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"This is ours… why should [we] be exempt?": Black South African lesbian couples' experiences of identity in the *lobola* practice.

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Declaration

I, Linda Mkhize, declare that "**This is ours… why should [we] be exempt?": Black South African lesbian couples' experiences of identity in the *lobola* practice** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

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Abstract

Majority of countries in Africa consider homosexuality, or any kind of same-sex relation, illegal and immoral. The basis of this problematic notion is that 'homosexuality is unAfrican'. South Africa remains the only country in sub-Saharan Africa where same-sex marriage has been legalized. The Civil Union Act 17 of 2006 gave same-sex couples the opportunity to get married and gain legal recognition before the law. However, the option for a customary marriage for Black same-sex couples remains unavailable. This then raises questions about the complexities of 'African' identities/cultures/practices alongside same-sex sexuality - what happens when one person occupies both of these seemingly contradictory identities? The aim of this study was to investigate the possibilities of disruption of the *lobola* practice when Black African same-sex couples decide to go through the process. *Lobola*, otherwise known as bride wealth or bride price, is a lengthy cultural custom that includes a prospective groom/husband sending cash/cattle or other gifts to his prospective bride/wife's family in consideration of a customary marriage. This exploration was undertaken by looking at how individuals/couples construct, negotiate and renegotiate their identities as 'African' as well as 'lesbian' and how this all happens in the context of the *lobola practice*. The study further aimed to investigate how individuals/couples spoke about their identities as 'African' and 'lesbian' in the face of the anti-homosexuality discourse present in African cultures, politics and so forth. The criteria set for participation required that the participants identify as African (under the racial category of Black), queer (a gender and/or sexual identity that is non-normative), and currently undergoing or have undergone *lobola* negotiations. Data was collected by means of 8 individual interviews and 4 couple interviews using open-ended questions. A thematic and conversation analyses were used to interpret the data. The study allowed for engagement with existing literature on the construction African identities and negotiating this alongside queer identity in a predominantly heteronormative and gendered practice such as *lobola* and then built on this. The study ultimately finds that Black African queer individuals and couples both challenge and adapt to existing constructs of African identities, cultures and customs.

Keywords: *lobola*, lesbian, gender, sexuality, culture, Africa.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1. Key terms

The following is a list of important terms that will be used throughout this study:

Lobola

The cultural practice of *lobola* is predominantly found in sub-Saharan Africa "where it is the most common form of marriage transaction" (Rudwick & Posel, 2014, p. 118). There are several parallels in the way it is practiced across cultures but in some cases, it differs with each culture displaying its own "culturally idiosyncratic" version (Kuper, 1982, p. 157). Because of diversity and cultural relativism, various African groups name and practice *lobola* differently. However, for purposes of this study, it was explored through the lens of the Zulu people of South Africa where it is called *lobola*, the Basotho people of Lesotho where it is called *bohali* and the Shona people of Zimbabwe where it is called *rowora* (Rudwick & Posel, 2014; Chigwedere, 1982; Murray, 1981). Nevertheless, for consistency, *lobola* was used to signify this marital custom as it happens across African cultures.

Africa(n)

Africa is by no means a monolith and Africans are not a homogenous group. The continent has 54 countries, each with distinct languages, ethnic groups and diverse cultures. For the purpose of this study 'Africa', 'African/s' was only used to denote the geographic continent but also a term and identity used "politically to call attention to some of the commonalities and shared historical legacies inscribed in cultures and sexualities within the region by forces such as colonialism, capitalism, imperialism, globalization and fundamentalism" (Anum, 2014, p. 93). Even with these commonalities, 'African' identity is not unitary or static. Its fluidity calls for caution to avoid the mistake of essentializing this identity. Therefore, challenging 'African' identity was a point of discussion throughout this study (Wright, 2002). Finally, 'African' was used to refer to people who fall under the racial category of 'Black', and within a particular ethnic group in Africa.

Same-sex/Queer

Same-sex and/or queer was used to describe the pairing of various couples in this study. However, the two are not interchangeable. Same-sex relates to people of the same biological

sex. The definition of queer here has drawn from Sewell (2014, p. 293) who argues that it is an "inherently problematic" descriptor with a history that is disparaging for gay people. He also notes the importance of assessing the term in more recent contexts where it denotes difference and explicitly resists heteronormativity (Sewell, 2014). In the context of this study, queer was used to imply a range of non-normative genders and sexualities.

1.2. Background and rationale of the study

Simply framed, this study explored the experiences of *lobola* amongst Black lesbian women in South Africa. However, when broken down further, it investigated three very specific concepts, namely: African identities and cultures, *lobola* as an existing and changeable practice, and gender and sexual identity (specifically in an African context). The discussion below fleshes out each of these concepts and explains their relevance to this study.

African identities and cultures

Africa is not a monolith and Africans are not a uniform group of people. The continent is made up of 54 countries, each with their own variety of languages, ethnic groups and cultures. It is for this reason that defining African identity as a singular entity "is both a daunting and potentially frustrating task" (Wright, 2002, p. 1). It depends on the numerous "disciplinary positions" from which one approaches the task. Wright (2002) argues that 'African' is often a misrecognized identity that is created by non-African academic writers. This Western knowledge parades as global knowledge (Wright, 2002). Sparse knowledge of the representation of Africans through the African lens exists. Accordingly, if Africans do not write about Africa, one wonders how to go about exploring and formulating African identities (Wright, 2002). There has to be an intentional move to remove African identities from the margins and center it by having Africans writing about Africa (Wright, 2002; Oyewumi, 2002).

Wright (2002) then offers five strategies that would make it possible to formulate a realistically complex African identities. Two of these are relevant here. Firstly, he suggests that writing about African identities should be a task that is taken on by a variety of voices and that it should be a multi-stage project. This would assist in collecting varied perspectives/experiences that can represent the diverse layers of Africanness. Secondly, he posits that Africa is multitudinous, fragmented and dynamic in a way that allows it to come to life in a range of ways. Defining African identities is not simple at all, rather, it allows "for the possibility of

multiple and contradictory identifications coexisting in the subject at the same time" (Fuss, 1995, p. 34).

In order to explore the multiple ways in which participants constructed their identity as African, the study drew on Wright's strategies of identity formulation. It sought to see the diverse points of departure in defining identity, chief among them are language, culture and location. It was thus, important that participants were Africans who this positionality to establish what Africanness meant to them. Secondly, the study did not seek to define a final representation of Africanness, or representations that sought to bind or dissociate national/cultural identity from gender and sexual identity. Instead, following on Fuss (1995) and Hall's (1992) writing, the study attempted to look for identities and forms of existence that were fluid and harmonized.

Same-sex sexuality in the context of Africa

Approximately 60-70% of the countries in Africa consider homosexuality or any kind of same-sex relation illegal (Carroll, 2016). The anti-homosexuality laws in these countries prohibit individuals from engaging in any kind of same-sex sexual activity, same-sex marriage, fluid gender identity/expression and even outlawing serving in the country's military (Dunton & Palmberg, 1996). However, in countries such as Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Niger, homosexuality or same-sex relations have never been criminalized. Antithetically, countries such as Sierra Leone, Uganda and Tanzania have totally denied LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex) rights stating that homosexuality is a Western import (Ward, 2013). Somalia and Nigeria have gone as far as legislating that homosexuality or same-sex relations are punishable by death (Carroll, 2016). Of interest to this study is the fact that culture and tradition are always cited as the defense for chastising same-sex sexual activities. Homosexuality is said to be "unAfrican" and runs against the grain of African identities and cultures. Hence, it is important to clearly define what it means to be African, what it means to take up same-sex sexuality in the context of Africa and a practice such as *lobola*.

The history of African sexual identities is largely based in colonial rhetoric (Lewis, 2011). The way in which African sexuality is written about displays "the historical legacy of racist fascination with Africans' allegedly profligate sexuality" (Mama, 1996, p. 39). Arnfred (2004, p. 59) speaks of African sexualities as "tales and silences" due to the "re-circulated ideas and

conceptions, which on closer scrutiny, tell more about the minds of those who made them than they tell about Africa and Africans". They reflect the "connection between this type of tales and one type of silence: the general absence of 'sexuality' as an issue in African feminists' writings." When the silences on African sexualities are broken, they often miss the mark by solely writing about them in relation to disease and violence (Mama, 1996; Lewis, 2011; Arnfred, 2004).

Same-sex relations in Africa are often misconstrued. Part of the misconceptions regarding same-sex sexuality in Africa are; (a) that same-sex relations never existed; (b) any form of same-sex relation or homosexuality is a colonial importance; and (c) therefore, homosexuality is unAfrican (Morgan & Wieringa, 2005). Epprecht's (2004) historical scholarship on sexual practices in Africa demonstrates a range of gender performances and sexualities in Africa. The misinterpretation, then, comes from these varied gender identities and sexual practices not being labelled same way in African cultures as they are in the West (Lewis, 2011; Allotey, 2015). Therefore, the narrative that Africa is a 'heterosexual' continent is quickly falls short.

South Africa is currently the only country in sub-Saharan Africa that has legalized same-sex marriage, theoretically making it the continent's leader in LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questions, intersex and more) equality (Carroll, 2016; Barker, 2011). Countries like Angola, Cape Verde, Malawi and Zimbabwe, among others, have actively implemented "legal provisions that legislatively or constitutionally prohibit same-sex marriage" (Carroll, 2016, p. 50). South Africa is said to be the one country in Africa where LGBTQI+ persons experience the most freedom because of the constitution which outlaws discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation and so forth (Shefer & Potgieter, 2006; Carroll, 2016). However, the lived experiences of many LGBTQI+ people in South Africa do not reflect this.

South Africa permits solemnization and registration of civil marriages, customary marriages and civil unions (Department of Home Affairs, 2018). The legal recognition of same-sex marriages, however, was not an easy feat. Despite backlash from religious/traditional leaders and after many Civil Union Bill hearings, same-sex marriage was legalized by way of the Civil Union Act 17 of 2006 (Bonthuys, 2008; Mkhize, 2008). Notwithstanding this seemingly positive move, during the bill hearings, the option of same-sex couples getting married customarily was never discussed (Bonthuys, 2008). Bonthuys (2008) suggests that the different

forms of marriage in South Africa appear unequal before the law based on their varying racial, religious and cultural dimensions. Furthermore, Bonthuys (2008) considers why it is possible for civil unions to accommodate same-sex couples while others such as customary and Muslim marriages do not allow the same. It is implied, then, that customary and Muslim cultural norms are perhaps "static, inflexible and incapable of accommodating change" (Bonthuys, 2008, p. 729). However, this is debatable as the section below shows. The thesis also demonstrated the ways in which cultural customs and practices are certainly receptive to change.

Culture and lobola as a changing practice

Culture is as a conglomeration of values, norms, practices, traditions and customs taught and shared by a social group over many years (Mkhize, 2008). People use culture to navigate and make sense of the world they occupy (Mkhize, 2008). Hence, "culture is nothing without the people who enact it". Consequently, it is subject to change depending on who is using it and the context in which it is operating (Mkhize, 2008, p. 104). In this study, the focus is on the cultural practice of *lobola*, and how this practice has changed, even if subtly, over the years. Regardless of how parts of the practice have changed, it remains a largely heteronormative and gendered one.

Hall (1992) argues that there is no such thing as an authentic culture or cultural identity that is natural. Rather, it is socially constructed. It follows therefore that if culture and cultural identity are socially constructed, then they have the propensity to shift and be reconstructed. This can extend to African, queer and other identities. Tamale (2011) suggests that identities, whether cultural, gendered, sexual and so forth, must be explored as relational, fluid and based in the context they are being explored. Ratele (2007, p. 70) extends this discussion by revealing "cultures were then, and still are, always messy." Ratele (2007) goes on to explain that cultures are in no way hereditary. Instead, they are dynamic, changeable and a system that is able to transform overtime for the people who utilize it. Nonetheless, the repercussions of culture are great especially in the cases where it does not allow "multiple belongings and internal differentiation" (Ratele, 2007, p. 68).

If culture is dynamic and adaptable, then a cultural practice such as *lobola* should be the same. *Lobola*, otherwise known as bride wealth or bride price, is a custom whereby a prospective groom/husband sends cash/cattle or other gifts to his prospective bride/wife's family in consideration of a customary marriage (Livermon, 2015). The cultural practice of *lobola* is

predominantly found in sub-Saharan Africa "where it is the most common form of marriage transaction" (Rudwick & Posel, 2014, p. 118). There are several parallels in the way it is practiced across cultures. However, it differs with each culture displaying its own "culturally idiosyncratic" version (Kuper, 1982, p. 157).

The purposes and processes of *lobola* have changed gradually over time in order to meet the needs of contemporary society (Ansell, 2001; Nkosi, 2011). Firstly, it has become more about the exchange of cash or other gifts than simply exchanging cattle and other livestock (Chiwese, 2016). Secondly, the length of *lobola* has decreased significantly (Livermon, 2015). In earlier years, the practice could take place over 10 to 20 years. Now it is done over a few months (Murray, 1981; Chigwedere, 1982; Livermon, 2015). In the words of Chigwedere (1981, p. v) "all live cultures are dynamic [...] the dynamism is the mechanism by which the new needs of society are accommodated while the old practices that have outlived their use […] become obsolete and discarded." The old ways of performing practices do not need to be discarded, especially for those who still wish to use them, but there is certainly a need for these practices to accommodate new/different needs. In the case of this study, it is the need for same-sex couples to be able to get married.

This gives rise to two areas of interrogation regarding African identities and practices. What does it mean for same-sex couples to go through the process of *lobola* and what does the use of African practices by queer people mean for African identities? Livermon (2015) offers brief responses to these questions in his work *Usable traditions: Creating sexual autonomy in post-apartheid South Africa* where he examines the relationship between African customary practices (Xhosa initiation, *lobola*, *ubusangoma*) and queerness. He draws on the discourse of queerness as unAfrican to show the ways in which African queers are secluded from African customs/traditions and ultimately African subjectivity. It is clear that there are both limitations and possibilities for the ways in which Africans queers can put tradition to use (Livermon, 2015). By putting tradition to use, African queers illustrate the constantly-in-process and fluidity of customary African practices as well as African identities (Livermon, 2015). This study used and expanded upon Livermon's (2015) work. There was an effort to look at the way that African customary practices, specifically *lobola*, become *useable traditions* for African same-sex couples. It explored how this practice can accommodate African same-sex couples, in spite of the notion that homosexuality is anti-African. The study also intended to look at how

the category of 'African' was defined, same-sex sexuality and the possible changes of the *lobola* practice.

Contribution of the study

By pulling all three concepts together, the study sought to expose the ways in which they intersect with each other. It did so by firstly engaging with how existing literature on African identities and cultures are constructed and establishing possibilities for fluidity of identities/cultures. More importantly, it interrogated the ways in which individuals construct this identity and how they embody it. Secondly, *lobola* as a predominantly heteronormative and gendered practice was explored with a view to establishing how it has existed, its place in contemporary society and its usability for Black African same-sex couples. Finally, the study investigated the ways gender and same-sex sexuality are constructed and performed for and/or by individuals living in Africa, especially in the light of the perception of 'homosexuality as unAfrican' discourse.

1.3. Structure of the thesis

This thesis has seven chapters. Chapter 1 is an overview of the thesis, providing a brief background and the rationale of the study. The research aims and questions that guide the study are also presented and explained here.

Chapter 2 provides an explanation of the theoretical framework (social constructionism) used in this study.

Chapter 3 acts as the literature review which documents existing knowledge on marriage in South Africa, the history of *lobola* across three African cultures, African epistemology, the history, multiplicity and complexity of African sexualities and finally heteronormativity.

Chapter 4 frames the methodology used for the study. This includes explaining the qualitative research design, the various sampling methods, data collection methods, the two data analysis methods (thematic and conversation) used, ethics and reflexivity.

Chapter 5 is the analysis and discussion section. This chapter is made up of three subsections (*Coming out the closet with unexpected bodies and desires: The intersections of gender, sexuality and compulsory heterosexuality; How to be African: Defining and describing African identities and cultures;* and *Adapting and aligning - whatever worked at that time": Black lesbian couples navigating and re-claiming the practice of lobola*) which encompass the broad themes and findings of this study.

Finally, chapter 6 summarizes this study and presents the various conclusions.

1.4. Research aim

The aim of this study was to investigate the possibilities of disruption of the *lobola* practice when Black South African lesbian couples decide to go through with this process. This included exploring how individuals/couples construct, negotiate and renegotiate their identities as 'African' as well as 'lesbian' in the context of the practice of *lobola*. Finally, the study enquired about how individuals/couples speak about their identities as 'African' and 'lesbian' in the face of the anti-homosexuality discourse present in African cultures and politics.

1.5. Research questions

The following research questions guided his study:

- What do the experiences of *lobola* practice amongst Black African same-sex couples inform us about the possibilities for disruption as a heteronormative practice?
- How are discordant gender and sexual subjectivities constructed/narrated as African by same-sex couples?

Chapter 2
Theoretical framework

Social constructionism

According to Gergen (1985, p. 266) social constructionism "views discourse about the world not as a reflection or map of the world but as an artifact of communal interchange." To say that something is socially constructed is to recognize that it is subject to our previous/current society and that it might have not existed if we did not have our previous/current needs, values or interests (Boghossian, 2001). Social construction (SC) bears a variety of definitions across disciplines such as psychology and sociology (Craib, 1997). Even with these varying definitions, Burr (2015, p. 2) states that there is a 'family resemblance' regarding the characteristics or assumptions that link these definitions together.

