'd already had a liking for it in my primary school…* (Participant 4)

Adults are said to be more likely to withdraw from a physical activity if the level of enjoyment

decreases or they have a negative experience while participating (Fontana et al., 2017). According to Stopher (2020), over 25 million people play basketball globally and this suggests that the sport is popular among professional and casual players. Basketball is a game that, at its core, is easy to learn and play, which has been a contributing factor to its popularity (Duncan, 2021b; Stopher, 2020). The large rate of participation across the globe supports the idea that it is a game that is enjoyable.

Family Ties

Other participants of the study indicated that they were encouraged to play basketball by their family members and friends.

> *Okay, so my dad plays basketball, so I just grew up around basketball and eventually I started playing as well, you know, from his influence and his friends, I guess.* (Participant 2)
>
> *It started with my brother and myself in the backyard shooting.* (Participant 6)
>
> *How it started was in 2003 my brother taught me how to play the game.* (Participant 7)

The family is considered to be the most important environment in shaping the physical activity of children (Kracht & Sisson, 2018; Timperio et al., 2013). Significant factors that impact this include parents' physical activity that they model through physical activity or sport participation and co-participation with their children in sporting activities (Timperio et al., 2013). Siblings are also considered an important factor in physical activity, particularly through co-participation and social support (Kracht & Susan B Sisson, 2018; Allbaugh et al., 2016). Modelling can also occur with regards to physical activity, where children choose to participate in the same sporting activities as their siblings (Allbaugh et al., 2016). Relationships between siblings further influence attitudes towards activity and siblings who have intimate bonds tend to have a greater influence than those with conflicted relationships (Allbaugh et al., 2016).

Competitiveness and Creativity

Some of the study participants indicated being attracted to the sport by the competitiveness and creativity that it brings.

> *Well, in the beginning it was just an excitement about how the game is played, right,*

> *and you know, what activities actually happened in the game and the competitiveness of it, of its nature.* (Participant 1)

> *Probably the thing that got me the most about basketball when I was playing it was it's kind of the one that allowed me to, like, express myself creatively the most.* (Participant 5)

Many people choose to play basketball because of its fast-paced and competitive nature (Stopher, 2020). Tactical creativity in sports is defined on a behavioural level as "unusualness, innovativeness, statistical rareness, or even uniqueness of solutions to a related sport situation" (Memmert, 2011, p. 373). Creativity in this context can therefore be seen as an array of rare and flexible decisions made and executed in a variety of situations (Memmert, 2011). Earvin 'Magic' Johnson is an example of a player who became famous for his creativity with his use of what became known as the no look pass. He would make a pass to a teammate while fooling the opponent by looking at the most obviously free teammate (Memmert, 2011). Other examples of basketball players known for their signature creative moves include Allen Iverson with his crossover and Karim Abudul Jabbar with his skyhook.

Theme 2: Benefits of Playing

Sport participation has been linked to better physical and mental health and personal development. There are a wide array of benefits including enhanced emotional health and promoting social relationships, fostering resilience and building self-esteem (Khan et al., 2022; Vella et al., 2022).

Relationships and Networking

One of the first benefits highlighted by the participants is the manner in which it helps to create relationships and opportunities to network within the space. Socially, participation in sports provides opportunities for social interactions (Khan et al., 2020).

> *But I think most importantly, why I love it now is because of the relationships I've built through playing the sport. And being in South Africa, where basketball is, you know, fairly neglected, those relationships are what resonate most.* (Participant 1)

> *[…] obviously the brotherhoods that are formed with a lot of people I know who've played the sport.* (Participant 8)

Basketball requires the formation of teams and in order to win, teams need to know each

other at a deeper level. This requires increasing social interactions and improving communication skills (Shrestha, 2021). Relationships are an important part of the sporting experience and have the ability to impact winning. Previous studies have shown that prosocial behaviours among teammates is positively correlated to effort, performance and commitment (Al-Yaaribi & Kavussanu, 2018). Furthermore, athletes are able to learn from how their teammates cope with adversity as a means of learning how to combat difficult situations themselves (Crozier et al., 2019). The researcher, from her experience working with university-level and senior men's basketball teams, has witnessed this. She has observed that teams that have close bonds off the court appear to have greater cohesion and performance on the court.

Learning Life Lessons

Basketball also gives pragmatic life lessons to those who play it. These lessons include a good work ethic, overcoming challenges and staying mentally healthy despite being at a disadvantage or in a position of weakness. While taking part in sports, athletes often encounter failures, emotional difficulties and setbacks (Crozier et al., 2019). As a result, effective coping strategies are vital to helping them navigate these obstacles in an adaptive way (Crozier et al., 2019). According to Shrestha (2021), basketball teaches perseverance and determination for overcoming problems or challenges and that success can be achieved through hard work and continuous improvement, which can only be accomplished through taking responsibility and learning from failures. Some participants indicated similar reasons for playing the sport:

> *A more abstract reason why I love the game is sometimes it's such a great reflection of life as well. You can take so many lessons from the game and apply it to your life.* (Participant 3)

> *[…] there are so many things that I've learned on the court that I can actually implement in my real life. You know, overcoming adversity, the mental aspect of it, physical aspect, and just being able to be the best that you can be at everything that you do.* (Participant 9)

A key factor to developing good coping strategies is self-compassion. It has been found that male athletes have a greater level of self-compassion than non-athletes (Crozier et al., 2019). Furthermore, those athletes with greater self-compassion are less likely to experience

depression and self-stigma. They are also said to have more positive attitudes towards seeking help (Crozier et al., 2019).

The literature review outlines how basketball teaches its participants a wide array of lessons including specific ways of thinking and decision-making (McLaughlin, 2004). The participants of the study confirmed that they have learnt lessons from the game, which have translated into other areas in their lives. They relayed how they have been able to extract these lessons that they have applied to their lives beyond the basketball court.

A Form of Therapy

Participants highlighted how basketball can be therapeutic and used to let off steam.

> *Right now, I think it's great as an escape, you know? Like, if you have problems at work, problems, whatever, you know, you can just get on the court, play, and it's, you know, it's you can have fun with a group of guys.* (Participant 4)

> *So, I've always used it either as a therapy session where I go and I shoot some hoops by myself, or just the fact that I don't have to worry and stress about life at that particular point. It's an escape mechanism.* (Participant 6)

It is reported that basketball, through the intense physical activity, helps the brain release endorphins that help relieve pain and improve mood, which in turn takes away the stress that the basketball players are experiencing (Shrestha, 2021). The physical activities of sports are said to lead to lower levels of stress-inducing hormones like cortisol, adrenocorticotropin, catecholamine and epinephrine. In addition to this, physical activity is found to increase the levels of serotonin, endorphin hormones and noradrenaline, which are associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms (Khan et al., 2022).

The underlying positive impact of participation in sports on depressive symptoms is further attributed to improved body image, self-esteem and self-confidence, which are a result of greater self-efficacy from having overcome physical challenges and improved bodily awareness (Kahn et al., 2022). As a result, playing basketball can be a way to relieve pressure and escape from the problems that life may bring and helps players maintain their physical and mental health, which enhances their quality of life.

Adolescents who participate in team sports are said to have better psychosocial health, including lower anxiety, fewer depressive symptoms and decreased social problems in comparison to those who take part in non-team sports. Participation as adolescents is

associated with fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety at later stages in life (Kahn et al., 2022).

From the findings of the study, it is clear that building and nurturing relationships is central to what the participants enjoy about the game of basketball. This speaks to the importance of belonging and acceptance within the environment. This is consistent with literature that has been reviewed and speaks of the basketball environment as being a social institution that provides a comforting experience of belonging (Brooks, 2004; McLaughlin, 2004). Positive relationships within the space further contribute to team success and individual performance and commitment. This highlights the importance of the study in looking at the acceptance of gay players within the environment. It questions whether the experiences of players who do not subscribe to dominant masculinity are able to derive the full array of benefits that are associated with the sport.

Theme 3: After-sport Activities

The research participants inferred that the basketball space in South Africa is not only focused on playing the game on the court, but there are other after-sports activities that the players participate in together.

Let's Do Lunch

According to Participants 6, having luncheons is one of the after-sport activities they do to spend time together after basketball games: *"Socialising, we do that. We create social occasions, you know, braais, luncheons".* In addition, it was also indicated that the players also utilise these luncheons to welcome new members of their team: *"Whenever new guys would come, we'd have, you know, like, a pizza day or something like that."*

According to James (2021), basketball players typically go out for dinner after an intense game and this also gives them an opportunity to bond even further. As indicated earlier, good relationships among teammates have positive effects on the overall team as it increases effort, commitment and performance. Although the socialisation continues off the court, there are benefits that can be gained on the court. In an environment where athletes feel as though they are a part of the team, such as feelings of being nurtured and their opinions being equally valued, can result in positive effects on the degree to which they care for the well-being of their teammates, both on and off the sporting field (Fontana et al., 2017). It therefore makes it imperative that new members in particular are welcomed into the social

environment.

Drinking, Partying and Chasing Skirts

Despite there being evidence that alcohol consumption impairs sporting performance through the decrease of skill levels and aerobic capacity, alcohol remains deeply intertwined with sport (Maughan, 2006; Murry et al., 2022). Sports participation has been related to elevated alcohol use and athletes are said to be more prone to binge drinking than their non-athlete counterparts (O'Brien et al., 2005; Vest & Simpkins, 2013; Weschler et al., 1997). Both elite and non-elite athletes who participate in organised sports consume risky amounts of alcohol, and young men in contact team sports in particular have high levels of risky consumption (McFadyen et al., 2019). In addition to this, higher levels of harm related to alcohol are reported among the players and spectators of male-dominated teams and contact sports (McFadyen et al., 2019).

The participants of the study revealed that drinking and partying together are prevalent in the social interactions within the basketball space as with other sporting activities:

> *So drinking, I mean drinking is a big draw.* (Participant 5)

> *Yeah, that's what we do, actually, we party and we drink.* (Participant 7)

> *So, all the guys that, you know, like to party together.* (Participant 2)

Participant 1 was of the opinion that there is a bad culture of substance abuse among Johannesburg basketball players: *"There's quite a bad culture, I think, of substance abuse…"*

Athletes are seen as being at risk of developing similar problem behaviours as their teammates and the use of alcohol is one of those that is negative (Vest & Simpkins, 2013). Furthermore, it has been found that teammates can feel more obligated to drink in the pursuit of team bonding (Maughan, 2006; Murry et al., 2022). Adolescent studies suggest that it may be the grouping of like-minded individuals in a team sport that provide opportunities for the reinforcement of sensation-seeking behaviours (Vest & Simpkins, 2013). It has also been suggested that it may be because of the competitiveness, performance expectations and stress within the environment that influence drinking behaviours (Vest & Simpkins, 2013). This suggests alcohol is being used as a coping mechanism to alleviate anxiety and the stress of competition (Vest & Simpkins, 2013).