This theoretical framework typically challenges realism, essentialism and biological determinism (Burr, 2015). SC questions realism as it refutes that our knowledge is an objective observation of reality or the world (Burr, 2015). Instead, all knowledge comes from perceiving reality or the world in a particular way that ultimately is in the interest of something/someone (Burr, 2015). Essentialism refers to the idea that the characteristics of persons or groups are significantly influenced by biological factors and are, therefore, largely similar in all human cultures and historical periods (Kang, 2012). For example, essentialism would maintain that all people have a (heterosexual) sexual orientation that does not change over time and this sexual orientation is inherent and biologically determined (Kang, 2012; Subramaniam, 2014). SC is anti-essentialist because it argues, "that there are no 'essences' inside people that make them what they are". Antithetically, the social world "is the product of social processes" (Burr, 2015, p. 6). Essentialism, thus, hinges on a biological determinist theory of identity (Kang, 2012). Biological determinism is the general theory that all human behaviour is innate, determined by genes/brain size/other biological attributes and forms all social, political, and economic destinies (Kang, 2012; Subramaniam, 2014). For example, returning to the existing ideas about sex and gender, sex is seen as a biological fact that distinguishes humans into two categories, which ultimately determine or make the heterosexual assumption that females are defined by their ability to have children (Subramaniam, 2014).

In her book *Social Constructionism*, Burr (2015) outlines the four key assumptions of SC. Firstly; SC is a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge. It is necessary that we

begin to problematize and critique our observations of the world and knowledge that is often presented as objective and unbiased. It is for this reason that SC is seen as a direct challenge of positivism and empiricism, both of which feign that knowledge is objective, "the nature of the world can be revealed by observation and that what exists is that what we perceive to exist" (Burr, 2015, p. 3). Furthermore, the categories that are seen to be 'real' or 'natural' are not actual divisions. The example that she provides is that of gender and sex. Common knowledge suggests that there are only two categories of human beings (men/males and women/females) and that these categories are naturally occurring. However, these categories are not naturally occurring. Rather, they are adopted through socialization. Furthermore, we are able to see through people who are intersex or people who undergo gender-reassignment surgery that these categories are not concrete but ambiguous.

Secondly, SC is historically and culturally specific. These categories (man/woman, Black/white, motherhood/womanhood) are assumed to be natural when in fact they are created, changed, and reproduced through historical processes within institutions and culture. This means that any given category/classification is not natural or fixed and can be understood differently depending on historical periods and different societies. For example, the idea of childhood has continuously evolved. According to Aries (1962), the things that are considered 'normal' for children to do have changed over time. In the same way, the roles/responsibilities of parents have also progressed. In addition to considering the historical and cultural, it is also important to consider the social, economic and political aspects that shape those times as this brings us closer to understanding the various truths and/or untruths that may exist.

Thirdly, knowledge is sustained through social processes. The argument by Burr here is that our knowledge of the world is constructed through daily interaction. Social interaction, and specifically language, is at the heart of social construction. For example, dyslexia is understood through interaction between the people who have their friends/family and those who offer medical assistance. It is not solely a product of medical research or objective observation but also a product of "social processes and interactions in which people are constantly engaged with each other" (Burr, 2015, p. 5).

Finally, in SC, knowledge and action go together. Through the various social interactions that we engage in, there are ranges of socially constructed events that take place. These different events bring about different and particular kinds of actions and consequences. For example,

before the Temperance movement in the 19th century, a drunken person was seen as solely responsible for their negative behaviour. However, during the movement, alcohol itself became the problem and the alcoholic was rather seen as suffering from an addiction. As a result, we are able to conclude that these actions/consequences are about the different contexts and power relations that exist when the different kinds of knowledge that is produced and exchanged.

As mentioned above, language is a defining factor of SC. It is the "principal means that we use to construct our social and psychological worlds" (Burr, 2015, p. 10). It is through language or communication/interaction that people construct and co-construct multiple realities (Cojocaru, Bragaru & Ciuchi, 2012). Therefore, language goes beyond simply being descriptive and becomes performative (Burr, 2015; Korsgaard, 2007). Still, language is not a clear and objective medium through which we express our thoughts and feelings (Burr, 2015; Korsgaard, 2007). Burr (2015) argues that language has consequences and reveals the arrangement of reality. We are born into a world where there are pre-existing constructions, concepts and categories. As we grow up, we learn each of these different constructions, concepts and categories as we acquire and develop our use of language. We then continue to use, reproduce and share them until they become a normative part of our language and culture. Furthermore, they become a part of our everyday social interaction and we come to understand that "when people talk to each other, the world gets constructed" and these constructions have larger material consequences (Burr, 2015, p. 11).

These consequences show us the way in which language and power are closely connected to SC (Blackledge, 2005). Blackledge (2005, p. 5) states that they are associated in the following ways; "it is usually in language that discriminatory practices are enacted, in language that unequal relations of power are constituted and reproduced, and in language that social asymmetries may be challenged and transformed." Essentially, it is through language that people are able to maintain a status quo that serves their interests. In the same way, it is through language that people begin to challenge the dominating system that oppresses their interests (Tilahun, 2016). Language is imbued with ideology that can be used for or against domination (Tilahun, 2016). Either way, these ideologies become increasingly powerful when they are thought of as 'common-sense' or 'natural' and further allow language to preserve/transform power in social/political/economic contexts (Tilahun, 2016).

SC assisted in thinking through various aspects of this study. It provided an opportunity to analyze what is considered common knowledge about the purposes and practices of *lobola*. In some of the existing literature, it is apparent that there was a solely negative perception of *lobola*. For example, it is seen as an institution that has been commercialized, hence, financial, patriarchal, and has no room in contemporary society (Chiwese, 2016; Shope, 2006; Rudwick & Posel, 2014). However, these viewpoints tended to only focus on particular parts of *lobola* while ignoring the other significant cultural aspects of it. In other texts, it is clear that *lobola* had many meaningful, complex, varied and multifaceted functions in African societies (Rudwick & Posel, 2014; Nkosi, 2011; Mwamwenda & Monyooe, 1997). By critically engaging with different kinds of literature, it becomes possible to discover multiple truths about *lobola* as a practice. This includes elements that are patriarchal and problematic as well as elements that are customarily, culturally and traditionally significant.

There was also the task of challenging the gender dynamics within a practice such as *lobola* and the institution of marriage. Both entities require that there be a man who takes on the role and responsibilities of a husband while there is a woman who takes on her own role and responsibilities as a wife and eventually a mother. However, in a same-sex relationship, these constructs of a woman/wife/femininity and man/husband/masculinity do not exist simplistically as they do in heterosexual relationships. It is through this framework that there was an effort to investigate the ways in which the categories "African", "same-sex/queer/lesbian" and "*lobola*" were constructed and re-constructed in literature, in the researcher's own way of thinking as well as by the participants.

Through the literature, it also becomes possible to probe into the historic and cultural specificities of *lobola*. Rudwick and Posel (2014) outline some of the historic and contemporary purposes and practices of *lobola*. In their paper, they note that in pre-capitalist context, there was strict use of cattle as a means of exchange, potential for fathers to pay *ilobolo* on behalf of their sons, a significance of female reproduction in reference to bride wealth payments and an understanding that *lobola* legalized/legitimized the marriage. In contemporary times, they note that *lobola* can now be paid in cash, the groom (rather than his father) typically pays it, there is still emphasis on female reproduction (although it is not taken back if women remain childless) and *lobola* is still seen as a way of legalizing/legitimizing marriage. This study then attempted to observe the purposes and particulars of *lobola* in 2018

for Black and lesbian women. More precisely, there was an opportunity to re-assess and re-construct what is known or understood about *lobola* - what it is and what it can be.

This construction and re-construction of *lobola* took place as a social process between participants and the researcher. The social process included learning from each other, disagreeing with each other, sharing ideas with one another and contradiction at many points. At the center of this social process was language. The way in which participants used language to construct their "African identity/Africanness", "same-sex/queer/lesbian identity" and "*lobola*" gave insight to how they embodied (or rejected), and/or make meaning to each of these entities. Through language, participants wedged themselves into existing categories and at other moments used language to create new spaces and types of existence for themselves. There were multiple truths/realities constructed through this social process.

Chapter 3
Literature review

3.1. Marriage in South Africa

In South Africa, marriage can be undertaken in the following ways:

Civil marriage

The Marriage Act, 1961, governs any civil marriage in South Africa (Act No. 25 of 1961) (Barker, 2011). This form of marriage is based on Roman-Dutch laws. It sees marriage as a union between a single man and a single woman (Barker, 2011). Persons getting married should be 18 years or older (unless parents/guardians write a letter of consent stating otherwise) and not already married.

Customary marriage

Colonial conquest arranged and regulated indigenous customs and African life into what they christened “customary law” (Shope, 2006; Mamdani, 1996). The combination of "indigenous customs and British legal procedures" (Carton, 2000, p. 25) permitted colonial leaders to take advantage of traditional customs to secure/cement their legitimacy. It also gave them negotiation power that provided traditional leaders with a sense of authority over their own customs (Herbest & du Plessis, 2008). Customary marriages became legally recognized through the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act 1998 (Barker, 2011). The Recognition of Customary Marriages Act (RCMA) stipulates that “a marriage which is a valid marriage at customary law . . . is for all purposes recognized as a marriage”. Any customary marriages that took place before the RCMA are “unconditionally valid” and any marriages taking place after the implementation of the RCMA must meet the requirements stated in the Act (Barker, 2011, p. 449). These requirements include consent between the two individuals getting married. Neither of them should already be married (by means of the Marriage Act or Civil Union Act). Minimum age requirement is 18, and there can be an agreement to pay *lobola,* but the marriage is still valid without it (Barker, 2011).

Civil union (Same-sex marriage)

As already mentioned, South Africa is the only country in Africa that has legalized same-sex marriage. The Civil Union Act 17 of 2006 (Civil Union Act) was adopted on 1st December 2006 (Barker, 2011; Bonthuys, 2008). This was because of the *Minister of Home Affairs v*

Fourie case, which declared the lack of legal recognition of same-sex relationships unconstitutional and provided Parliament a period of one year to resolve this to ensure that same-sex couples would be able to validate their relationships (Barker, 2011; Bonthuys, 2008). Civil unions were met with the similar requirements as customary marriages – both individuals should consent to the marriage, they should not already be married or 'civilly partnered' and they should be 18 years or older.

While all these forms of marriage are acknowledged and legally recognized, they are not all afforded the same "gold standard recognition" in a variety of ways (Barker, 2011, p. 448). Firstly, granted that customary marriages and civil unions are accepted marriages, they are convened under different Acts rather than the original Marriage Act (Barker, 2011). Furthermore, only heterosexual couples are able to have a civil or customary marriage which are both recognized by the law but same-sex couples are only able to marry by means of a civil union (Barker, 2011; Bonthuys, 2008). There is also some vagueness to whether civil marriages are open to different-sex couples or only same sex couples (Barker, 2011). This suggests that these different forms of marriage are not recognized in the same manner and suggests there is a hierarchy of marriage (Barker, 2011; Bonthuys, 2008).

Secondly, the recognition of customary marriages fundamentally erased the traditional standards and enforced standards that were closer to that of civil law (Barker, 2011; Bonthuys, 2008). For example, rather than making use of the "customary dispute resolution" to resolve issues between families or to dissolve the marriage, the RCMA fashioned a judicial divorce process that partially mirrors the divorce proceedings in a civil marriage (Barker, 2011, p. 449). Once again, customary marriage is modelled after the archetype of civil marriage.

Thirdly, after the ruling of the Civil Union Act, there was still a strong belief that emphasized "a marriage is the voluntary union between a man and a woman only" and therefore same-sex marriages should be seen as 'civil partnerships' rather than marriages (Barker, 2011). In the end, same-sex couples were able to opt to call their unions 'marriages' but this still calls for interrogation about language (Barker, 2011). More specifically, interrogating the implications of fully recognizing one kind of marriage and calling it a marriage, over the other, which is only seen as a union or partnership. Finally, the officers responsible for conducting civil unions have the option of refusing to do so on the basis of religious or other personal belief (Barker, 2011). However, there is no similar concession in the case of civil marriages. This insinuates

that there is something about same-sex marriage that gives space for officials to refuse couples their constitutional rights. Based on the points mentioned above, there is an undertone that proposes customary marriages and civil unions remain subordinate to civil marriage despite all of them having legal recognition.

3.2. Lobola across cultures

In order to explore the institution of *lobola,* it is important to establish its traditional purposes and procedures. The broad purpose of *lobola, bohali and rowora* is for the groom and his family to transfer cattle or cash to his bride's family in order to secure her domestic and reproductive services (Rudwick & Posel, 2014; Chigwedere, 1982; Murray, 1981). In literature, there is clear emphasis that this marital transaction is not about buying the bride or selling her to the "highest bidder" (Shope, 2006, p. 65). A more accurate description of this marital transaction is a delivery or transfer from the groom's family to the bride's family (Chigwedere, 1982). This includes taking the bride from her family home into her potential husband's family home while merging these two families in the process (Mkhize, 2008; Rudwick & Posel, 2014). The transfer of cattle or cash is made with the consideration of the domestic and reproductive contribution a bride will make to her new household as well as considering the loss it is for her own family (Rudwick & Posel, 2014). Most importantly, it is about ensuring that any children born into the marriage "belong" to the husband and his family (Rudwick & Posel, 2014; Chigwedere, 1982; Murray, 1981). This begins to illustrate the gendered and patriarchal nature of this practice. Firstly, the women have to leave their families and communities behind in order to perform domestic/reproductive labour for another family. In addition, "belonging" to another family through the transfer of cattle or cash and becoming a possession is indicative of patriarchal notions.

The procedures that take place during *lobola, bohali and rowora* are broadly the same. After the bride and groom have decided, they want to get married or, more historically, after a father has found a suitable bride for his son, the process is initiated. Across these various cultures, an intermediary from the groom's family is sent to the bride's home with a letter that states that they found a bride within that household and would like to officially begin *lobola* negotiations. If the family is satisfied with this proposal and the groom is clear on which woman is his bride within her family's household, the negotiations may commence. There may be some back-and-forth movement in deciding meeting dates for the negotiation process. The part of negotiation process where the negotiators are talking about the "brideprice" may take one day or may only

be finalized after several meetings. Once the amount of cattle or cash has been agreed upon and transferred, the marriage is legitimized in the eyes of culture and a public declaration can be made. Following the completed negotiations and wedding, several festivities take place depending on the cultural practices of each group (Rudwick & Posel, 2014; Chigwedere, 1982; Murray, 1981).

Though there are many parts to solidifying this marital transaction, the new marriage is only fully acknowledged once the transfer of the cattle or cash is completed (Rudwick & Posel, 2014; Chigwedere, 1982; Murray, 1981). Cattle are arguably the most significant part of the *lobola* process. It is with cattle that the marriage is officiated and, more importantly, husbands are able to claim paternal rights to the children born into the marriage. In earlier times, when cattle were predominantly used for this marital transaction, the number of cows transferred varied based on several reasons. These reasons include the age, family lineage and virginity of the potential bride (Rudwick & Posel, 2014; Livermon, 2015). In recent times, these reasons have extended to the bride's level of education and whether she already has children or not (Rudwick & Posel, 2014; Livermon, 2015).

The differences between *lobola, bohali and rowora* are particularly evident in the ceremonies/festivities that take place both before and after the cattle or cash transfer and wedding. For example, *rowora* takes place in three parts (*zvidiki*/small payments, *kunonga*/the bride share and the main marriage deal) and each of these have 5 or more different payments, gifts or ceremonies that have a particular meaning in this marriage process (Chigwedere, 1982). *Lobola* takes place in four parts (Mkhize, 2008; Ngubane, 1987). *Ukucela* (asking for the bride's hand in marriage), *ilobolo* (negotiation then transfer of cattle or cash) which is concluded with a celebration for reaching an agreement. This is then followed by the wedding and finally *izibizo/umabo* (gift exchange) where the family of the groom gifts the family of the bride and vice versa. This is part of the effort to welcome and blend each other's families (Mkhize, 2008).

Having explained how *lobola* traditionally occurred, it is necessary to note that this cultural practice has changed over time. With the arrival of European colonizers, in Zulu society specifically, *lobola* was reshaped because of the migrant labor system as well as the introduction of a money economy (Rudwick & Posel, 2014). As seen above, the transfer of cattle has become the transfer of cash or other material goods (Rudwick & Posel, 2014). Other

contemporary shifts in the process of *lobola* include a shift in gender roles as well as marrying across racial lines.