The participants of the study further outlined how this lifestyle of partying and substance abuse is associated with promiscuity:

> *[…] go back to partying, chasing skirts, living the life.* (Participant 10)
>
> *[…] living a life of drinking and having sex with whoever the fuck you want to.* (Participant 1)

The attitudes expressed towards women are consistent with the views of hegemonic masculinity that are described as being dominant in the environment. A masculinity, which according to Demetriou (2001), subjugates women. Research into the sexual attitudes of student athletes have found that male athletes often talk about women as sexual conquests and objects (Finkelstein et al., 2015; Nelson, 2018; Pappas, 2012). Participation in heterosexual sex provides athletes with bragging rights and is seen as a means of competing among themselves and building camaraderie (Finkelstein et al., 2015; Nelson, 2018). There are those who look for sexual relationships for the purpose of having locker room stories to share and others engage in unwanted sex as a way to fit in (Ford 2018; Nelson, 2018; Pappas, 2012). Those who are not sexually active and are opposed to how women are discussed or those who disagree with sexual competitions often remain silent (Finkelstein et al., 2015; Nelson, 2018). This is out of fear of being seen as weak or an outcast as well as the fear of the impact it may have on team culture (Finkelstein et al., 2015; Nelson, 2018)

The findings of the study reinforce the importance of relationships within the Johannesburg basketball landscape. The purpose of the after-sporting activities is to improve team cohesion and bonding. However, these activities are linked to a culture of excessive drinking and promiscuity.

Theme 4: Views on Being Gay in Johannesburg Basketball

This section covers some of the perceptions of gay players that are expressed within the space and why some may be discouraged to disclose their sexuality. It further investigates possible reasons offered by the participants as to why these views are prominent.

Negative Connotations

Several of the participants were in agreement that being called gay within the space was associated with negative connotations:

> *[…] gay or fag or fairy would be seen as a non-positive, or, you know, 'Why you so gay*

> *man? You've got to be a grown ass man.' So, the opposite of masculine is not the desire thereof.* (Participant 6)

> *I know from personal experience within the males that it's still something that's looked down on, you know…* (Participant 2)

> *I'm saying to you that there is a general issue that exists within society where gay people are victimised, and where gay people find spaces where they're not accepted.* (Participant 5)

This speaks to the notion outlined in the literature review that although the South African constitution does not allow for discrimination based on sexual orientation, it appears to have not translated to inclusion on a practical level within the sporting environment (Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2014; Van der Walt, 2007).

The word 'fag' as used by Participant 6 refers to 'faggot', a term that is a representation of a penetrated masculinity and it serves as a symbol of a form of masculinity that is devoid of power (Pascoes, 2005). Pascoes (2005) argues that fag is a fluid identity that can be temporarily applied to those who are not necessarily perceived to be gay, but rather when they are seen to be revealing weakness or femininity in anyway or are failing at heterosexual prowess, strength and masculine tasks of competence. As a result, boys are seen to police their behaviours in order to avoid a permanent 'fag identity' and so it is used as a mechanism for regulation (Pascoes, 2005). It appears to have been applied in the same way with the Johannesburg basketball community.

Fear of Judgement and Isolation

It was found that the views expressed on homosexuality place gay players at risk of judgement, discrimination, humiliation and isolation within the basketball community. This in turn may be a potential reason for a lack of disclosure among players:

> *I think people just don't want to be judged, you know, in terms of their orientation, if I maybe, I could put it that way. So, I think that's what may, you know, keep them from coming out, it just may be like not being, not wanting to be judged or not wanting to be treated differently.* (Participant 8)

> *I think there'd be a lot more isolation for a particular individual, they probably wouldn't spend as many hours staying behind after the game and probably wouldn't be invited out to social occasions or, you know what I'm saying?* (Participant 6)

> *So it wouldn't be outwardly confronted, but I think it would be a subtle disassociation that would then, you know, just alienate them slightly. I don't think they'd feel generally accepted, that's my perspective.* (Participant 9)

It has been previously outlined in the study that social interaction is an important part of the sporting experience and it impacts players' level of enjoyment, which in turn impacts participation, commitment and performance (Al-Yaaribi & Kavussanu, 2018). According to Luisi et al. (2016), violating the expectations that are created by hegemonic masculinity can place an athlete at risk of feeling deliberately excluded from their team.

It would appear from the study that identifying as gay in the Johannesburg basketball environment has the potential to impact the level at which an individual is able to engage in the social components surrounding the game. There is an apparent loss of social capital and historically it appears to have led to players withdrawing or even leaving the environment:

> *I think I've known about gay players on the team and seen how they get treated differently by other teammates, and I think you see how that player sort of, you know, like withdraws themself from the group, even when we're playing or sitting on the bench.* (Participant 2)

> *[…] he eventually, yeah, he left because he could clearly see that he wasn't going to be comfortable opening up to the team, and putting himself at risk of being humiliated, which is incredibly sad*. (Participant 3)

> *We have a former teammate who's came out almost post playing. He was alienated for a while and since then I think he's been more accepted. Yeah, he took a step away from the game.* (Participant 6)

The views expressed by participants on the treatment of gay players in the Johannesburg basketball environment has been largely negative. It is an environment that has shown itself to value social interaction and cohesion, this however has not translated into gay players being able to fully enjoy the benefits of this. Historically it appears to have driven gay individuals to become disengaged from the sport. This is something that the researcher has observed herself as well having worked on a team with a player who identified as gay outside of the basketball environment and was open with a partner; however, he left the team before ever coming out to his teammates.

Why We Treat Them That Way

The two main reasons offered by participants with regards to homophobia within

Johannesburg basketball were social context and upbringing, as well as fear of becoming an erotic object:

> *I think it's the combination of socio-cultural influence, and historical level, which has then inherently affected the environments people live in.* (Participant 1)

> *I guess, the way people were brought up, makes them uncomfortable, and instead of wanting to know more, learn about it, or accept it, they, I don't know what's the word. They like reject it, you know, and they just talk down on it or bad about it.* (Participant 2)

> *[…] foreign nationals that come from countries where homosexuality is a foreign thing, or a taboo, or something intolerable, they're very negative towards homosexual people.* (Participant 7)

Despite there being international laws that prohibit the ill treatment of individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, homosexuality continues to be illegal in 78 countries across the world (Amusan et al., 2019; Msibi, 2011). In Africa, it remains criminalized in 38 of the 54 nations and there has been increasing intolerance for same sex relationships across the continent (Amusan et al., 2019). This hate has been expressed through condemnation of same-sex acts, societal rejection, violent attacks against those thought to be homosexual and, in extreme cases, legislation that prohibits homosexuality (Amusan et al., 2019).

Often attacks on gay people in South Africa are justified and legitimised through a racial cultural lens, with claims such as homosexuality being un-African (Da Costa Santos, 2013; Langa, 2015). The participants of the study appear to agree with the notion that socialisation in society and the home environment may teach that homosexuality is unacceptable (Langa 2015; Poscoes, 2007). They offer this as a possible reason to the dominant negative ideas around homosexuality within the Johannesburg basketball environment. Participants share the idea that the views about homosexuality that are expressed within their sporting context are a reflection of the broader society. Langa's (2015) analysed the discourse around gay boys among adolescent boys in South African high schools, finding that being gay was characterised as being unchristian, and participants used culture and tradition as justifications of their aversion to same-sex marriage.

Don't Come too Close to Me

The participants of the study revealed that heterosexual players expressed a fear of receiving romantic advances from gay men within the basketball environment:

> *I'm afraid to get too up close and personal with him… he's gonna make a move on me or he's gonna touch me inappropriately.* (Participant 8)

> *It's just a sexual orientation choice, just don't hit on me, fam, that's all I'm saying.* (Participant 6)

> *An example is players being hesitant to change in front of a gay teammate because of a fear that they will be looked at in a lustful manner.* (Participant 10)

Kiguwa and Langa (2017) found that gay students were often reduced to sexualised entities in their study examining heteronormative spaces in South African male university residences. Furthermore, they found that male students had a fear of being seen as sexual objects, which was born from the stereotypical view of gay males students being sexual freaks or predators (Kiguwa & Langa, 2017). There appears to be the same fear of being sexualised by gay players within the Johannesburg basketball space. It also further aligns with the notion that often negotiating the gay masculinity relationship with heterosexuality revolves around establishing distance, both culturally and physically (Connell, 2005). The fear by heterosexual players of receiving sexual advances from gay players further increases the social exclusion that homosexual players are faced with.

Theme 5: Gay Associated Behaviours

The study identified several behaviours that players within the Johannesburg basketball environment associated with being gay. There are those attributes that are physical and those that are emotional, all of which however appear to be associated with being feminine. Cornell (2005), in particular, outlined the notion of hegemonic masculinity assimilating gayness with being feminine. In addition, one of the variables of homohysteria (males avoiding behaviours that may lead to being labelled as gay) is a disapproval of homosexuality that also has an association with feminine characteristics (Luisi et al., 2015).

You've Got to be Dominant

A lack of dominance in stature, ability or physical interaction is seen as being feminine and is associated with being gay:

> *Qualities like not being physically dominating, even if in size, in actual physical size, if you are of a smaller build or a far more slender build, then, you know, they assign feminine qualities to you. […] If you don't like a lot of physical contact in the game, then you're seen as not being a man in the game, not being very masculine…* (Participant 3)

> *If somebody gets like hurt on the court and a lot of the time it's hey, toughen up, you know, don't be soft.* (Participant 2)

This suggests that being a basketball player of small stature displays frailty that is associated with being feminine and by deduction this is also associated with being gay. It suggests that having a smaller stature portrays weakness and vulnerability, which is contrary to the hegemonic masculinity perspective inherent in many sports including basketball. There is a saying among those in the NBA about not being able to teach height (Berri et al., 2005). Demographic data from the US showed 97.9 per cent of young adult males are 6 feet 3 inches/190.5 cm or shorter, while in the NBA less than 20 per cent of players in the 2003 to 2004 season were 6 feet 3 inches or shorter, with 30 per cent being listed at 6 feet 10 inches/ 208.28 cm (Berri et al., 2005). This suggests that basketball by nature is a sport played by taller players. Furthermore, masculinity in basketball is associated with being tough and dominant (Anderson, 2005). As such, players who are not willing to use their physical toughness to assert themselves or are easily hurt physically are associated with being gay.