Some of the literature suggests that women are sidelined in the process of *lobola* and only play a small yet still significant role (Ngubane, 1987; Mkhize, 2008). Ngubane (1987) explains how the role of women in *lobola* is implicit and has to do with the domestic domain, while men's roles are explicit and have to do with the external domain. Ngubane (1987, p. 178) goes on to argue that the role that women play in *lobola* "has very far-reaching consequences for social structure and its effects." However, there are possible resistances and reformulations to this in order to accommodate queer folks and more feminist perspectives. For example, Wendy Isaack (2008), a Black Zulu lesbian, states the following:

> … It's time to be more challenging, and to say that we have multiple identities. I am a lesbian. I can access the Civil Union Act. But I am also a Black Zulu woman, and there is a law in this country that makes provision for Zulus in terms of recognizing marriage. Why should I not have that?... I believe that it's not only a legal institution- it's also about social recognition and communicating certain social values. So, I would like to do it properly. I might take the Zulu aspect of my tradition: the *lobola* needs to be paid, and there needs to be a negotiation around how it is done. I know of lesbian couples who talk about paying *lobola* for each other- they pay the same portion to each other's families. One can work around these things. But what we have so far is not enough. I want to have all the options. I want to have the option of using the Customary Marriages Act. (p. 47).

Here, Isaack addresses three important issues about resisting and reformulating this practice. Firstly, she argues that a civil union (which is thought to be preserved for white gay individuals) may not be able to capture her intersectional experience of being a queer Black woman. Secondly, she re-emphasizes her need for social recognition within her own Zulu culture while still being acknowledged and accepted as a lesbian woman. Finally, she advocates destabilizing this practice by having two women deliver *lobola* to each other's families and begins to demonstrate that queer couples' wanting to get married traditionally is not an impossible task.

Livermon (2015) addresses the issue of gender, and how queer couples going through the process of *lobola* unsettle this overtly gendered practice. Traditionally, parents expect to receive *lobola* for their female children but certainly not their male children. If a feminine presenting or gendered queer man has *lobola* paid for him, this may suggest his role as the

'wife/woman' in the partnership (Livermon, 2015). It is similar for lesbian women with the masculine presenting or gendered queer woman possibly being expected to pay *lobola* for her wife and is then seen as the 'husband/man' (Livermon, 2015). In both cases, gender performance is central to how each of these transactions is expected to be carried out. Furthermore, while there is resistance to the traditional form of *lobola*, there is still a possibility of re-inscribing those traditionally gendered roles.

3.3. African epistemology

African epistemology is included here to engage with the African concepts, cultures, traditions, and identities being discussed. Adopting a solely Western lens to investigate African concepts, cultures and experiences might lead to misunderstanding of such concepts (Baloyi, 2009). For example, the English term "spirit/soul" has previously been inaccurately translated to the Zulu/Xhosa term *moya*, in literature about the African conception of the soul (Baloyi, 2009). The term *moya*, loosely and haphazardly translates to "spirit/soul", which does not fully capture the spiritual significance of this word as used by Zulu/Xhosa people (Baloyi, 2009). Therefore, it is important to study African concepts and their applicability in an African context. It would be inaccurate to do a study such as this without including an African framework to contextualize the knowledge and experiences of African cultural traditions such as *lobola* (Baloyi & Makobe-Rabothata, 2014).

Though this African epistemology may be useful to the concepts presented here, it is also necessary to keep in mind a possible critique of it. Nyanzi (2014) argues that an African epistemology is required to understand African queer identity because using the theories of Foucault and Butler may be limiting. Her argument is valid. However, as mentioned earlier, Africa is not a monolith and there is need to problematize it when it is presented this way. Defining and conceptualizing this epistemology as an 'African' one lends itself to the reproduction and essentialization of 'African' identities and cultures. Creating an African epistemology may also not be the solution to counter Western thought. This is due to the essentialist nature attached to such an epistemology. Tamale (2011) and Hall (1992) aver that 'African' or cultural identities are relational, fluid and dynamic. Consequently, a singular framework may not be efficient to understand this scholarship. Nonetheless, African epistemology is worth looking into for purposes of this study.

Each culture, according to Mkhize (2004), is shaped, and in turn shapes a particular worldview. This worldview is "a set of basic assumptions that a group of people develops in order to explain reality and their place and purpose in the world" (p. 35). Worldviews encompass four components: nature orientation; time-space orientation; human-activity orientation and the relational orientation (Mkhize, 2004, p. 35).

Nature orientation is concerned with how people associate with nature and the environment they live in. In the "hierarchy of being", African metaphysics places plants and inanimate objects on the lowest level, while the next level is occupied by animals (Mkhize, 2004, p. 39). Although they are the lowest on the hierarchy of being, nature and animals are an important part of African tradition. Plants and herbs are used for traditional healing while animals have utilitarian value as sacrifices in various rituals (Sofowora, 1982). Next on the hierarchy of being are the ancestors. Following in the intermediate world are human beings. Finally, at the apex of the hierarchy is God who "constitutes the spatiotemporal totality of existence" (Teffo & Roux, 1998, p. 140) and permeates everything in the world. Human being's participation in the divine is articulated in Sotho saying "*motho ke Modimo*" meaning "the person is (the) Divine" (Mkhize, 2004, p. 42). Despite the hierarchy, there is a great emphasis on the interconnectedness of all these elements – also known as "cosmic unity" (Mkhize, 2004, p. 44).

The time-space orientation refers to the manner in which a culture corresponds with history and tradition – the present, the past and future. In African tradition, there is a greater emphasis on the past (indicated by ancestors) and the present (indicated by fellow human beings). The intent is to live peacefully with ancestors, the family and the community as a whole. Ancestors are located in the third level of the hierarchy of being. The importance of honouring and connecting with ancestors is seen in the process of *lobola*. In a study by Rudwick and Posel (2014, p. 132) both old-fashioned and contemporary Zulu men and women felt it was important to "shak[e] hands with the ancestors" and doing things correctly in order to protect the marriage, the children as well as the entire family unit. Therefore, beyond the conventional meanings and purposes of *lobola*, engaging with different parts of African tradition is important for individuals to create a sense of cosmic unity.

The human-activity orientation brings to attention the preferred mode of human activity. In African cultures, human activity focuses on being/being-in-becoming where value is placed on harmony with others in the community, the social environment and spiritual fulfilment

(Mkhize, 2004). Similarly, the relational orientation is interested with how the self is defined in relation others and the environment. The self, in African cultures, is defined in relation to family, friends, community, status or position in a group (Mkhize, 2004). Both the human and relational orientation encompass the African traditional way of thinking about personhood and communal life. Personhood is not described through individual physical or psychological attributes. More accurately, personhood is brought to life through participation in the community and relation to others. Community in this African context does not refer to a collection of individuals but rather it refers to "an organic relationship between component individuals" (Mkhize, 2004, p. 46; Mentiki, 1984).

Family and community "a prominent nexus in the social life of Africans" (Ekane, 2012, p. 1). The family includes those who are alive and deceased, and when placed in a hierarchy, family is organized from oldest to youngest (Mkhize, 2004). Family is also a predominant part of *lobola*. They are involved in the various steps and aspects of the process. *'Ihlonipho'* (respect) and especially *ubuntu* (see below) are important to display during *lobola* in order to create harmonious relationships within the family unit as well as in the marriage (Rudwick & Posel, 2014, p. 132). Connecting the family/community and creating a sense of belonging are an important part of culture. This family/community and belonging affirms and is affirmed and concretized through *lobola*.

The sense of community mentioned above can be established and understood through *ubuntu* (Kimmerle, 2006; Nussbaum, 2003). The philosophy of *ubuntu* is a distinctly African one that wholly differs from much of Western philosophy (Kimmerle, 2006). African philosophy places a heavy emphasis on the "we" whereas Western philosophy, more often than not, focuses on the "I" (Kimmerle, 2006; Nussbaum, 2003). Variations of this philosophy (*ubuntu, hunhu or botha*) can be found in South, West and East Africa even though languages have transformed since its first conception (Kimmerle, 2006). In South Africa specifically, *ubuntu* (Zulu/Xhosa) or *botho* (Sotho/Tswana) is based on the proverb "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" or "*motho ke motho ka batho*". Both proverbs loosely translate to, "a person is a person because of other people", or, "to be human is to affirm one's humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and, on this basis, establish respectful human relations with them" (Nussbaum, 2003). *Ubuntu* exists beyond class or age and prioritizes mutuality, humanity dignity, reciprocity and compassion within the community (Kimmerle, 2006; Nussbaum, 2003).

Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata (2014) state that *ubuntu* extends past the physical world and embraces the living-dead. For the purpose of safeguarding the living family and for greater cosmic harmony, the living-dead must be constantly acknowledged (Ramose, 2003). For example, slaughtering animals to provide food to all people who come to family funerals or gatherings is crucial to the *ubuntu* philosophy and connecting to the living-dead (Baloyi & Makobe-Rabothata, 2014).

Simiyu (1987) also argues that we should not romanticize *ubuntu* and deny that African communities exist without conflict or any kind of turmoil. Matjila (2007 as cited in Bayoli, 2009) cautions that *ubuntu* also contains negative aspects like jealousy or witchcraft. These vices are enacted on human beings by other human beings. In such cases, *ubuntu* falls short. The aim then is that should conflict arise, it should be resolved in a way that empowers and improves the community (Kimmerle, 2006). It is important to understand that in the face of these afflictions, African communities should attempt to keep *ubuntu*, or communalist-like ideals, as the fabric of social existence (Kimmerle, 2006).

3.4. African sexualities

A brief history of African genders and sexualities

An extensive amount of literature on African sexualities has been based on colonial interpretation (Lewis, 2011). In the words of Lugones (2010, p. 748) "gender is a colonial imposition". Gender categories come as a result of the 500 years of slavery and European colonialization (Oyewumi, 2002; Lugones, 2010). Therefore, it is inaccurate to study such social categories in Africa using the American and European gender studies as they are not framed or functional in the same ways (Oyewumi, 2002). In Nigeria, for example, the traditional Yoruba family in Nigeria can be described as non-gendered (Oyewumi, 2002) explains. The family is considered non-gendered because roles/categories are not assigned through gender. Instead, the family is organized by seniority that is based on age. There are no gendered terms for offspring and terms for terms for siblings. Older siblings are referred to as *'egbon'* while younger siblings are referred to as *'aburo'* and these terms are not gendered in anyway. The names for husband and wife are not gendered either:

> Within the family the category *oko*, which is usually glossed as the English husband, is non-gender-specific because it encompasses both males and females. *Iyawo* glossed as wife, in English refers to in-marrying females. The distinction between *oko* and *iyawo* is not one of

> gender but a distinguishes between those who are birth members of the family and those who enter by marriage. The distinction expresses a hierarchy in which the *oko* position is superior to the *iyawo.* This hierarchy is not a gender hierarchy because even female oko are superior to the female *iyawo.* (Oyewumi, 2002, p. 3).

With this non-gendered organization of social categories, the preoccupation with 'woman' and the other as 'man' is needless.

Much of this literature on African sexualities demonstrates the anxieties, desires and fantasies of the colonial writers (Reid & Walker, 2005). Colonial interest in African sexualities can read as obsessive and displays a need for colonizers to assert themselves as representatives of knowledge and power (Lewis, 2011). This is seen through the insistent description of Black men and their bodies as excessive, bestial and violent, and oversexualizing the bodies of Black women (Lewis, 2011; Vaughan, 1991). Just as images, descriptions, myths and prejudices of the East have been represented in the form of 'orientalism', the same has been done to represent "African societies, cultures and peoples as signs of something else" rather than what they truly are (Mudimbe, 1988, p. x).

Colonial writers worked to ensure that there was distinct (and racist) difference between themselves and Africans. This distinction meant that Western sexuality was transcribed as the norm, healthy and civilized while African sexuality was transcribed unnatural, crude and pathological (Mohanty, 1991; Lewis, 2011; Reid & Walker, 2005). Unfortunately, colonial stereotypes of African sexuality have outlived their writers. ''Among the many myths Europeans have created about Africa, the myth that homosexuality is absent or incidental in African societies is one of the oldest and most enduring'' (Murray & Roscoe, 1998, p. xi).

In the book *Heterosexual Africa*, Epprecht's (2008) writes about the initial accounts of same-sex practices and non-normative genders in Africa as told by Europeans. He illustrates how same-sex practices existed in Africa from as early as the 14th century but were dismissed by anthropologists and artists alike. The first encounters date back to the 14th century in West Africa and the 16th century in southern and eastern Africa. By the 19th century, European writers had accumulated details on the intimate lives of various African cultures. Epprecht (2008) explains that while there was certainly evidence on same-sex relations, authors scarcely cited it and spoke about it in "strongly disparaging language" (p. 37). Burton's 16th century

writings poorly mentioned male-to-male sex relations but deemed it otherwise "unnatural in the Kongo domain" (Burton, 1886). Also in the 16th century, Battell explored Imbangalo (early Angola) and witnessed men in women's apparel. He found this to be "beastly" (Purchas, 1613, p. 375).

At this time, Africans incessantly became a part of the uncivilized vs civilized debate. The deduction was drawn that Africans are barbaric, close to nature and therefore could not hold any kind of cultural complexity or progression. This also meant that Africans were innately heterosexual without any sexual or emotional diversity. Gibbon (1909) who had never been to Africa and Browne (1806) who had only been to North Africa continued to pen these ideas about African heterosexuality and they continued to gain momentum. The arrival of Christian missionaries came with a fixation on polygyny, child-brothels, marriage by cattle, female genital cutting and widow cleansing but none on same-sex relations. Epprecht (2008) suggests that the omission of African same-sex relations was an attempt by the missionaries to shape African sexuality into one that resemble their own. This continued until the same-sex relations became too apparent to ignore. Some colonial authors were also faced with the reality of questioning their own sexuality. For example, Tessmam (1998), an anthropologist, found himself attracted to the Cameroonian men he had encountered during his ethnographic expedition. Eventually, it became impossible to ignore these cases of same-sex relations. Thus, the prevailing idea of crude and solely heterosexual African sexuality was not true. Those who allowed themselves to pay close enough attention began to realize that these same-sex relations amongst various African cultures often did transgress any marital, reproductive and gender roles. For example, Epprecht (2008) and Wieringa (2005) note that Kung women of present day Mozambique helped each other with the elongation of the labia minora. With the exception of Herskovit's (1967) account, this was never seen as a sexual practice due to the lack of vaginal penetration. The purpose of this practice was to prepare the other for sexual pleasure in their future heterosexual marriages. In another example from Murray and Roscoe (1998), the Ashanti people of present day Ivory Coast kept "male slaves as concubines, treating them like female lovers" (p. 91). Both these practices were considered normal and unproblematized within the respective communities (Murray and Roscoe, 1998). There is no outright opposition or homophobia towards these same-sex relations until the arrival of European missionaries (Ward, 2013).

Same-sex relations in Africa

> The idea that same-sex sexuality is somehow un-African and alien to African cultural traditions is one that haunts queers of African descent globally. If tradition is represented as that which is authentically and un-problematically African, then same-sex sexuality is its direct opposite—its constitutive outside. Under this formulation, Black queers cannot exist as part of African cultural practices represented by tradition. They can only be some manifestation of cultural loss and ultimately alienation from African subjectivity. (Livermon, 2015, p. 18).

Homosexuality, or at least the presence of same-sex relations, are certainly not a colonial import. The colonial import, as argued by Allotey (2015) as well as Morgan and Wieranga (2005), is homophobia. Morgan and Wieringa (2005) argue that "homophobic post-colonial governments perpetuated colonial policies in denouncing same-sex relations, and that it seems a perverse distortion of African history to label same-sex relations as a 'western import'" (p. 13). Ward (2013) writes at length about how Uganda is one of these post-colonial African governments that preserve colonial policies as well as Christian missionary beliefs about homosexuality. The English legal system was presented in Uganda in during the colonial era and stayed in place even after Uganda gained its independence in 1962 (Ward, 2013). This legal system criminalized homosexual relations. Religion in Uganda also played a role in the development of homophobia. With approximately 80% of Uganda aligning themselves with the Anglican or Roman Catholic church, the Bible and religion were used to oppose gay rights calling it 'unbiblical and inhuman' (Ward, 2013, p. 419). At the height of anti-homosexual rhetoric in Uganda in 2009, government party MP David Bahati, with his Anglican and Revivalist background, proposes the Anti-Homosexuality Bill to parliament (Ward, 2013; Paszat, 2017). The bill was signed in February 2014 but by August 2014 the counterattack from lawyers and civil society activists resulted in an overturning of the law (Paszat, 2017). This bill not only proposed capital punishment for particular offences but also expanded on the range of what might be considered a "homosexual act" (Ward, 2013, p. 420). While Bahati argued against the death penalty as a form of punishment, he invoked church teachings, proposing that individuals plead for "God's forgiveness and repentance" for their homosexual ways (Ward, 2013, p. 421).

Other African leaders such as Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe and South Africa's own President Jacob Zuma share Bahati's anti-homosexual sentiments. Mugabe in particular, exclaimed, "We are not gays!" at a UN General Assembly (Irechukwu, 2015). He preceded

this by saying giving rights to LGBT would be prescribing rights that are contrary to African values, norms, traditions and beliefs (Irechukwu, 2015). Here, Mugabe is equating sexuality to the nationalist project and stating that non-heterosexual sexualities are not part of, and even destroying the Africanist agenda (Anum, 2014). Epprecht's (2004) historical scholarship on sexual practices in Africa demonstrates a range of sexualities, not just the binary of heterosexual and homosexual that were present in Africa long before the colonial encounter. Therefore, the narrative from African leaders about a solely heterosexual Africa is easily dismissible.