What not to Wear

When gay bodies occupy heterosexual space, they are often subject to regulatory practices that look to deny agency when it comes to performing or defining gender differently (Kiguwa & Langa, 2015). Socially constructed norms dictate the manner in which they should behave, feel and dress (Vänskä, 2019). When it comes to clothing and appearances, the study found that clothing that is considered feminine, and excessive cleanliness, were seen to be associated with being gay:

> *So you know, maybe if your clothing is too restrictive or too tight, I suppose as a man too tight, if you're rocking tights, those pink neon tights as a man at the basketball court, it might evoke some reactions as to questions about sexuality, you get what I'm saying?* (Participant 6)

> *Sometimes the way they wear their uniform, for example, you may find that they roll up their pants or put on the black, those tapes on their shirts, on their sleeves, to make*

> *it a bit smaller.* (Participant 8)

> *[…] if you take care of yourself way too much and you too clean, you are then seen as hey, you're a little feminine...* (Participant 10)

Clothing plays a central role in the theorisation of gender and sexuality, and gendering with the use of clothing begins at a young age (Vänskä, 2019). Some of the early gay rights organisations advised members to adhere to gender norms due to fear of violence (Vänskä, 2019). This included asking gay men to dress in conventional male fashion including dark suits, sports jackets, simple shirts and ties (Vänskä, 2019). Generally speaking, men's clothing is associated with dark colours, and wearing light and loud colours is associated with being gay (Cyr, 2016). This speaks to the potential reason for basketball players whose dress code includes neon colours may have their sexuality questioned. Men's clothing is highly regulated and they are only allowed to express their individuality through detail (Vänskä, 2019). It is also apparent that tightness in clothing is something that is considered an indicator of gayness within the basketball space. Like with bright colours, tight clothing does not adhere to the social norms of men's clothing. When it comes to the issue of cleanliness, it is interesting to note that studies have shown that there is no marked or significant difference between males and females in their cleanliness behaviours (BBC Future, 2022). This also suggests that there is no justifiable reason to assume that males who are "too smart" or too clean should be gay. However, this appears to continue to be the case within this environment.

Don't Be Too Touchy Feely

Dusenbery (2013) acknowledges that men who are soft and touchy have been traditionally linked with being gay as they exhibit feminine-related behaviour. This appears to be consistent with the perceptions of the participants of the study. Players who are seen as having gestures associated with femininity or of showing too much affection towards others may also be perceived to be gay:

> *Too many affectionate hand gestures to another man, you know what I'm saying? Trying to get all touchy feeling with an individual might not necessarily work your way*. (Participant 6)

> *They often have hand gestures that show that they're feminine, like they would have their hands out and the way they point is not the conventional way of, if I can say, of men pointing, if anything* (Participant 8).

> *They show a lot more affection, like if a player gets hurt or a player is feeling down, they show a lot more affection then men would…* (Participant 8)

> *There's a lot of touch and a lot of feel. I think a big part of masculinity is physical, so you know between friends, is physical interaction but it's not a soft hugging, caressing, you know, interaction… There's a hug between a guy and a girl, which is a lot softer, a lot warmer, a lot more caressing, and if a guy shows that kind of behaviour within that locker room, then yeah, for sure, like I said, feminine kind of behaviour...* (Participant 5)

These views on men showing affection are consistent with John Amechi (a gay former NBA play) as cited by Feminist Wire (2012). He states that men are taught not to show affection to other players as they would be seen as gay (Feminist Wire, 2012). According to Amechi, this has contributed to making many players conceal their emotions and not showing affection (Feminist Wire, 2012). Panayotova (2016) also argues how men are typically taught from childhood to be tough and not to be overtaken by emotional turbulence as it would make them look weak and girly.

They Are Overly Emotional

The final group of behaviours identified to be associated with gayness within the space were focused on emotions. Players who are seen to be overly emotional, particularly in how they handle criticism and pressure, were associated with being gay:

> *From my experience, if, you know, an overly, or what they would claim to be an overly emotional player, you know, a player who perhaps breaks down under pressure, you know…* (Participant 3)

> *They really seem to or tend to get into the more emotional side of things to get you to feel a bit more lifted, uplifted, if I can say.* (Participant 8)

> *Okay, from my perspective, not being able to take, like, criticism of all types because it comes in, like different ways, you know. It can be constructive, it can be destructive, and, you know.* (Participant 4)

Hegemonic masculinity dictates that men are supposed to be tough and, therefore, they should be able to take criticism no matter how negative it might be (Burstyn, 1999). The results of the study are consistent with the idea that heterosexual masculinity is a fragile identity that has to be continuously performed and regulated in specific ways in order to maintain its hegemonic status (Kiguwa & Langa, 2017). Men in this space are required to

regulate their emotions and those who do not are seen as being too feminine and are associated with gayness.

Theme 6: Dominance as an Expression of Masculinity

According to McLaughlin (2004), basketball is one of the sports in which men learn to navigate their masculinity as it teaches and moulds the masculinity of men. The study found the participants believed dominance was the main way of expressing masculinity within the space:

> *The sport inherently expresses a premise of dominance, if you're a good player, which, you know, would happen in any sport.* (Participant 1)

> *There are ideas where someone that's masculine needs to be physically tough, needs to be relatively dominating, has some sense of authority.* (Participant 3)

Physical Dominance

According to the participants of the study, physical dominance is best expressed through competitiveness and winning:

> *Masculinity. I think the first way would be on the court, you know, dominance on the court, being the better player.* (Participant 7)

> *Winning is a big part of masculinity, and I think to be a dominant individual within a group or a dominant team, the first premise is win, because that gives you bragging rights and is more masculine in my perspective.* (Participant 6)

According to Pronger (1999), competitiveness in sport is illegitimate without clear winners and losers; in this regard, the dominant and more masculine players will be the winners. Furthermore, masculinity is also associated with myths of heroism that portrays masculinity as being tough, competitive and winning against all odds (Burstyn, 1999). This encourages competitors in a sport game including basketball to be over aggressive during game play as they may view it as a way to express their masculinity over the other in order to dominate and win (English, 2017).