The misunderstanding and/or misinterpretation of African sexualities is in part due to the understanding of African sexualities as documented through Western-centric language, concepts and existing paradigms (Lewis, 2011; Allotey, 2015). The same-sex relations present in Africa may have not been erotic or sensual; however, Europeans interpreted these relations as such. Their understanding of same-sex relations were not understood, experienced or labelled by African people in the same way. For example, the women of Lesotho engaged in 'deep kissing, mutual manipulation of labia majora, dildo play and female to female marriage' (Allotey, 2015, p. 19). Notwithstanding, these women never labelled themselves 'lesbians' because this was part of their normal erotic relations that existed without labelled or deemed sexual (Allotey, 2015; Kendall, 1998). Obono (2010, p. 8) correctly articulates that "Africa's sexual revolution can no longer be ignored." It is essential to move away from talking about African sexualities with regards to HIV/AIDS and sexual violence. Appiah (1993, p. 240) calls for "discursive space-clearing" in order to truly investigate and re-write African sexualities in a way that illustrates their dynamic, relational and multitudinous nature in which they occur. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, these sexualities must be understood through their complexities and must always be contextualized (Tamale, 2011).

Sangomas and same-sex sexuality in South Africa

In their work on ancestral wives among same-sex *sangomas* in South Africa, Nkabinde and Morgan (2006, p. 9) expressed how *sangomas* (also known as traditional healers) defy "the notion that same-sex relationships are unAfrican." *Sangomas* occupy a central role in African culture. They are powerful figures to be both respected and feared. There is extensive literature on *sangomas* and their practices; however, it centers on male and heterosexual individuals who then control the inter-generational narrative and history regarding these practices (Nkabinde & Morgan, 2006). The existence and experiences of same-sex *sangomas*, have not been largely

documented. Nkabinde and Morgan's (2006) paper attempts to fill this literary gap and provide a different perspective on this topic. This is also why I include their work here. Firstly, they illustrate how African culture and customs make space for what may be understood as non-normative gender identities and same-sex relations. Secondly, this is done without any condemnation or discrimination because there is a purpose for them within the frames of culture.

Closely tied with *sangomas* and their practices are the presence of ancestors. "Every *sangoma* has many ancestors who have different roles in their healing work", Nkabinde and Morgan explained (p. 11). *Sangomas* often take on an ancestral wife to help by collecting herbs/medicine for rituals or making ready the appropriate attire. The age or biological sex of an ancestral wife is irrelevant because this relationship is not intended to be a sexual one. In their study, Nkabinde and Morgan (2006) stated that all but one of their participating *sangomas* were ruled by a male ancestor. Hlengiwe, one of the participants, described how her ancestral wife was chosen by her dominant male ancestor who had passed away while unmarried – she even went on to pay *lobola* to her ancestral wife's family. This is just one of the instances where the norms of gender and sexuality are blurred.

Sexuality is not discussed or focused on during training to be a *sangoma*. Nonetheless, it is usually during this time that two of Nkabinde and Morgan's participants spoke about having same-sex encounters for the first time. While she was training, one of the *sangomas* recalls how she became involved in a same-sex relationship with her trainer. She goes on to reveal that she was aware that her ancestors did not want her to have sexual relations at this time, but she still felt that they allowed it as they did not show any anger towards her or her trainer at this time. Using this story and other stories in the study, we are able to see how ancestors and *sangomas* are open to variations of same-sex relations. These relations were not explicitly denounced in any way according to the participants; rather, they are kept taboo and understood in the context of this practice.

Mkasi's (2013) study also explores same-sex relations amongst Zulu *sangomas*. In her findings, both male and female *sangomas* took part in some manner of same-sex relations. It is interesting to see that the male *sangomas* were more direct when speaking about same-sex relations. They did not see these interactions as problematic because they were "related to their medicinal rituals" (Mkasi, 2013, p. 35). Some *sangomas* either come into their work already

identifying as gay or lesbian. For example, several participants in Nkabinde and Morgan's study identified as lesbians before and after their calling to become a *sangoma*. Therefore, they did not view their sexualities in relation to their male ancestors. Others experienced same-sex relations through the spiritual possession of ancestors. Mkasi (2013, p. 48) explained that spiritual possession can happen in the following ways (Western concepts written in brackets): a) a female spirit in a female *sangoma* (lesbian); b) a male and a female spirit in a female *sangoma* (bisexual); c) a male spirit in a female *sangoma* or vice-versa (transgender); and d) a *sangoma* with both sexual organs (intersex). Thandi, participant in Nkabinde and Morgan's study, identified as male and carried themselves as a masculine individual without the influence of their male ancestor. Thandi explained that their attraction to women is something that had existed throughout their life and it was something that they did not hide from their ancestors. After becoming a *sangoma*, Thandi understood this attraction as a result of having male ancestors. Hlengiwe then spoke about how her male ancestor (Muzi) enjoyed having sex with Nomsa (Hlengiwe's ancestral wife) and how this influenced Hlengiwe to behave like a man:

> ...But when it's time for Muzi to come, I become a man, like when I dance or when I'm at my consulting room. My voice changes and my body becomes tough – that's when I become a man... Muzi loves sex. I will tell you everything. After dancing I don't have to stay at that place. I have to take Nomsa and we come straight home. Then we do it until he is fine and my dear I'll be like a man... (Nkabinde & Morgan, 2006, p. 17).

Nkabinde and Morgan (2006) as well as Mkasi's (2013) papers are filled with examples of how gender and sexual 'transgressions' are possible in a space that is seen as deeply traditional. Still, their work leaves us with two different conclusions. Nkabinde and Morgan determine that same-sex relations are not unAfrican. Rather, Nkabinde argues that sexuality is related to her spiritual work. A better way to frame it is to say same-sex sexuality in this context has been taboo and, as a result, there is no visibility around this subject. On the other hand, Mkasi reckons that these practices are in fact not kept a secret and are openly discussed. She also argues, and I agree, that language comes to play an important role in understanding these concepts. Interpreting a female spiritual possession of a female *sangoma* as lesbian is incorrect. As mentioned above, Western concepts of gender and sexual identity do not always fit an African context and thus, cannot be understood as such.

African sexuality in the case of Inxeba/The Wound

The critically acclaimed film *Inxeba/The Wound* (directed by John Trengrove) follows a complicated love triangle amid three Xhosa men during *ulwaluko*. *Ulwaluko* is Xhosa male traditional circumcision and initiation into manhood (Mhlahlo, 2009). The ritual is a significant part of Xhosa tradition. Xhosa men are imparted with lessons about manhood and the responsibilities that come with it (Mhlahlo, 2009). The film is an excellent example and site for challenging culture, Xhosa masculinity and sexuality. With regards culture, the film prompts audiences to think about the deeper meaning of this Xhosa rite of passage. One begins to question whether the cultural ritual is truly open to everyone it is intended for, and the possibilities for reformed cultural norms. Xhosa masculinity is brought to the forefront and faces enquiry on defining manhood; what it means to be a "real men" and how gay men are often disqualified from this. Ultimately, the film depicts three characters at different moments of accepting or repressing their sexuality. This is based on knowing that the Xhosa tradition does not accommodate and intentionally disregards anyone who does not subscribe to the stipulated Xhosa masculinity and heterosexuality.

According to South African History Online (SAHO) (2017), the film was largely received well internationally as it collected multiple awards like the Best Film and Best Actor in Spain at the Valencia International Film Festival, Best Narrative at the Sarasota Film Festival in Florida, Best Film at the Taipei Film Festival in Taiwan and eventually submitted for Best Foreign at the Oscars (SAHO, 2017). At home in South Africa the film collected Best Director and Best Actor at the 38th Durban International Film Festival (SAHO, 2017).

However, in South Africa, the film received more retaliation than it did it praise. From the trailer and a few initial screenings, it was clear that the film stirred heavy emotion particularly within the Xhosa community. The reasons for outrage were varying. Firstly, many found it problematic that the film was directed by a white man who surely could not identify with the culture and therefore the content of the film (Bongela, 2017). Trengrove explained that he remained reflexive through production; he consulted with numerous Xhosa men over 6 months and created a film crew (including Xhosa writers and other non-actors) all to assist him with maintaining the authenticity of the film. Secondly, the aggravation was directed at the film exposing the sanctity of *ulwaluko*. Kiguwa and Siswana (2018, p. 5) write about how "the discourse of culture as sacred and something not to be interfered with comes out strongly in the public comments." In their paper, they document the online responses to the film. Various

commentators talk about how the rite “has always been shrouded in secrecy” and therefore the film is “an insult to *isizwe samaXhosa*”.

However, we find that this argument may not hold because this custom has been addressed several times in the public eye. Examples of this can be found in, Nelson Mandela’s book *Long Walk to Freedom* and Andile Mhlahlo’s (2009) master’s thesis titled *What is manhood? The significance of traditional circumcision in the Xhosa initiation ritual*. These works share the same, if not more detail, than what is presented in the film (SAHO, 2017). Finally, the film seemed to receive this vicious response due to its queer contents. The film not only displayed moments of intimate and sexual relations (which are not allowed during *ulwaluko*) but it displayed these moments between two men. The public took to social media to convey that they felt that the spectacle of two men involved sexually was *“inyala”* (a disgrace) towards Xhosa culture and this practice of *ulwaluko* as Siswana reveals during the presentation of his paper.

Two weeks after being screened in cinemas across South Africa, the hostility towards it grew and resulted in its 16LS classification to an X18 rating by the FPB (Film and Publication Board) for "classifiable elements of sex, language, nudity, violence and prejudice" (Dayile, 2018). This ruling, though implicitly, effectively equated the on-screen display of sex between queer people to porn. In the first week of March, the X rating was removed which allowed the film to be put back in cinemas. Even with this minor victory, it is evident that South Africa hosts an anti-homosexual/anti-queer environment for LGBTQI+ people as well as film representation.

One of the *Inxeba’s* main characters, Niza Jay who plays Kwanda in the film, wrote an article detailing why he chose to forego *ulwaluko* as he felt that he had “no place in any conversation about Xhosa initiation or manhood”. He goes on to explain that as a gay and “feminine presenting man” he is in direct disobedience of the narrow definition of culture. How Jay argues that “real men” too fall short of culture but their physical and social adherence to the ritual means their place in Xhosa culture is maintained. In another article about complexities of culture through the lens of Inxeba, Qambela (2017) validates Jay’s experiences yet wishes to extend the conversation around queer Black Xhosa men with *ulwaluko* and culture in general. He specifically disputes that Jay’s “homogenized narrative” does not give space for agency and it does not account for the way that different Xhosa queers may find belonging even with this seemingly unaccommodating ritual. Qambela (2017) makes use of Livermon’s (2015)

paper titled *Usable traditions*, which presents the diverse ways Black and queer South Africans utilize culture and tradition.

Using Livermon's (2015) work, Qambela (2017) explains that many Black and queer South Africans adopt and adapt various African customs/traditions in a way that redefines them, shows them as "constantly in process" and able to acclimatize to transformation. Livermon (2015) draws on the story of the late South African gospel star Lundi Tyamara to illustrate how a ritual such as *ulwaluko* can present an opportunity to affirm queerness. After coming back from initiation, Tyamara explained that this process had given him the courage to come out. It is through the disruption of tradition that gender and sexual binaries are also forced into reconceptualization (Livermon, 2015). Furthermore, it is through adopting and adapting these traditions in a way that "suit their needs" that will grant Black and queer individuals "acceptance and visibility in their cultural contexts" (Qambela, 2017). In conclusion, Livermon (2015) suggests that it is beneficial to shift from the notion of culture as exclusionary to using it as a chance for redefinition and reclamation amongst Black and queer South Africans.

3.5. Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity refers to "the privileged position associated with heterosexuality based on the normative assumptions that there are only two genders; that gender always reflects the person's biological sex as assigned at birth, and that only sexual attraction between these "opposite" genders is considered normal or natural" (Victor, Nel, Lynch, & Mbatha, 2014, p. 12). This term was created by Michael Warner to describe the institutionalized nature of heterosexual norms (Seale, 2009; Warner, 1991). Heteronormativity is strongly reinforced and functions universally through various institutions (law, politics religion, education, and culture), societal norms and discourse, and even through subjective thoughts, actions and desires (Allotey, 2015; Seale, 2009).

Jackson (2006) highlights that sex, sexuality and gender are all interconnected. The visual gaze is used to determine a person's sex and with this information, the viewer assumes a gender and, therefore, a sexuality is prescribed to the person they are viewing. This is part of what Butler (1990) presents in her theory of the 'heterosexual matrix'. Moreover, Butler (1990) introduces the idea of gender as a performativity. She argues that daily actions, ways of speaking, mannerisms and representations, dress codes, and behaviours reflect the various ways we perform gender.

Lobola relies on both heterosexuality and gender performance. Each partner in the compulsory heterosexual relationship has gendered roles to play. Since the husband has taken the wife from her family to become a part of his, he must ensure that she is well taken care of. He, therefore, has the unavoidable role of provider – his marriage and his masculinity rely on this. On the other hand, a wife is expected to meet the needs of her husband as this is what has been agreed upon through the transfer of *lobola.* As stated by Chigwedere (1982), *lobola* is delivered to the wife's family so that the husband and his family may "secure the [domestic/reproductive] services of the bride" (p. 2) and as a woman/wife/mother, she must fully serve her purpose.

As much as heteronormativity is typically seen as a means of regulating heterosexuality and divisions of gender, it also ensures that those who fall outside the normative boundaries are marginalized and chastised (Jackson, 2006). Although "gendered and sexual self-hood are culturally and historically specific", they are "never fixed and continue to be reflexively renegotiated or reconfirmed throughout our lives, allowing for considerable variation" (Jackson, 2006, p. 116). When individuals no longer conform to the norm, they become what Butler (1990, p. 23) calls "incoherent" gendered and sexual beings. However, this incoherence or deviance is, ironically, created by the very heteronormative laws that have been put in place to ensure that everyone adheres to normative gender and sexuality (Butler, 1990).

Queer couples, then, interfere with the rules of normative sexuality and gender division. More so, African queer couples going through the process of *lobola* also unsettle the heterosexual sexuality and gender roles. This is seen by the complexity of two men getting married. It raises question about how to decide who will pay *lobola* or how they will eventually have children. This is under the assumption that queer couples may even want to have children. If they do not, this further disrupts the purpose of *lobola* because the cattle or cash delivered to the other family is for the sake of securing the paternal rights to the children. In either case, African queer couples create many possibilities for disruption of the heteronormative state of the *lobola* practice.

Chapter 4
Methodology

4.1. Research design

A qualitative design was used for this study. The purpose of this qualitative research was to gain in-depth insight into the lives of respondents, to obtain an empathetic understanding of the stories they told and provide opportunity for close interaction with respondents (Holloway, 1997). A qualitative approach engaged subjectivity, interaction/rapport, individual motives and thick talk/text descriptions in a way that the objective, scientific and correlation/cause quantitative approach does not achieve (Holloway, 1997). This design was appropriate for the purposes of this study in order to gain deep and detailed understanding of how Black African same-sex couples spoke about their cultural, gender, sexual identities as well as their experiences around the practice of *lobola.*

As a part of this qualitative approach, this study employed an interpretivist paradigm. Thomas (2010) explains that interpretivist research is based on the idea that "reality consists of people's subjective experiences of the external world; thus, they may adopt an inter-subjective epistemology and the ontological belief that reality is socially constructed" (p. 295). As a result, interpretivism does not adopt a singular route to creating knowledge nor does it invest in proving or disproving theories (Thomas, 2010). Rather, it is a paradigm concerned with observing and interpreting information and/or events while locating them in a particular context (Thomas, 2010; Reeves & Hedberg, 2003). Merging with the intentions of a qualitative design, an interpretivist approach uses meaning orientated methodologies (interviews/focus groups), relies on the relationship between researcher and participant while focusing on the intricacy of human-sense-making (Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994).

As mentioned above, meaning orientated methodologies work well with qualitative research. Therefore, interviews with open-ended questions were used in this study as a means of data collection. This study aimed to gather data for analysis on three elements. Firstly, the researcher was interested in uncovering biographical data in order to gain an understanding of participant's gendered and sexual identities – who they are, how they talk about who they are and how they came to understand themselves as such. Secondly, the researcher aimed to explore how participants negotiate their various identities – specifically with queerness regarded as 'unAfrican'. Finally, the researcher planned to engage couples on the experiences

of and personal investments in *lobola*, and how they might have chosen to reform culture as well as the practice.

4.2. Sampling

This study consisted of 4 Black African lesbian couples. The original criteria set for participation required that the persons identified as follows:

- African (specially falling under the racial category of Black);
- Queer (any gender and/or sexual identity that is non-normative); and,
- Currently undergoing or have undergone *lobola* negotiations.

To recruit participants, the researcher used a variety of methods. The initial attempt to recruit participants was done by speaking to fellow students and colleagues who had worked with or knew of this particular demographic of people. Then, a broadcast was placed on Twitter where the researcher had a reasonable following of queer individuals who would be able to help or else refer other people. The broadcasted tweet expressed the interest to work with and speak to Black African, queer/same-sex who had undergone or were undergoing the process of *lobola*. Finally, from the participants recruited, snowball sampling (using existing participants to refer the researcher to potential participants) was used to gain more participants.

The demographics and the pseudonyms (used to protect the participant's identity) can be found in the table below.

	Name	Age	Ethnicity	Gender identity	Sexual orientation
Couple One	Lesego	27	Tswana	Cisgender woman	Lesbian
	Lerato	31	Sotho	Cisgender woman	Lesbian
Couple Two	Sihle	27	Tswana	Cisgender woman	Lesbian
	Siya	33	Sotho	Cisgender woman	Lesbian
Couple Three	Tshego	27	Tswana	Cisgender woman	Lesbian
	Tumi	32	Tswana	Cisgender woman	Lesbian
Couple Four	Vee	31	Xhosa	Cisgender woman	Lesbian
	Vuyo	40	Zulu	Cisgender woman	Lesbian

4.3. Data collection methods

Data was collected using open-ended questions in various interviews (see Appendix A for interview guideline). The open-ended questions were a useful tool for this study because they allowed participants to speak at length about their own experiences, their own perspectives and get across emotions on how they encountered different moments in their lives (Wengraf, 2001; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). More so, this technique permitted participants to convey their responses with minimal interference from the researcher and allow for fluidity. The interviews took place in two phases:

Phase One – Individual interviews

Interviews are a valuable tool for data collection because they provide candid responses from participants, offer an opportunity to probe for more detail, and allow for private communication and flexibility (Steinar, 1996). The aim of these individual interviews was to explore the ways in which individuals presented perspectives of themselves, how they construct themselves as African as well as their construction and experiences of being lesbian identity. During these

interviews, participants were able to convey different stories and moments about their identities, process of negotiating and renegotiating these identities, coming out, lived experiences and so forth.

Phase Two – Couple Interviews

The aim of couple interviews was to engage participants about their African and lesbian identity, their experiences of the *lobola* practice as well as any possible tensions that arise as a result of these identities and this process. Couples' interviews were chosen as a means of data collection so that couples were able to "balance divergences and convergences across shared and individual accounts by allowing experiences to be rectified, remembered and re-adjusted in light of new, emerging information in the construction of a jointly told, dyadic narrative" of *lobola* (Daniels, 2015, p. 1). Unlike individual interviews, these couples' interviews allowed couples to co-construct their stories about identity and *lobola*.

In total, there were 8 individual interviews and 4 couples' interviews. All interviews were conducted in English; however, participants did code-switch occasionally. The researcher was able to understand and translate these moments of code switching for the purposes of transcription. These interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed. Both the audio-recordings and transcripts were stored on a password-protected laptop that only the researcher had access to.

4.4. Data analysis

Data analysis for this study materialized in two phases: a thematic analysis and conversation analysis.

Phase One – Thematic analysis

The data collected in this study was thematically analyzed and focus on thematic content of the interviews. Thematic analysis is a frequently used analytic tool for qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis (TA) is described as "a method for systematically identifying, organizing and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). In this context, a theme can be understood as a recurring idea that appears in the data set and lends itself to answering the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While using this analytic tool many themes may appear, it was, however, important to focus on the ones that help to answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

TA is a useful tool for interpretative work and compatible for any theoretical framework. Therefore, it is vital to this study's interpretivist research design as well as social constructionist framework (Braun & Clark, 2006). TA allowed the researcher to explore how participants represented and constructed their identities, coming out stories, negotiation of self as well as their experiences of *lobola*. It also allowed the researcher to explore how participants construct their African and lesbian identities as well as their experiences of *lobola*.

Braun and Clarke (2006) state that TA occurs in the following six steps:

1. Familiarization with the data – In this phase the researcher is advised to become acquainted with the data by reading and re-reading it. It is recommended that the researcher begins to note the ideas that may be relevant to answering the research question.
2. Coding – This phase requires the researcher to recognize interesting and familiar features across the data set and categorizing them to a relevant code.
3. Searching for themes – In this phase the researcher uses the collated codes to investigate how they can be used as potential themes (a recurring idea that appears in the data set and lends itself to answering the research question).
4. Reviewing themes – This phase entails the researcher repeatedly examines the identified themes so far. These themes must be of relevance to the research question and other themes. The researcher must decide which themes must be kept/discarded or expanded upon/combined.
5. Defining and naming themes – The researcher must now pinpoint the significance of each theme and what part of the story it tells. Themes must be relevant to each other but there should not be too much overlaps. These themes are then given succinct names to prompt readers to know what they are about.
6. Writing up – The final phase of this process is of great importance. It is here that the researcher begins "weaving together the analytic narrative and (vivid) data extracts to tell the reader a coherent and persuasive story about the data and contextualizing it in relation to existing literature" (Clarke & Braun, 2013, p. 122).

Phase Two – Conversation analysis

CA is a form of analysis that examines the details that occur during social interaction (ten Have, 2010). ten Have (2010, p. 10) states that human interaction is "organizational and procedural".

Therefore, when people speak to each other, it can be understood as a "collectively organized event". It is not only about why people say what they say but how they say it is equally important. According to Heritage (1984), CA centers on these three key features: talk in action, action as structurally organized and talk creating/maintaining intersubjective reality. The first feature, talk in action, requires us to understand that talk is the vehicle of human action (Schegloff, 1991). In other instances, talk is linked to other means of action such as gazing, gesturing, laughing and so forth (Goodwin, 1981; Jefferson, 1984). In CA, there is also interest in the way conversations are started/opened and finished/closed. It is important to note that all of these are a part of the aspects to consider when conducting a CA. The action as structurally organized feature simply means that our social interactions are structured and organized into sequences. The most basic and important sequence is known as an 'adjacency pair' (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). An adjacency pair is made up of two actions where the first action (first pair part/FPP) by one individual invites a second action (second pair part/FPP) by another individual (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). For example, a question is followed by an answer or an offer is met with an acceptance/refusal (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). Furthermore, adjacency pairs can come in the form of a pre-expansion (an adjacency pair that comes before the FPP and SPP), an insert-expansion (an adjacency pair that comes between the FPP and SPP) and a post expansion (an adjacency pair that comes after the FPP and SPP) (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). Therefore, it must be understood that all talk is structured in some kind of sequence or arrangement. Finally, talk creating/maintaining intersubjective reality refers to intentions, knowledge, relations, and stances of participants (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973; Peräkylä, 2007). By understanding their intersubjective meanings of talk and interaction, we are able to also understand their ideas on the talked-about objects, which is then maintained and negotiated (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973; Peräkylä, 2007)

Detailed transcriptions are a fundamental part of CA. When transcribing for purposes of thematic or narrative analysis, researchers are able to correct tenses, rephrase and add or delete words/punctuation without affecting too much of the data (Wilkinson, 2000). For a CA transcription, however, it is important to capture even the most frivolous components of the interaction as they provide the actuality of the interaction that are not usually available (Have, 2010). For example, the simple utterances such as "uummm" or "mm hm" indicate uncertainty or agreement and that serve various conversational purposes (Wilkinson, 2000). Elements such as time, date, place, identity of participants, words, sounds, silences, overlaps, pace, stutters, intonation, speech repair and so forth are all important when transcribing and analyzing an

interaction for purposes of CA (ten Have, 2010; Wilkinson, 2000). Once the transcription has been completed, analysis of patterns and interpreting meaning from excerpts can begin. ten Have (2010) states that there is no accurate way to begin a CA. It is useful, perhaps, to do a careful reading of the transcripts in order to looking for the four various interactional organizations: turn-taking organization, sequence organization, repair organization and the organization of turn design (ten Have, 2010). Still, these four organizations are not an exhaustive way of conducting a CA. ten Have (2010) suggests that there are many other observations that are worth noting and, therefore, researchers should not hesitate to note and expand on these.

4.5. Ethics

Ethics are an important part of the research process as they work to ensure that no harm occurs to the participant(s) and the researcher during the research process (Rest, 1994). Ethical authorization for this study was submitted to the Human Research Ethics Committee Non-medical (please see Appendix E and Appendix F for Ethics application form and Ethics approval letter). All issues regarding ethics were presented in the participant information sheet, consent form and then repeated upon meeting participants (see Appendix B and Appendix C for the relevant forms). Ethical issues were addressed as follows:

Informed consent: Before the start of the individual and couple interviews, participants were given consent forms which explained the aims, procedures, expectations, time-frame and so forth of the study. All participants were given an opportunity to read the consent form and ask about any queries that they had. Participants were also notified that they were able to remove themselves from the study at any point and that there would be no consequences for this. The form notified participants of the fact that their individual/couple interviews would be recorded and used in write-up of the research report.

Confidentiality and anonymity: The information captured in the interviews were kept confidential and the identities of participants were kept anonymous. Furthermore, in the final write up, pseudonyms were used to maintain the anonymity of participants. Full anonymity of participants was not guaranteed with regards to their partners as they may be able to piece together parts of their story through the individual interviews. In attempt to combat this, a printed transcript was sent to each participant who took part in an individual interview. They were able to read through the transcript(s) in order to approve and/or remove any of the material transcribed. The audio recordings and interview transcripts will be stored on the researcher's password-protected laptop for five years after the study and destroyed thereafter.

Benefits and harms: There were no benefits and no harm anticipated for this study.

4.6. Reflexivity

In the following few paragraphs, I will reflect on the personal experiences, research methods, and other processes that took place before, during and after undertaking this research project. This reflexivity is an important practice that takes place throughout the research process. Through reflexivity, a researcher is able to examine their presence and their contribution to the construction of meaning during this research process (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Reflexivity requires researchers to reflect how various factors (such as background, values, beliefs, political commitment, experiences) will impact the research (Willig, 2001). Reflexivity also has to do with the power imbalance between the "researcher" and the "researched" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). This power imbalance is present and changes at all stages of the research process (Karnieli-Miller, Strier & Pessach, 2009). At all times, the researcher must assess the ways in which the power imbalance is operating and do their best to counter any imbalance. Reflecting on these factors as well as other aspects of the research project (such as theoretical frameworks and data collection methods) provides an opportunity for readers to understand how/why I arrived at particular decisions regarding this project and why I felt it would be necessary to adjust them as the project went along.

Reflections before beginning the research process and interviews

I approached this study as a researcher who identifies as a Black queer woman. My identities inform the kind of academic work I do. That is why I chose to take on a project that explores the experiences of other Black queer individuals. These (seemingly) shared identities meant that I undertook this study with some preconceived ideas on what it means to be a Black/African and queer person. These preconceived ideas came from my own experiences, the experiences of other people around me and the representation of Black queer people in literature and media. I thought that having these shared identities would be advantageous in some moments because it would create a sense of comfort/trust between participants and myself. Conversely, I worried that it could create a space where particular things are overlooked, not articulated or taken for granted. Before starting the project, I also was aware that I would likely speak to couple's that were older than me. In many African cultures, superiority is typically based on age and, I was concerned that it would result in me having to be rather passive as a means to remain respectful and accommodate participants.

With regards to methodology, I had opted to conduct the project using a narrative framework and analysis. The initial research questions were formed with this same narrative approach in mind. For example, the early questions were "how are discordant gender and sexual subjectivities narrated as African by same-sex/queer couples?" and "what do the narrated stories of *lobola* practice amongst same-sex/queer couples inform us about possibilities for disruption of *lobola* as heteronormative practice?" The questions in the interview schedule were then designed to extract extensive and rich accounts from participants. For example, many of the questions began with the statement "tell me about" so that participants could answer at length about the question asked. I had paired this narrative approach with a thematic and narrative analysis so that I could engage and interpret the themes and meaning-making stories regarding identity, culture, gender/sexuality and the *lobola* process.

Furthermore, I opted for a two-part interview process. The first part of the interview was an individual interview where I was interested more in the biographical factors of each person. As seen in the interview schedule (see Appendix A), the individual interview questions were concerned with asking about participant's individual identity regarding being African, being queer, their personal coming out process as well as how they navigated each of their identities and experiences. The couples' interview concentrated more on understanding the process of *lobola* especially as a same-sex couple. These questions asked participants to explain how they navigated the process as a couple, how they engaged with their families during this time and how identities shaped their process.

Reflections during and after the research process and interviews

Finding participants for this study proved to be a rather difficult task. As explained earlier, recruitment was done by (a) speaking to fellow students and colleagues who had worked with or knew of this particular demographic of people; (b) broadcast a tweet explaining the interest to work with and speak to Black/African, queer/same-sex who had undergone or were undergoing the process of *lobola*; and (c) by snowball sampling. I had hoped to recruit 5 couples but due to time and some complications, I was only able to recruit and interview 4 couples. Some of these complications included distance (couples were outside of Johannesburg) or in other cases I was unable to find couples where both individuals were willing to sit down with me.

Also, in the initial proposal, it was proposed that all interviews would take place in a "neutral" venue (such as a coffee shop) which would be close to their home and at their convenience. When time came to conduct interviews, three of the four couples requested that we met in their homes as this was most convenient and most comfortable for them. Even though I had felt that this might be outside of the rules of what is considered to be 'proper research principles', I made the executive decision to meet them in their homes if that was most suitable for them. However, I found that created a more casual environment for interviews and felt like a casual conversation rather than being formally questioned or interrogated.

After conducting interviews and reviewing transcripts, my supervisor and I decided the initial narrative approach chosen for this study would no longer be fitting for the study. The data collected did not reflect the extensive and rich accounts that I had anticipated earlier in the study. Even though the intentions of the questions were to extract long narratives, the result did not match. The questions should have been reworked and perhaps more time should have been given to individuals to speak. I found that during the interview process, participants occasionally gave short or restricted answers even after I had probed them further. In some instances during the interviews, it became clear that some participants became uncomfortable when I probed more. Therefore, I opted to move swiftly through the interview questions on order not to upset them further. As a result, I did not get the data I had wanted. After evaluating the material collected, we changed the theoretical frameworks from narrative to social constructionism, discourse and talk-in-interaction. This was done because the existing data spoke to the construction of identities and experiences and various discourses that were relevant to the goal of the study were present. Talk-in-interaction (a key feature of conversation analysis) was chosen because there were various interesting verbal and non-verbal moments that happened during the interviews that were worth discussing as a part of analysis. Therefore, the method of analysis was changed to a thematic, discourse and conversation analysis to accommodate the data that we had at that point.

Limitations of study

The call for participants indicated that the study sought African (Black) and same-sex/queer couples. Although there was an openness to cisgender, transgender individuals as well as couplings made up of two men/women/genderqueer individuals, those who responded were solely cisgender women who were coupled together. The researcher is aware that this sample does not reflect the full spectrum of LGBTI+ individuals and, therefore, acknowledges that the

narratives have been shaped in a particular way. The results of the study would have certainly been different if gay men or transgender individuals would have participated. In the same way, the sample is made of solely South African individuals and this does not capture or reflect the varying experiences of African individuals as the study had originally intended.

Chapter 5
Analysis and discussion

Thematic analysis of constructs of 'Africa/African', 'lesbian' and '*lobola*': Troubling identity in practice.

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents how the themes of this study were coded, selected, divided and interpreted. The process was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) outline for thematic analysis. The process began with a vigorous and repetitive read-through of the transcribed individual and couples' interviews in order to find appropriate and noteworthy material for analysis. This was followed by an exploration for more concrete themes that would be relevant and helpful to answering the research questions that frame this study. Figure 1 below displays the 10 initial themes identified. Each of these 10 themes spoke to the research questions in particular ways but not all of them were significant enough to include in the final analysis. Upon reviewing the themes once again, some of the less significant themes were eliminated and the themes that overlapped or spoke to each other were then combined. Figure 2 illustrates the grouping and naming of the three most significant themes, each of which has numerous subcategories. The three broad themes below were selected because they spoke directly to the research questions. Furthermore, some sections that follow will include data that has been transcribed and analyzed using conversation analysis (see Appendix D for Jefferson transcription system symbols). Conversation analysis has been included because it is helpful in exhibiting some of the more complex and intimate aspects of social interaction (Peräkylä, 2007). The conversation analysis extracts show both the verbal and non-verbal features of talk and, more importantly, they can be used to answer to the research questions of this study in various ways (Peräkylä, 2007).

The first overarching theme '*Coming out the closet with unexpected bodies and desires: The intersections of gender, sexuality and compulsory heterosexuality'* encompasses experiences about coming out to friends and/or family, dealing with gender presentation and sexuality, navigating space and safety, compulsory heterosexuality and negotiating multiple identities. The second theme '*How to be African: Defining and describing African identities and cultures'* speaks to the idea of defining African identities and cultures, the ways identity/culture is enacted through rituals/customs as well as the possibilities for flexibility of identity/culture.

The third and final theme *'"Adapting and aligning - whatever worked at that time": Black lesbian couples navigating and re-claiming the practice of lobola'*, details the ways in which couples perceived and defined *lobola*, the ways in which they communicated through the process, their needs for validation and affirmation by *lobola*, the place of family in the practice and the role that gender plays in creating and complicating *lobola*.