Verbally Gaining an Advantage

In addition to the physical manner in which players try to dominate one another, there are also verbal ways they assert themselves. Trash talking encompasses negative or derogatory comments about a player's ability or personal life and can include cussing that can

be done before, during and after a game with the aim of annoying and messing with the psychological state of the opponent to gaining an advantage (Rookie Road, 2022):

> *I mean, guys will, you know, shout at each other, they will flex their muscles at each other, they will like say things like to each other about how, you know, like oh, you're too little for me, I own you just, just trash talk.* (Participant 2)

> *[…] peacocking is a big thing, I think peacocking, again physically, but also very much verbally, verbal peacocking, so verbal jousting is a very big thing.* (Participant 5)

In the NBA, trash talking is part of the basketball culture and has become part of the entertainment in the sport (Rookie Road, 2022). Moreover, in the history of the NBA it has been reported that players like Michael Jordan, Kevin Garnett and Reggie Miller, among others, are famous for trash talking and getting into the heads of their opponents (Rookie Road, 2022). According to MacMahon (2022, para. 11):

> The days of trash-talking titans overtly jawing at opponents for 48 minutes might be gone, but the art hasn't disappeared. Rather, it has become more subtle, more sporadic and sometimes won't include the "talk" at all. But the best in the game still find ways to gain an edge.

The Johannesburg basketball space seems to emulate the NBA in this regard. Therefore, it is not surprising that trash talking, peacocking and taunting opponents are a part of the local game. Moreover, trash talking is now being considered as a skill to be learnt as part of becoming competitive in the basketball game; this is according to an article by Duncan (2021a) entitled, “How to Trash Talk in a Basketball Game”.

According to the participants of the study, homophobic slurs can at times form part of the culture of trash talk. This is consistent with the notion that it is not uncommon within sports for a man to be mocked using homophobic slurs regardless of their sexuality if they perform poorly (Bass et al., 2015; Gough 2007). Globally, sport is still largely considered a hostile heteronormative environment where coaches, athletes and spectators continue to use homonegative slurs as taunts or forms of motivation (Halbrook et al., 2019):

> *You would hear that in a locker room. You would hear that, you know, courtside. Your coaches would be talking that way. Like, yo, this guy’s gay, man. Go after him, you know what I mean? And it was, like I say, it was kind of normal in that kind of language.* (Participant 5)

> *The general response would be humour, and I'd say humour because it's coming off as trash talk, or, you know, trying to put me down, trying to...What's the... Like just trying to make me less of a man than I am…* (Participant 7)

The manner in which communication happens in the locker room is seen as a deterrent to gay players coming out to their teammates (Bass et al., 2015). Male athletes and coaches use extremely homophobic language behind closed doors, such as in the locker room and or closed practice sessions (Bass et al., 2015). This is something that the researcher has observed herself having been part of male locker rooms and practices as an assistant coach.

Dominance as a Protective Factor

For those players who are gay within the basketball space, however, displaying dominance can serve as a protective factor against homophobic bullying. Dusenbery (2013) argues there are some gay people who can also display masculinity and therefore are able to be competitive with the other males on "equal footing". Wellard (2003) spoke of how cultural capital is able to be achieved through performance. In the case of Jason Collins, his athleticism and hypermasculinity were used to emphasise his novelty in contrast to his sexuality (Moscowitz et al., 2019). Reporting on his coming out emphasised his masculine form, physical power and body, which safely contained gayness within the hegemonic form of masculinity (Moscowitz et al., 2019). The findings suggest that it is through being an exceptional player and showing dominance that gay individuals are more easily accepted within the space.

> *I think people aren't judging people in terms of their sexual orientation anymore. I think if you can hoop you can hoop, you know, and they respect you for what you can actually do on the court, instead of what, you know, you do off the court.* (Participant 4)

> *But if he's purple but he can ball, nobody cares.* (Participant 5)

These findings are in line with the notion that developing knowledge in sports as well as developing a sporting prowess is an area where men in particular are able to acquire cultural capital (Wellard, 2003). Often media coverage judges gay athletes on their athleticism and masculine traits with the assertion that how they perform on the court is all that matters (Moscowitz et al., 2019). This works to downplay the idea that sexuality has any relevance in sports while carefully containing the threats of masculinity, making media complicit in the

preservation of hegemonic masculinity (Moscowitz et al., 2019). Researchers have found that in the professional locker room that players care more about winning than sexuality (Luisi et al., 2016). Judging gay players in this way, however, can be seen as a way to ask gay players to distance themselves from their sexuality in a way that is not applied to heterosexual players (Moscowitz et al., 2019). It presents them as not being stereotypically gay, which works to further present compulsory heterosexuality as the norm and re-enforce the typical notions of gender performance (Moscowitz et al., 2019).

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The aim of the study was to explore the hidden practices of homophobia among male basketball players. This included examining the unwritten rules and practices within the basketball space that may promote or perpetuate the ideals of a particular type of masculinity that allows for the discrimination of gay basketball players. The theory of habitus was used as a guide to help further contextualise these issues.

Central Findings

The study revealed that the nature of the sport is central to why participants take part in it and that they learnt pragmatic life lessons that they could apply in other areas of their lives. It also found that building and nurturing relationships is an important aspect of the game of basketball, which spoke to the importance of belonging and acceptance within the environment. Positive relationships within the space contribute to team success as well as individual performance and commitment.

The basketball community in Johannesburg was found to have a cultural identity that subscribes to the principles of hegemonic masculinity. As a result, it is an environment that demonstrates negative perceptions towards gay players and is not generally accepting of them. Behaviour that is deemed feminine in nature is seen as synonymous with being gay. This includes one's physical presentation and the manner in which one manages emotions and displays of affection. Those who are perceived as being gay are often isolated, ridiculed and discriminated against and they experience a loss of class and social capital within the group. There is little, if any, room within the space for alternate masculinities to exist without bringing into question the sexuality of the individuals who exhibit them.

The study further found dominance was considered the most key component of masculinity within the space. It is for this reason that for gay players it is only through the embodiment of hegemonic norms and displays of dominance that they are able to receive acceptance fairly effortlessly. This is, however, a conditional acceptance that works to reinforce the boundaries of the dominant masculinity.

Limitations

The global COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions put in place by the National State of Disaster meant that the researcher was not able to conduct physical interviews with participants. This meant that participation was limited to those who had

access to a stable internet connection and a device that was video conferencing enabled. The unstable nature of energy supply in South Africa further made this form of interviewing difficult and there were instances where interviews had to be rescheduled due to loadshedding. The ability to conduct physical interviews would have allowed for a wider range of participants as well as a smoother interview process. This is due to physical interviews removing the barrier of technological requirements which are necessary for virtual interviews.

Although suitable for qualitative research, the small sample size used is a limitation because it does not allow for generalisation of the information. The geographic limitation of the study further restricts the generalisation of information to the broader South African context.

Recommendations

This research aims to contribute to knowledge production in the realms of sport and sexuality within South Africa. It is recommended that future research in the same field look to further contribute through studies that allow for greater generalisation of information. This includes including more participants in studies as well as examining a wider range of sporting codes. In addition to this, one of the participants made mention of the “KZN basketball scene”, which would suggest a need for future research to focus on different geographic locations.

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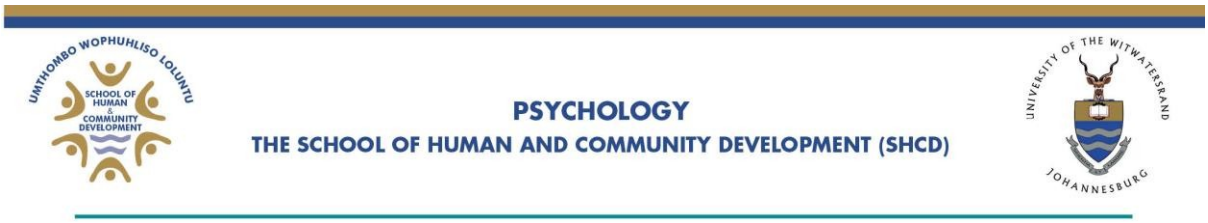
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Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet



School of Human and Community Development
Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa
Tel: (011) 717-4500 Fax: (011) 717-4559

Good Day

My name is Nompumelelo Ramatsoga. I am currently doing my Master's degree in Community based Counselling psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of my studies I am required to conduct a research project. My research will focus on how gay players are considered among male basketball players in Johannesburg. I would like to invite you to participate in my study. Participation is voluntary and will involve an interview of approximately 45 minutes to one hour. All information will be treated confidentially. Even though the interviews will be audio-recorded, only my supervisor and I will have access to the recordings. Both the recordings and the transcripts of the recordings will be stored on a password protected hard drive for five years and destroyed thereafter. You are free to answer only the questions you feel comfortable with and to withdraw any information you provide at any time with no consequence. There are no benefits or risks associated with participation in this study. Your anonymity will be ensured in that no identifying information about you will be revealed in my report or subsequent publications. You will be referred to by a pseudonym, e.g. participant A or participant B.

If you have any further queries or you would like to know the overall results of the study, please feel free to contact me. A summary of the study and the results should be available on request approximately twelve months after this interview. Additionally, if you experience any distress from this interview and feel you would like free telephone or in person counselling, I recommend you contact Life Line, Pretoria on (012) 804 3619, Johannesburg (011) 728 1347 or visit http://www.lifelinepta.org.za or http://www.lifelinejhb.org.za for more information. My contact details appear in the signature below. You are welcome to contact me if there is anything further you would like to discuss.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. Your participation will be highly appreciated.

Kind Regards

Nompumelelo Ramatsoga
082 552 1024
462102@students.wits.ac.za

Dr Malose Langa
011 717 4536
malose.langa@wits.ac.za

Appendix B: Consent Form (Interview)



PSYCHOLOGY
THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (SHCD)



School of Human and Community Development
Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa
Tel: (011) 717-4500 Fax: (011) 717-4559

I,_____hereby consent to being interviewed by Nompumelelo Ramatsoga, for her study exploring homophobic practices and acceptance of gay players among male basketball players in Johannesburg.