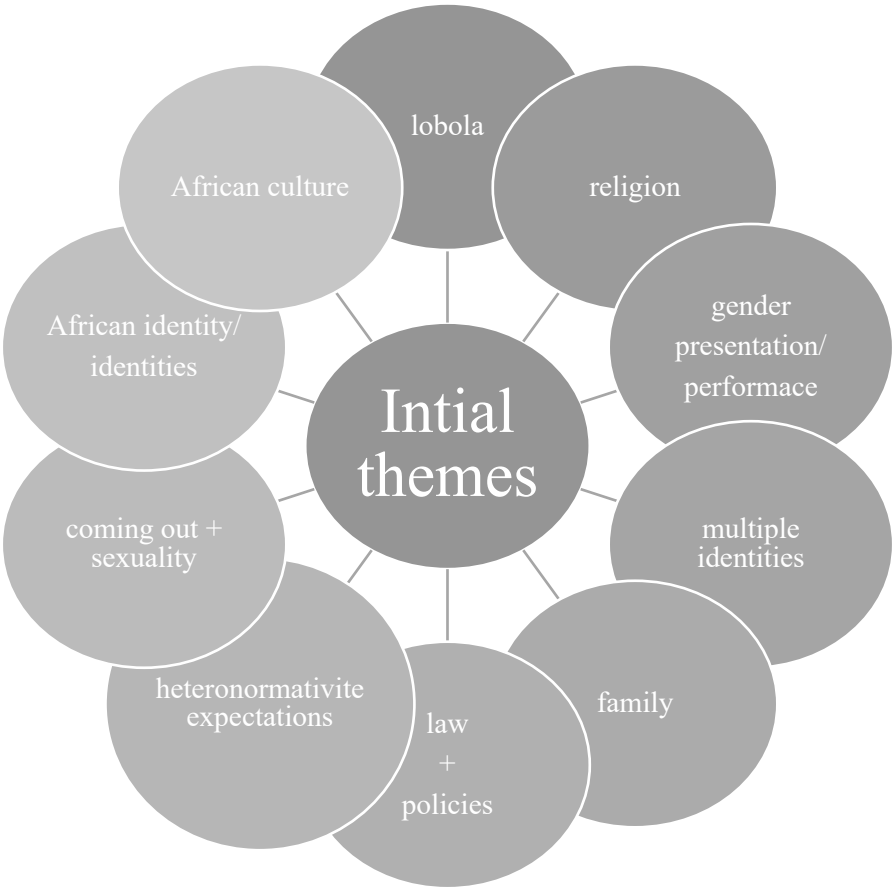


Figure 1. The initial themes identified within the data.

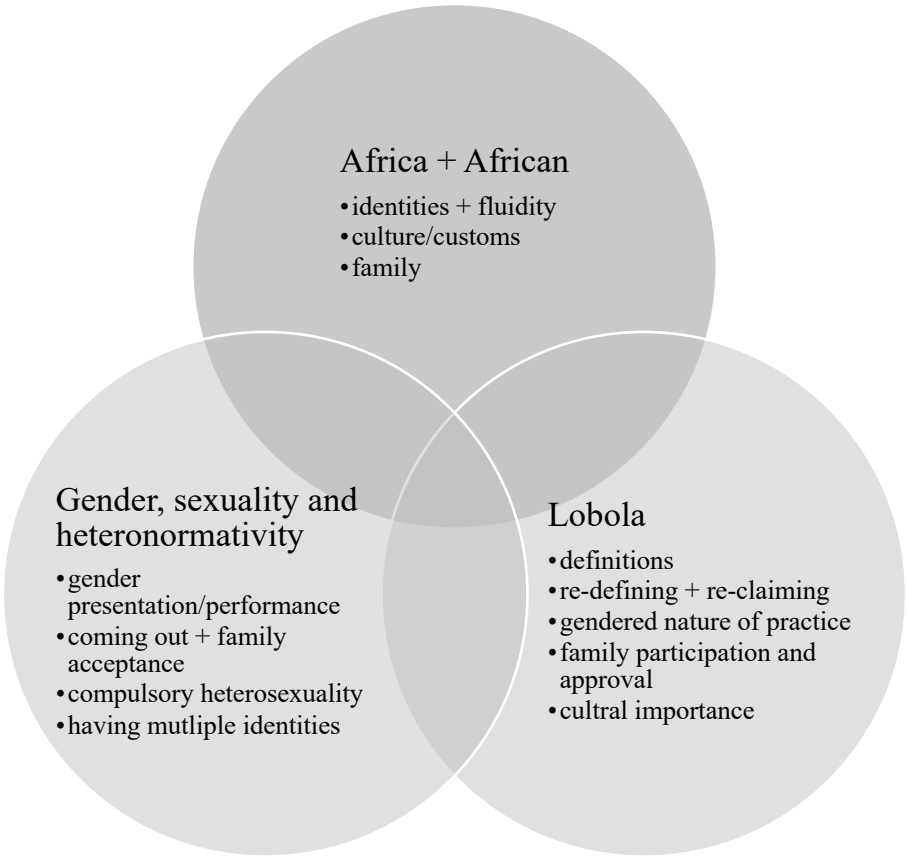


Figure 2. The final elimination and collation of themes.

5.2. Coming out the closet with unexpected bodies and desires: The intersections of gender, sexuality and compulsory heterosexuality.

"Being lesbian is…": The construction of lesbian identity.

The Oxford dictionary simply defines 'lesbian' as "a homosexual woman". While this definition is concise and practically correct, definitions of lesbian identity that participants provided were loaded and enmeshed with personal experience as seen below:

> "For me it means being committed and being in love not only physically but also emotionally… I don't want to complicate it and say you have to be in a relationship for so long and being 100% committed because you'll find in the work I work in people will identify for years as lesbian but then at the same they still have those feelings for males. There's a very thin line and people confuse bisexuality with lesbians.

So, I feel 100% committed emotionally and physically to the same sex." – Sihle, individual interview.

"To me being lesbian is how I identify, my sexuality. What makes me feel that I identify as a lesbian is because I am in love with another woman and I have been. It took me a long process to understand my lesbianness. Because it's a journey, I normally say, you don't just wake up in the morning and say hello I am a lesbian. It takes a lot for you to understand it. First of all, it's weird for you to see another woman and be like she's hot, you know? And you don't know why your heart is beating so fast for this woman and only a certain type of woman, not just any woman." – Vee, individual interview.

"Being lesbian… I don't know what to say. It's just me. I don't know. I've never been anything else, that's the problem. It's who I am, the person I identify as I've never imagined being anyone else… It's who I am. Like being female, being Vuyo, being a part of my clan. Ya, it's a part of me." – Vuyo, individual interview.

The above definitions regarding being lesbian certainly match part of what is described in the Oxford dictionary. More than that though, they tell us about the various ways that these participants have lived and experienced their sexual orientation. Sihle posits that being lesbian means being both emotionally and physically attracted to other women. More interestingly, she emphasizes that this commitment and attraction has to be 100% otherwise, one may "confuse it for bisexuality". This particular point is noteworthy because it is in opposition to theories about sexual fluidity. Sexual fluidity can be described as the "sexual functioning of an individual, and given the right circumstances, most people can perform sexual acts even when their fantasies and orientation might differ from the act itself" (Ventriglio, Kalra & Bhugra, 2018, p. 109). Horley and Clarke's (2016) paper, "Constructing Sexuality: A Theory of Stability and Fluidity", explores this idea of sexual fluidity. One of the conclusions that they present is that there are the extensive possibilities for sexual desire and expression and how they are shaped and change based on time, place and experience. That is to say sexuality is indeed fluid. Sihle's definition of lesbian identity, however, is rigid and does not allow for fluidity in the way that Horley and Clarke (2016) propose. Vee also latches onto the definition

of lesbian as being attracted to other women. She adds to this definition by saying it is a "process" and a "journey". Several studies suggest that identity formation, especially in relation to sexuality, can be divided into five stages: identity confusion, identity comparison, identity acceptance, identity immersion and identity synthesis (Brady & Busse, 1994; Cass, 1979; Sophie, 1986). Before getting to the stage of identity acceptance (which includes feeling comfortable enough to disclose sexual orientation to others), individuals must work through the first two stages which Horley and Clarke (2016) claim can take some time. It is through this model that we can understand why Vee may have felt that reaching a comfortable place with her sexuality is indeed a long process or journey. As a part of this progression, Vee finds herself having to reconcile feeling "weird" about her attraction to other women and exploring the type of women she may be attracted to. Finally, Vuyo sees being lesbian as something, she has always been. This suggests, like with Sihle, that her sexuality is almost rigid as she says, "I've never been anything else." In her other statements such as "it's just me", "it's who I am" and "it's a part of me", it appears that Vuyo speaks of her sexual orientation as an essential or a natural part of herself – supporting that her experience of sexuality is more rigid than fluid. She lastly goes on to compare her sexuality to be as intrinsic as her being female and a part of a clan. This proposes that she sees all of these identities as strict. It becomes interesting to see how Vuyo and other participants maintain or abandon these ideas about identities throughout this study.

"Coming out – it was hectic": Different moments in the coming out process.

The process of coming out (or self-disclosing one's sexual orientation) is one that is common for most LGBTQI+ individuals. It can be a scary and uncertain moment for many, but it can also be "empowering and enable[s] an individual to reconstruct their self-identity in a positive way" (Valentine, Skelton & Butler, 2003, p. 486). As mentioned above, individuals grapple with coming to terms with their own sexuality first, before taking on the task of coming out to others (such as friends, family and colleagues) (Chirrey, 2003). Coming out is not always a linear, goal-oriented or developmental process and often differs from individual to individual (Rust, 1993). Valentine et al. (2003) argue that there is a perception that coming out is easier now than it might have been in the past but homophobia and other forms of discrimination are ever-present in society. From the data collected in this study, the process of coming out began as a negative experience and gradually became a more positive one. The extracts below exhibit the initial experiences of participants who started the difficult process of coming out to their loved ones:

“The key moment of me coming out - it was hectic. Having to organize a meeting I got my great aunts, my young aunts and sat [my mom] down it was quite… It was quite an experience… The relationship with my mom since has gone south, ya. It took the worst turn. I think I think she’s got a very big misconception obviously about homosexuality and what that means. So, she was throwing words around and saying I gave birth to a girl, you know? I didn’t give birth to a boy and I’m like I’m not trying to be a boy though. I wear dresses from time to time - I’m just comfortable with being a tomboy. But I do wear dresses from time to time.” – Lerato, individual interview.

“I came out and [my mom] didn’t speak about it for like two, three weeks or something after I told her. In those two, three weeks, we didn’t communicate… [Then one day] we were sitting with my mom chilling and she was like, so you are lesbian, and I just started sweating and I was like yeah… She was like okay if you are happy, I am happy. But my mom has this straight face and you can’t read but I could see a sparkle of sadness in her eyes and that was one of the most heartbreaking moments.” – Sihle, individual interview.

“My mom used to cry every day and say but you never played soccer and I had to explain I’m not a tomboy, I’m just a woman who is in love with another woman… To my family - coming out to them was very bad because of that abusive relationship and after that it was quiet for a while. I didn’t want to date anybody because I was scared and then I was doing it secretly.” – Vee, individual interview.

“My mom always had this perception that lesbians beat each other up, you get drunk put your pants beneath your bum. She has all these bad perceptions because of that experience and then later on as my relationships went on she saw that it was not that bad. I’m having [and] I’m bringing proper partners home who are career orientated, people

> that are clean, people that are smart, people that are well behaved." – Vee, individual interview.

While listening to and transcribing these accounts, it became clear that the process of coming out takes place in affective economies marked by fear, anxiety, sadness and uncertainty. Lerato recalls the story of gathering her mother and her aunts in order to come out to them as "quite an experience". Her unease about the situation is further fueled by her mother's misconceptions regarding what it means to be homosexual. Lerato states that her mom feels that she gave birth to a girl and not a boy as Lerato's appearance may suggest. Lerato's tomboy dress sense leads her mother to believe that she in fact wants to be a boy. Here we see the mix-up between gender identity and gender expression. Lerato's gender identity is a cisgender woman, however, her gender expression (particularly her way of dressing) is perceived as stereotypically masculine or boy-ish by her mother. Continuing with affective economies, in her mother's statement "I gave birth to a girl, you know? I didn't give birth to a boy", there is a sense of perceived loss. Her mother may feel as though she has lost her girl child even though Lerato continually expresses that she does not feel like or want to be a boy. Lerato provides a sense of comfort by saying she wears dresses from time to time but ultimately, she is more comfortable with being a tomboy. These feelings of despair can also be found in Sihle's account of coming out. When she initially came out, Sihle did not speak to her mother. It is only after a few weeks that they were able to begin a conversation about Sihle's sexuality. When they eventually had a conversation, her mother was able to talk to her about her sexuality and finally accepted her but she still had a "sparkle of sadness in her eyes". Essentially, there appears to be a disconnect between the words of acceptance that come from her mother's mouth and the despondency that Sihle sees in her mother's eyes. Finally, the emotions stemming from Vee's story are a mixture of anxiety and distress that ultimately led to secrecy. Vee's coming out experience was difficult for several reasons. Firstly, like Lerato's mom, Vee's mom seems to have misconceptions about the link between gender and sexuality. Vee's mom expresses that Vee had never played soccer or been a tomboy. Therefore, she does not understand how she can be lesbian. Here we see that there is a perception that lesbians typically grow up as tomboys or take part in what is considered boys' activities like playing soccer. The feeling sensed here is that of betrayal or deception as Vee's mom fails to understand how she did not see her daughter's non-normative sexuality from a young age. Secondly, Vee was outed by someone else to her mother. Not only did her mother find out she was lesbian but she was also outed for being in an abusive relationship with another woman. Because of shame and fear, Vee then opted to date secretly

to avoid disappointing her family any further. In her statement that follows, Vee articulates that she opted to date and bring "proper partners" home to her family. This statement introduces an element of respectability politics. As a result of being lesbian and having been in an abusive relationship, it appears that Vee uses the idea of dating people who are "career orientated, people that are clean, people that are smart, people that are well behaved" in order to counter the former negative perceptions around being lesbian.

Literature on coming out normally discusses the process in relation to the individual but often disregards the impact on the people around them (Valentine et al., 2003). Family and friends are an equally large part of coming out. Queer individuals often have to think about and carefully understand their family/friend dynamics before they can disclose their sexuality (Valentine et al., 2003). This is because after coming out, individuals constantly have to deal with both the positive and negative consequences of coming out (Valentine et al., 2003). As seen in the accounts above and below, the coming out process is one that deeply involves family relationships and it is clear that individuals would like for their families and friends to accept them. The acceptance from family and friends does not always come immediately. As seen in the literature and the examples here, the emotions and experiences of coming out can shift overtime from negative emotions/experience to positive emotions/experiences:

> "I normally tell people in our spaces that when I accepted who I am, it didn't mean that my family had to accept it also at the same time." – Vee, individual interview.

> "My mom is one foot in and one foot out. She is really trying. I don't expect her to accept it but she's educating herself. It's very funny because everything that is gay, or lesbian orientated she will give me a call [and tell me to watch] channel whatever and she'll ask how it works. It takes time, it requires understanding from me." – Lesego, individual interview.

> "I don't care even if my parents reacted like that. I knew they would come round. It needs patience, time and understanding. All around everything is okay to a certain degree. Also, if you are not fully honest

with me, I will take it that you are okay." – Lesego, individual interview.

"I think at the moment we are trying to make things work slowly. She is trying to accept and adjust to - I guess according to her the new me." – Lerato, individual interview.

"I didn't speak to [my aunt], and I told her if you do not want to associate with me as the person I am, I give you the full permission to write me off and tell everyone that you're not related to me and that's absolutely fine. I will wait for you to accept it." – Sihle, individual interview.

"What we have to remember is that when we come out our parents have to go through a coming out process at church and whatever. It is the most conservative groups. So, once that happens is that they have to find a way they are comfortable with explaining [it]." – Sihle, individual interview.

"So, all of the expectations and fears we had were totally nullified by the acceptance. There was so much love and there was so much acceptance..."- Sihle, couple interview.

A trend that can be seen in these above statements is that of time. Some participants express that they did not expect their friends or family to accept their non-normative sexuality immediately with open arms. Lesego in particular, expresses that it is a process involving "patience, time and understanding". There is a belief, or perhaps hope, amongst participants that their families and friends would gradually come to understand and eventually warmly receive them. However, in the case of Sihle, if this did not happen then it was also an accepted reality. In her first statement, she states that she had given her aunt "full permission" to disassociate herself from her, and she was willing to accept that this is a relationship that would not be able to be restored – even over time. Furthermore, Sihle presents an example of how coming out is not an individual process. The second statement from Sihle gives light to how parents also go through a kind of coming out process or experience.

Chrisler (2017) documents a theoretical framework for understanding the ways in which parents react to their lesbian, gay or bisexual children. In this framework, Chrisler (2017) explains that the parental process of coming out includes suspicion, uncertainty reduction activities, confirmation, appraisal, response, coping and reappraisal. It is during the component of appraisal that parents make sense of this new information and decide whether it fits with their own values/beliefs/principles (Chrisler, 2017). Furthermore, it is during the coping phase where parents may begin talking to other family members or friends as a way of gathering more information or coping with what it means to have a gay, lesbian or bisexual child (Chrisler, 2017). The framework provided here is also helpful in illustrating that the coming out process is not a solely individual exercise and reaches far beyond the individual. Finally, Sihle shares how even after the potentially scary and dreadful process of coming out, it is all made worthwhile if family and friends are able to accept wholly these queer individuals. Although it may be difficult to get to this point, it is clear that acceptance remains a large element that restores family ties.

In some cases, family members came together to help each other work through this process of acceptance:

> "[Siya's uncle] was just all about – parents, this doesn't happen every day, but these are our kids. Accept them, support them, love them, give them everything that they would get from the outside at home. Everything will work out. So, it was a lightbulb moment for the whole community because they all were enlightened." – Sihle, couple interview.

> "My family would advocate for me with my uncles or with anyone who didn't understand, and it eventually came to a point when they got to a family funeral or something [and they would say] can you come here? This is our lesbian daughter. They came to a point that they didn't see it as a bad thing. It was their steps to acceptance. I can actually communicate with my family about lesbian issues…" – Sihle, individual interview.

> "[Vuyo's] mom sat my mom down and talked to her and said no these are our kids. We need to embrace their relationship, we have to accept them, and we need to love them because at the end of the day they are our children. So gradually, she started accepting us to the point now that [Vuyo] is her number one." – Vee, individual interview.

In both Sihle and Vee's statements, there is evidence of the various ways that family members advocated for their children to other family members or the outside world, and the ways that family members derived support from each other. Sihle's statement presents an interesting comparison for the notion of "home" versus the "outside world." Here, family, friends and community are seen as "home" and as a safe space. A place free from intolerance, prejudice and discrimination. Siya's uncle insists that Siya and Sihle should receive acceptance, support and love as they would from the outside. However, in the examples seen above (and will be shown below), it is clear that home is not always a place of love and acceptance. Family, then, always plays a role in advocating for or defending their queer children from other family members. Sihle talks about how her own family finally embraced her and then became the people who championed for her in other family settings so that her and her wife would be received well. Finally, In Vee's excerpt, we are given insight into how family is able to come together to help one another understand what it means to have queer children and getting to a place of acceptance.

When sexuality "just appears": The gender performance of tomboys and masculine-presenting lesbians.

Those who grew up as self-proclaimed 'tomboys' or dressed/presented as masculine, the process of coming out was different. Several participants spoke about the moments where their families had 'suspicions' about their sexuality based on their gender performance – reinforcing that "gender is a social construct tied to sexuality" (Anum, 2014, p. 44). For these participants, coming out occurred after their families had already expressed their suspicion. In some cases, there were no intentional moments of coming out:

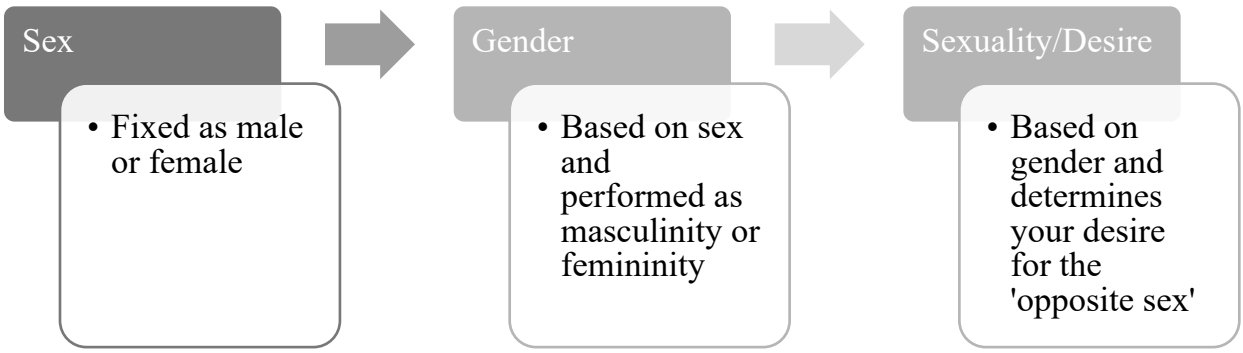
> "They saw that I'm tomboy but there wasn't really a communication about it. No one ever confronted me except for my dad." – Lerato, individual interview.

> "It's not bad because my family accepts me, and they've seen me since I was young that I was gonna be like that and they have given me their full support… They saw from a very young age that this person was going to be like this. They were actually waiting for me to come out to them." – Tumi, individual interview.

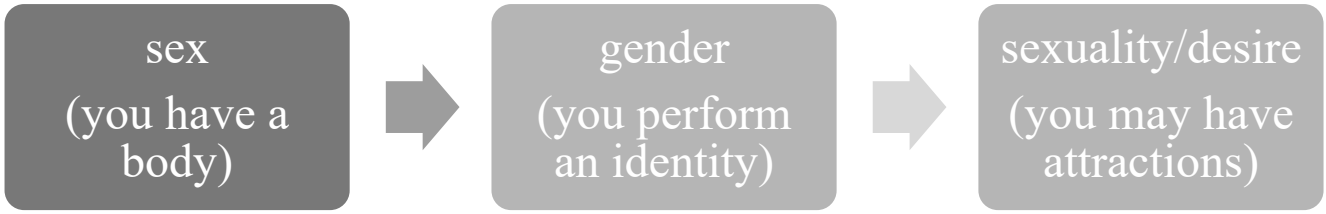
> "For me I came out '97 and it was quite easy for me because my parents just knew when I was growing up." – Siya, individual interview.

> "I found a weekly paying job and that's when I started buying myself clothes. Then my dress sense changed… Otherwise, nothing was said about me being lesbian… I never sat them down to say I am lesbian; I think they just figured it out." – Vuyo, individual interview.

According to Levitt and Horn (2002), 'butch' women typically become aware of their queer sexual orientation earlier than 'femme' women do. This is attributed to the ways in which 'butch' women see themselves and are seen by family as "different" at young ages (Levitt & Horn, 2002, p. 34). The statements "they saw", "they just knew" and "they just figured it out" by participants demonstrate that. Even more, these statements support and convey Butler's (1990) argument of how gender is performed and seen by other people. Butler (1990) says that gender and sexuality are often understood as a sex-gender-sexuality/desire continuity model. Gauntlett (2008) illustrates this:



The model offers the two options of existence. These are: females (sex) are feminine (gender) and attracted to men (sexuality/desire) while males (sex) are masculine (gender) and attracted to women (sexuality/desire). However, Butler (1990) then goes on to argue that these entities are independent of each other and Gauntlett (2008) uses a new model to illustrate this:



Gay men and some of the lesbian women in this study disrupt this anticipated continuity. Lesbian women who are masculine presenting tend to disrupt the link between sex and gender by being sexed as female while dressing as tomboys and performing gender in a masculine manner (Butler, 1990; Eves, 2004). Yet, due to their masculine gender presentation and attraction to feminine women, their sexuality might still be seen as conventional (Butler, 1990; Eves, 2004).

Dress and beauty practices then become sites of gender construction and imply sexuality both intentionally and unintentionally (Eves, 2004). For example, Lerato's dressing as a tomboy is not an intentional effort to communicate parts of her sexual identity. Earlier In her interview, she explains that she wears dresses from time to time, but she is generally more comfortable dressing as a tomboy. Overtime, however, she learnt that her tomboy dress sense became a maker of sexual orientation for others. On the other hand, Vuyo claims she never sat her family down to come out to them. Nevertheless, once she got a job and intentionally started dressing the way that she wanted, her family drew conclusions about her sexual orientation and "just figured it out." Consequently, gender presentation and visibility often act as a disclosure of sexual identity for butch lesbian women.

Sexuality as unsafe: The dangers of coming out and existing as a Black lesbian.

In this section, participants speak about how they do not feel entirely free and even unsafe because of their sexuality. With 44% of hate-crimes in South Africa being perpetrated against members of the LGBTQI+ community, existing as a queer individual is an enormous safety

risk (Mitchell & Nel, 2017). The raping and killing of lesbian women is a combination of "patriarchal and homophobic power that lies behind rapist men's senses of entitlement to women's bodies" (Gqola, 2015, p. 92). Black lesbian women are under the biggest threat due to 'corrective' or 'curative' rape and experience the most violence in townships around the country (Craven, 2011; Zway & Boonzaier, 2015). The term specific to South Africa is that of 'corrective rape' or 'curative rape', which describes "a form of sexual punishment by men towards lesbians in order to cure them of their sexual orientation" (Mwambene & Wheal, 2015, p.58). While the above definition refers to the rape of lesbians in general, corrective/curative rape mostly affects Black lesbians in townships around South Africa (Zway & Boonzaier, 2015). Although this is the term given to this act, it is important to continually problematize it as it implies that lesbian or queer sexuality is something to be 'fixed' and, therefore, warrants this kind of punishment (Koraan & Geduld, 2015). These statistics and realities are the same ones that some of the participants in this study continually experience. Coming out and existing, as a lesbian woman becomes a safety risk:

> "When people come up to me now, I just say I am celibate or I don't date because you never know how someone is going to react…"– Vee, individual interview.

> "It's not easy to be out and you're not always out because you're scared of what the next person is going to say. If you are out, you are scared of being in certain places so you're not entirely free." – Lesego, individual interview.

> "Being lesbian for me means that I get to be - first of all - be free… It's unfortunate that we live in a time where it's not always a safe space, you know? So, also being lesbian on the flip side becomes a scary experience. It becomes like - I am being too lesbian right now? So, it has its beautiful moments and it has its very challenging moments." – Lerato, individual interview.

> "Apparently my friend had a friend who got killed when they came out, so her mother preferred we stayed there, drank and do whatever we wanted to do. At least she can see us. We'd stay Saturday during the

> day but at night we would want to go out, but she would hear the gate open and shout at us like come back sit down I'll lock my gate and beat you up don't go out all, those things. Then, also growing up in rural areas, going out during the day, guys would make comments. They even stabbed me once because of a girl." – Vuyo, individual interview.

The experiences captured here can be well-understood using Gqola's (2015) female fear factory analogy. In her book *Rape: A South African Nightmare*, Gqola (2015, p. 78) explains how the manufacture of the female fear factory works and how the "threat of rape [or other bodily wounding] is an effective way to remind women that they are not safe and that their bodies are not entirely theirs." Whether women occupy private or public spaces or whether they are constantly protected by family/friends, the fear of being raped and/or killed escorts them wherever they are (Gqola, 2015). It is this fear factory that keeps women 'in line', silences them, and reminds them of their own rapability (Gqola, 2015).

The female fear factory also works to remind gay men, lesbian women and trans-people that they are like women and equally rapable (Gqola, 2015). Isaack (2003) explains that women's sexuality is determined and dominated by patriarchal society. Lesbian women's sexuality is self-determined and becomes a direct threat to this structure (Isaack, 2003). This accounts for the extreme acts of violence experienced by Black lesbian women in townships of South Africa. They experience the fear of rape in both the safe and non-safe spaces that they occupy (Gqola, 2015). For example, Eudy Simelane, a Black lesbian, a gifted national soccer player and LGBTQI+ activist was brutally raped and killed in her community of KwaThema, which was known for celebrating and embracing people in the queer community (Gqola, 2015). The female fear factory is concerned with policing the movement, behaviour and especially sexuality of Black lesbians (Gqola, 2015).

Vee is often assumed as heterosexual. Therefore, even though she experiences the effects of the female fear factory, it is not initially for being a woman who loves women. Nonetheless, she is aware that disclosing her sexual orientation can be a dangerous task as she is aware that could get a potentially dangerous response. Unlike earlier in her interview, Lesego speaks about being lesbian as not being "entirely free." She admits that her lack of liberation comes because of being around particular people who may be unwelcoming of her non-normative sexuality as well as being in particular places/spaces that may not allow her to navigate safety.

Lerato and Vuyo, however, are both masculine presenting lesbians and their visibility puts them in direct danger depending on the space they are occupying at the time. Lerato initially describes being openly lesbian as liberating but quickly turns to the fact that it can be "a scary experience." There is a palpable sense of fear in her statement. She is aware of the way her 'tomboyish' gender expression may reveal her sexual orientation and in turn, looking "too lesbian" may put her in danger. Vuyo reveals that a friend of a friend was killed after coming out. As a result, her friend's mother would prefer that they remain at home, in the back yard rather than being outside in the streets or pubs in rural areas. "Home", once again, is spoken about and seen as the safer space compared to the "outside world." Vuyo's story mirrors those of other in townships of South Africa. Countless Black women are raped, mutilated and killed in their own communities by familiar people, and often no one is held accountable (Gqola, 2015). While it is effective for Vuyo to stay in her friend's family yard and avoid danger, other Black lesbians are vulnerable even in their own homes. For example, Noluvo Swelindawo was abducted from her home and then, assaulted and killed by 10 men in the Western Cape (Mzantsi, 2016). It is for this reason that Gqola (2015) stresses that it is almost impossible for women to protect themselves or be protected from the violence that constantly looms. The fact that Vuyo was intimately interacting with another woman draws attention to the fact that lesbian women are harmed because of their 'deviant' sexuality as well as interacting with the women whom men feel they are entitled to.

In Vuyo's statement, the relation of safety, space and class is brought forward. Canham's (2017, p. 55) work on Black lesbians in Johannesburg reveals that "the occupation of physical space is deeply informed by the intersecting confluence of race, class, age, sexuality, and place." Safety can be negotiated depending on class and the space that one is able to occupy. For example, townships and rural areas or spaces such as Hillbrow (normally occupied by working class people) are not safe for Black lesbians as this is where they experience the most violence (Moffett, 2014; Canham, 2017). However, if a person is able to occupy spaces in Northern suburbia such ad Greenside, Sandton, Fourways, Pretoria where they are able to hold hands with their same-sex partner without the fear of being in danger, then one comes to understand how "safety can be produced as a function of class" (Canham, 2017, p. 99). The idea of maintaining safety by staying indoors, as seen in Vuyo's example, is also reflected in Canham's (2017) study. Participants, particularly older lesbian women who are able to afford their own homes, disclosed that they had opted to have gatherings in their own home as a means

of maintaining safety and solidarity. Therefore, being lesbian and occupying space can be as emancipating as it can be restricting/dangerous depending on one's social class standing.

"I just lived unapologetically": Sexuality constructed as liberation.

There are both costs and benefits for coming out of the closet. Corrigan and Matthews (2003) tell us that coming out can have consequences that include physical harm, social avoidance and social discrimination. This is clear in the material discussed above. Corrigan and Matthews (2003) emphasize that there are certainly benefits to coming out, which include increased self-esteem, increased self-awareness, decreased distress, better interpersonal relations and better general health. Following the long and sometimes daunting process of coming out, participants start to speak of it as a liberating experience. It is helpful and important to see that the trajectory of coming out is not a solely negative one. Participants express this feeling of liberation in the following ways:

> "I spoke to Siya about [coming out] that evening I told her I don't think my mom was happy about it and she said when [she] came out [she] got the same look. They will be okay as long as you are okay. The big step is out, and I think that is the aha moment that I had. I am out. I'm done. So, what's next?" – Sihle, individual interview.

> "Life is okay. That's the best… Coming out is one of the best stages because you don't hate yourself as much. You don't feel guilty. It's just okay." – Sihle, individual interview.

> "Never be apologetic about who you are. Don't be apologetic about the person you love. We grew into that. We decided this is what we want. The heart wants what the heart wants, and you can't turn it away." – Sihle, individual interview.

> "I just lived unapologetically. So, I just lived my life and I didn't put myself in a box." – Siya, individual interview.

> "I get to express my orientation around the people I live with, I share a space with, I interact with… I've become a lot more free." – Lerato,

> "It's just keeping your head down and living; and you don't just want to live. You want to be alive and be you and express love and express freedom and self-worth. It's a self-discovery path." – Lesego, individual interview.

> "So, you are free and you're not free… You get to be you. You get to be free. But you're also accountable for it." – Lesego, individual interview.

Corrigan and Matthews' (2003) benefits for coming out can be seen in the statements of these participants. Sihle continually mentions finally feeling "okay" feels less distressed after having shared her sexual orientation with her friends and family. Sihle and Siya both speak about being unapologetic about their sexuality, which suggests that they are more comfortable with themselves and have an increased sense of self-esteem and self-awareness. Lerato states that coming out provides her with a sense of freedom, especially around those she with whom she interacts. Lesego states that coming out does not only provide an opportunity for liberation but it also allows her to convey love and self-worth. However, in her last statement, she reminds us that all this liberation comes at a cost. We are reminded of the section above regarding safety and sexuality. Even though one has the freedom to express themselves, it is equally important to remember that this freedom comes with particular kinds of restrictions and risks.

A man, a wife and kids: The issue of compulsory heterosexuality amongst lesbian women.
According to Morrow and Richards (1996), four markers, namely exiting the education system, securing paid employment, marriage, and parenthood help us understand adulthood. Two of these are centered on heterosexuality: These four markers frame parents' expectations for their children. They anticipate that their children will eventually settle down and begin their own families (Valentine et al., 2003). This expectation is linked to and embedded in compulsory heterosexuality. Compulsory heterosexuality refers to the idea that heterosexuality is the default sexual orientation, therefore, assumed and imposed on all individuals of society (Konik & Stewart, 2004). In her infamous paper *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian existence*, Rich (1980) uses various arguments to challenge the way female heterosexuality is assumed and enforced by patriarchal society. Moreover, she considers how heterosexuality is a political institution that disempowers women. In explaining her grievances with heterosexuality, Rich

(1980) explains that this sexual orientation is not natural or innate to women. Rather, women subscribe to it because it provides women with social/economic security, it is expected by family/friends/society and often no alternatives are offered. She then introduces lesbian existence and the lesbian continuum as a rejection of this compulsory heterosexuality and expands 'lesbianism' to incorporate female friendships/comradery. A number of the participants dealt with faced with this idea of compulsory heterosexuality and expectations from friends, family and even co-workers:

> "Every mom hopes every daughter will bring about a grand wedding, a perfect husband and 2 to 4 kids but right now – it's not happening. It can happen for them but in a different way…" – Sihle, individual interview.

> "But for them, when they look at me, they will see a woman that needs to have a man and bear kids, you know? All those things that are attached to us. So, I think it was a difficult process for my family to understand." – Vee, individual interview.