I understand that:

- ☐ Participation is completely voluntary.
- ☐ I may withdraw from the interview at any time for whatever reason.
- ☐ I may refrain from answering any questions.
- ☐ There are no risks or benefits associated with this study.
- ☐ The information provided will be kept and dealt with in a confidential manner.
- ☐ No information that can identify me will be included in the research report.
- ☐ The use of direct quotations from the interview may be used in the research report but it will not be possible to identify me from the quotes as pseudonyms (Participant A, Participant B, etc.) will be used.
- ☐ The results will be made available to me, should I require them, approximately twelve months after the interview.
- ☐ I am aware that the results of the study will be reported in the form of a research report for the partial completion of the degree, Master of Arts in Community Based Counselling Psychology.
- ☐ The research may also be presented at a local/international conference and published in a journal and/or book chapter.

Signature_____ Date_____

Appendix C: Consent Form (Audio Recording)

PSYCHOLOGY
THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (SHCD)

School of Human and Community Development
Private Bag 3, Wits 2050,
Johannesburg, South Africa
Tel: (011) 717-4500 Fax: (011) 717-4559

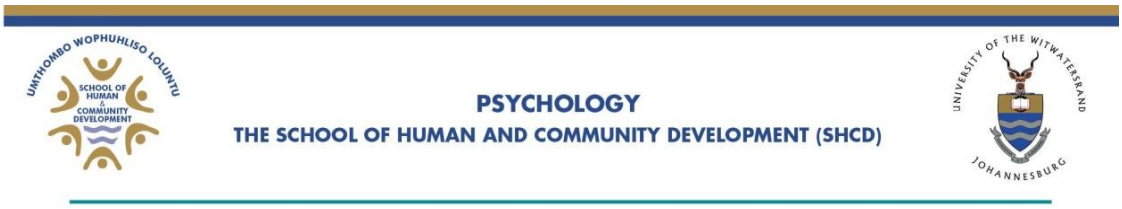
I,_____ give my consent for my interview with Nompumelelo Ramatsoga to be recorded for her study exploring homophobic practices and acceptance of gay players among male basketball players in Johannesburg. I understand that:

- ☐ The recordings will be confidential and only Nompumelelo and her supervisor will have access to them.
- ☐ Throughout the study, I will be referred to by a pseudonym (Participant A or Participant B, etc) and no identifying information will be revealed.
- ☐ After the study has been completed both the recordings and the transcripts of the recordings will be stored on a password protected hard drive.
- ☐ Recordings are kept primarily to facilitate the research being presented or published.

Signature_____

Date_____

Appendix D: Interview Schedule



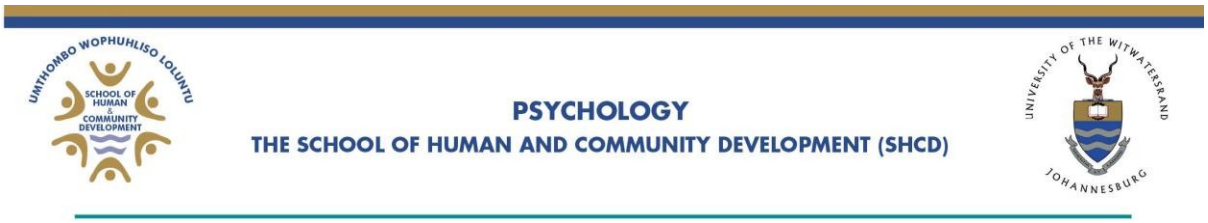
Good Day

I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. With your permission I am going to record the interview. I would like to assure you that everything you say during this interview will be kept confidential, and only my supervisor and I will have access to the recordings. After the study has been completed both the recordings and transcripts of the recordings will be stored on a password protected hard drive. This is primarily to facilitate the publication of the study. Although I know who you are, confidentiality will be maintained by not disclosing any information that is of a personal nature in the report. I will assign a pseudonym to your information in the report, for example, Participant A or Respondent B. I would like to remind you that you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and you may refrain from answering any question/s should you wish to do so. A feedback sheet in the form of a one to two page summary of the study and its findings will be provided to you upon request. You may e-mail (462102@students.wits.ac.za) or phone me (082 552 1024) if you would like to receive this. The feedback will be available approximately 12 months after the collection of the data.

Before beginning the interview I will need you to read through the information sheet, it details what we have just spoken about. If you are in agreement with this, please sign these two consent forms (See Appendix B & C). These forms just confirm that you are aware of everything that we have discussed concerning confidentiality, feedback and privacy. Additionally, if you experience any distress from this interview and feel you would like free telephone or in person counselling, I recommend you contact Life Line, Pretoria on (012) 804 3619, Johannesburg (011) 728 1347 or visit http://www.lifelinepta.org.za or http://www.lifelinejhb.org.za for more information. This information is also available on the participant information sheet that you will keep for your records.

Thank you. If you are ready we can begin the interview.

Appendix E: Semi-Structured Questionnaire



1. How long have you been playing basketball and how did it start?
2. Why do you enjoy playing basketball?
3. How would you describe basketball culture?
4. What are some of the friendship circles that exist in the basketball environment?
5. Which group do you belong to and what are some of the things you do together outside of basketball?
6. What are some of the ways basketball players express their masculinity?
7. What happens when somebody in that environment shows behaviour that is seen as being feminine or non-masculine?
8. What are some of the behaviours that are considered as not being masculine?
9. What is the general response when someone uses words like gay, fag, girly or fairy to describe other males in the space?
10. What is the general opinion on gay people in the Johannesburg basketball space?
11. What's been your experience with gay players in basketball?
12. What would your response be if your teammate or one of the people in your social groups within basketball game out as gay?
13. In professional basketball the NBA has only ever had one active player to come out as gay, why do you think that is?

Thank you for your time and co-operation