> "When I was still working, there was a time when someone from work passed away and we had to drive to the funeral for that weekend. So, I told them we are passing by my home in Ermelo, so I will come in the morning, my partner will drop me off… So, in the morning they direct me to the house for the funeral and [Vuyo] is driving. When she comes out of the car, they are like where is your partner? I'm like here she is… They are like okay, and everybody starts snickering. I didn't care. Then Monday at work everybody came to me and said why didn't you tell us? I'm like tell you what? They say tell us that you [are] dating another woman. I'm like why do I have to tell you? Do you tell me? Why do I have to come out?" – Vee, individual interview.

> "[My mom] has seven sisters or whatever, they have kids. They are getting married and having kids, but her daughter is not getting married or having kids, you know? All that was the talk." – Vuyo, couple interview.

> "She probably still thinks I'm going to not - for instance now she thinks she's not going to have grandkids. Like I'm not going to be able to give her grandkids, which is something that we still needs to talk about. So, I think it's mainly been interesting and challenging." – Lerato, individual interview.

Sihle, Vee, Vuyo and Lerato's excerpts present a number of issues regarding compulsory heterosexuality. Sihle and Vee, who are both feminine-presenting women, reveal that their respective families expected them to get married to a man and eventually have children.
This assumption or expectation can be illustrated through Butler (1990) and Gauntlett's (2008) sex-gender-sexuality continuity model. Sihle and Vee are sexed as female and perform a femininity - they maintain the projected relation between sex and gender. Their feminine gender means that they should be sexually/romantically attracted to men; however, they disrupt the anticipated continuity between gender and sexuality with their attraction to other women. In the same way, because of their femininity, Sihle and Vee are expected to bear children as their femininity is linked to motherhood (Choi, Henshaw, Baker & Tree, 2005). The failure to follow this aforementioned adulthood trajectory (especially getting married and having children), results in disappointment from parents and extended family (Valentine et al., 2003). This sense of disappointment can be detected in Vee's declaration as she notes, "I think it was a difficult process for my family to understand." Sihle statement brings about a similar kind of feeling; however, she offers consolation to her mother by explaining, "it can happen for them but in a different way." In her next statement, Vee tells the story of how her co-workers were surprised to find out that she was dating another woman. It is clear that up until this point, her co-workers had assumed that she is heterosexual. Consequently, they are surprised when they see a woman as her partner. She expresses her frustration with having to come out or disclose this aspect of her life, which other people had assumed incorrectly.

Vuyo and Lerato, who do not embody the same femininity as Sihle and Vee, face the expectations of compulsory heterosexuality in different ways. Despite her gender expression and by virtue of being a woman, Vuyo's family still expects her to marry a man and have children as the rest of the women in her family have done. Lerato explains that her mother might have completely disposed of the idea of having grandchildren. This links to the idea that

Lerato's mom feels that Lerato wants to be a boy. Therefore, it would not be possible for her to have kids.

This part of Vee's story presents a very interesting moment regarding following the adulthood trajectory and her identity as a lesbian woman with children:

> "And what [Vuyo] told me is that she has accepted me with my kids - she has never judged me. She doesn't know what happened, she doesn't want to be involved with that. It's just that I brought the kids and introduced them, and they are going to treat my kids as their kids… How do you call yourself a lesbian, but you have kids whatever? [Vuyo] said no I am not going to judge that – we just going to embrace them." – Vee, couple interview.

Earlier in this interview, Vuyo explains that Vee's two children are from previous heterosexual relationships. On that account, she has fulfilled part of the idea that women are expected to pair with men and have children. However, in the statement "how do you call yourself a lesbian, but you have kids", Vee speaks to the idea that women who are 'authentic' lesbians do not have relationships with men and thus, should not have children. However, Potgieter's (2003) research maintains that motherhood is a feature of womanhood even if a woman may identify as lesbian. Vee emphasizes that Vuyo had never 'judged' her for coming into the relationship with children. Her constant emphasis conveys the impression that Vee feels that this is something she has continuously judged and perhaps, something she should be ashamed of. Reed, Miller, Valenti and Timm's (2011) study on the acceptability of pregnancy for Black lesbians in America is partly useful in helping to unpack why Vee might have spoken like this or felt this way. In their paper, Reed et al. (2011) use DiLapi's (1989) model to illustrate the hierarchy of motherhood:

> "At the apex of her hierarchy is the ideal mother: the married, heterosexual woman. Her place at the top is established because she has correct sexual orientation and family form. Marginally appropriate mothers are those who are correct in either family form (i.e., bisexual, married mothers) or sexual orientation (i.e., single, heterosexual mothers). They encounter obstacles to pregnancy and parenthood, but not to the extent of inappropriate mothers. Those who are inappropriate

> mothers are incorrect in form and sexual orientation: lesbians." (Reed et al., 2011, p. 751).

Black lesbian women, according to Reed et al. (2011), exist under strict expectancies in terms of their gender and sexual identities. They are at risk for experiencing cultural bias when they have children because they are seen to be buying into "heterosexist imperatives" (Reed et al., 2011, p. 751). In this context, 'motherhood' and 'lesbianism' are mutually exclusive. Thus, lesbian women should not have children. However, one's "appropriate motherhood" can be negotiated depending on the conditions they had their children. For example, women, femmes to be specific, who chose to have children within their same-sex partnerships were seen as appropriate mothers. Women who fall pregnant outside of their same-sex partnerships were called "dick dykes" and seen as only marginally appropriate mothers. It is perhaps from this position and information where it is possible to begin to understand Vee's need to emphasize that there was no judgement from her partner for having children outside of their relationship. The literature by Reed et al. (2011, p. 751) provides insight into how (Black) lesbian women are criticized for not fitting the correct "family form" as well as for betraying the rules for being a "good gay female".

5.3. How to be African: Defining and describing African identities and cultures.

African in a multitude of ways: The different ways in which individuals define their African identities.

National and international scholars such as Smitherman (1991), Bates, Mudimbe and Barr (1993), Osabu-Kle (2000) and Eze (2014) have attempted to describe Africa as well as 'African identity' pre- and/or post-colonialism. Simplified and merely outlined by its physical form, Africa can be seen as a continent illustrated by "colonial map makers" (Anum, 2014, p. 93). However, going beyond this and determining Africa and African identities more meticulously proves to be a difficult task. A task that Wright (2002, p. 1) describes as "daunting and potentially frustrating" due to the various ideological and disciplinary points from which it is possible to launch this investigation. The accounts provided are seldom written by Africans themselves, which results in overgeneralization and homogenization (Wright, 2002). More so, there is a tendency to define Africanness in a fixed manner that does not consider the possibility of malleability within the identity (Wright, 2002). In the same way, participants in this study were particularly challenged by having to state what African identity meant to them and how

they might embody it. It was clear that many of them saw themselves as African people, but it was also evident that this was the first time that they had to convey the meaning of this verbally. Ultimately, participants drew on a range of ideas to explain and construct their African identities and finally arrived at defining it in these various ways:

> "To be African to me means… I know I was born in Africa… I identify as *umZulu*. I'm a child of Africa and that means many things because we are guided by *amasiko* (culture)… To me it means that I don't imagine being anything else. I know I'm from Africa first then South Africa, then I can just count the areas that I have lived." – Vuyo, individual interview.

> "I can just say African is diverse and has a lot of different cultures. I mean, 11 official languages in South Africa alone." – Tshego, individual interview.

> "I am African because I was born here. I am Black, and I love being Black." – Tumi, individual interview.

> "A lot of colour, food, song and everything that is different from being Western... You stand out. You are different in many ways. You are Tswana, you are this, you are that. It's quite broad. It's to be different but one" – Lesego, individual interview.

> "Being Black you still identify as oppressed or no voice. So, there are places where you have a voice or certain situations but is it really being heard? It's not that great. So, let's not hide the challenges of being African or Black. Like I said [it's] something that will not go away as fast as we want. It is gradually going away - maybe the colour of your skin or being in Africa. We often identify Africans as the dark skin people or the Black people as opposed to all people of colour that are born in or citizens of Africa or SA." – Lesego, individual interview.

> "History, your lineage, being proud of where you basically journeyed." – Lerato, individual interview.

> "Have love and patriotism towards your country." – Sihle, individual interview.

> "African because you stand by the principles of being African like *ubuntu*." – Sihle, individual interview.

> "African… *Ubuntu*. Just having *ubuntu* towards people that's what I can say about being African." – Siya, individual interview.

These quotations demonstrate the varied dimensions that participants used to define their Africanness: affect/emotion, geography/location, history, *ubuntu* and cultural practice.

Affect

Affect, in the context of psychology, can be understood as the experience or expression of emotion or feeling (VandenBos, 2009). Participants use affect to express the ways in which identity was a feeling or sense of bond that they had with their continent and the people who inhabit it. In the book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed (2004) explores the ways in which emotions work to shape the surfaces of individual and collective bodies. In her interview with Schmitz, Ahmed argues that objects/things are given value through emotion (Schmitiz & Ahmed, 2014). It is in this way that participants have constructed and assigned value to this identity. In the statements "I love being Black", "being proud of where you basically journeyed" and "have love and patriotism towards your country", participants assign emotions of adoration, honour, dignity, loyalty and patriotic sentiment to African identity.

Ahmed (2004) also notes that these affective economies are able to align and bind individuals and communities. For example, pain is typically thought of as a private feeling, but it is repeatedly used in public discourse to induce a collective response (Ahmed, 2004). Hence, it is shared histories of pain and oppression that can be used to construct and create an attachment for people who identify as African. Lesego claims "we often identify Africans as the dark skin people… being Black you still identify as oppressed or [having] no voice." By saying "we", she taps into the idea of a collective, and then draws on the shared category of being the "dark

skin people" who have a shared history of being "oppressed" and having "no voice." Therefore, participants use emotion in a way that takes on a cultural/sociopolitical character and use these as a means of constructing their identity as African.

Geography/location

Another point of departure for defining identity was that of geography and/or location. The study of place/space/geography and identity has been given many names including place identity, regional identity, geographic identity, place-belongingness amongst others. Despite the varying names, the purpose of this scholarship is to examine how space/place are a part of identity (such as class, gender, religious and ethnic identity) formation and the ways in which a sense of belonging is created when an individual is attached to a particular region, city, country or continent (Knight, 1982; Antonsich, 2010). Antonsich (2010, p. 647) suggests two factors which contribute to understanding belonging as 'rooted in a place'. The first are auto-biographical factors relating to a person's birthplace, experiences/memories and relationships in a given place. This can be linked to the ways participants continually referred to being born and living in Africa as a means of belonging here and claiming an African identity. Wright (2002) notes that it is possible that individuals slip between claiming a kind of generic African identity as well as claiming smaller or more distinct ethnic groups. He gives the example of Soyinka's (1976) literature which draws on both 'Yoruba' and 'African' as labels when discussing worldviews and cosmology. This is seen in Vuyo's statement "To be African to me means… I know I was born in Africa… I identify as *umZulu*" where she uses Zulu ethnicity as well as African geography to make meaning of her identity.

The second are cultural factors including language and food. Participants speak on the fact that in South Africa we have a variety of cultures and languages as well as how food and song distinguish us from other cultures. Language is a very essential factor as it is used for daily communication and constructing meaning in different situations. It is through language that individuals create a sense of 'we', community and intimacy (speaking to the affect dimension again) that produces the sentiment of being at home in a particular place. In the same way, language can be used to distinguish 'we' from 'them' and exclude other individuals. Food can also be understood as an extension of cultural expression. Food is a cultural artifact that gives communal significance and unites people in many different ways (Fox, 2003). Fox (2003) maintains that culture shapes food and food shapes culture. For example, pizza/pasta is strictly classified as Italian food and nachos/tortillas are strictly classified as Mexican food. Instead of

using language to distinguish 'us' from 'them', Lesego, uses food to separate African identities or cultures from "Western" ones. Food can also have a space within rituals in different cultures.

Socio-historical

The use of socio-historical elements is another way participants chose to speak about being African. Even after decades of independence, Africa is marked as the 'dark continent' and 'shit-hole' with a population of uneducated people (Osabu-Kle, 2000, p. 1). Africa has cohesions and shared histories, which are difficult to separate from the various effects of slavery and colonialism, which played out over 500 years (Oyewumi, 2002; Osabu-Kle, 2000). When Lesego refers to Africa as the place of the "oppressed" people with "dark skin", she is referring to this history. Parallel to the idea of Africa as the home of dark skin people is that Africa is the 'Dark Continent' (Jarosz, 1992). This notion has been produced and reproduced in many Euromerican discourses, in order to symbolize and sustain the distinction between the colonizer and the colonized (Jarosz, 1992; Wright, 2002). However, in her quotation, Lesego does not speak of this oppression as a thing of the past but something that Black people are still experiencing – only in a different way.

Ubuntu

Participants also used the philosophy of *ubuntu* to establish their African identities and as a means to relate to others. *Ubuntu* is a philosophy that is strongly embedded in African culture and "affirms one's humanity by recognizing the humanity of others" (Kimmerle, 2006, p. 81). When participants articulate that being African is having *ubuntu* or exhibiting it towards others, they are implying that one should show compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity to others as this is the African way of living (Nussbaum, 2003). Drawing on this philosophy to define African identities is in line with what Mkhize (2004) considers the African worldview. Rooting or determining the 'self' in relation to the community or those around you is an essential part of the human-activity and relational orientations which give rise to the saying "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" (a person is a person because of other people) to emphasize the importance of mutuality and cultural integration (Mkhize, 2004; Nussbaum, 2003).

The final dimension is that of culture and practicing particular rituals/customs. This dimension is rather substantial, with a variety of elements, and will be covered in a section of its own below.

"*Amasiko* and my Africanness": The ways in which belief, rites of passage, rituals/customs and ancestors construct African identities.

Partaking in rites of passage, rituals, customs and/or speaking to ancestors were the various ways in which participants constructed their African identities and/or cultures. It became increasingly clear that claiming and embodying Africanness was about 'believing' and 'doing' particular rituals/customs. To illustrate this, I draw on an interaction from one of the couple's interviews. The interaction below occurs after one of the participants (Lerato) explains why and how it is important to acknowledge one's ancestors. I took this as an opportunity to probe into the particular ways these two participants engaged with ancestors and therefore, 'did' culture:

1	Linda:	Have you ever::: (0.3) had cultural interactions with like ancestors >outside of
2		*lobola* the like practice or< is it something you're trying to bring in to (.) for
3		the::: for the purposes of *lobola*? (.) Like when you're saying thanking
4		ancestors = Do you have ceremonies = Do you do that outside =
5	Lerato:	Ya!
6	Linda:	Usually, outside of the =
7	Lerato:	= [>We do!<]
8	Linda:	[Okay]
9	Lerato:	We do.
10	Linda:	Okay.
11	Lerato:	(0.2). Ya, we're very cultural people.
12	Lesego:	Okay (.) not <u>very</u> cultural but =
13	Lerato:	= Okay (.) we're <u>quite</u> cultural people.
14		((everyone laughs))
15	Lerato:	We're <u>quite</u> cultural people.
16	Lesego:	Ya well we do do that. (0.3)
17	Lerato:	↓We're quite cultural.
18	Lesego:	(0.5) It's always something that's (.) you know? Always been introduced to
19		us = as kids (0.2) before we people the people of why, you know? We did that
20		and we practiced it until we grew up and had (0.4) our own understanding of
21		why it's done and how it is done.

22 Linda: Mmhhmm.
23 Lesego: So (.) I don't think if you were not a cultural person you would not bring up
24 the need to thank ancestors or acknowledge them, you know? So::: that was
25 one of our (0.3) most important things to consider is that (.) the ancestors
26 have been present and we (0.2) we are about them = so [let's]
27 Lerato: [Ya]
28 Lesego: Lets pay homage to the people.
29 Lerato: Ya and (0.5) to also just add onto (.) us being quite cultural – I mean for
30 instance this coming weekend (.) uuhhh is a month after my grandmother
31 passed away in December. It's literally a month since and *sinomsebenzi*
32 *otlhapisa* (0.5) a cleansing - so ya.

This excerpt is an example of attempting to clarify the significance of ancestors from these participants. The topic of ancestors came up unexpectedly in this portion of the interview. Thus, you see the interviewer stumbling to construct a follow up question regarding this topic. In lines 1 to 3, the interviewer struggles to pose a clear question (seen in the form of pauses and stretched sounds) that would be answered with the adequate information. When it becomes clear that the participants may not understand the initial question being posed, the interviewer (line 4) begins to pose the question differently with the hope that the participants might understand the question at hand. Before the interviewer is able to put forward the whole reconstructed question, Lerato interrupts in order to answer. Then in lines 7 and 9, Lerato continually emphasizes they do take part in such customs outside of the *lobola* process. In line 11, Lerato goes on to declare that they are "very cultural people". In this moment, Lesego indicates that she does not entirely agree with this and quickly rebuts to repair this utterance (line 12). She particularly stresses the fact that they are not "very cultural" in the way that Lerato specifies. Lerato then cuts in (line 13) as Lesego speaks and takes this opportunity to self-repair. From here, she chooses to change her declaration and emphasize that they are at least "quite cultural". The laughter that follows seems to serve two purposes. Firstly, it is humorous that they have had this minor disagreement that ultimately results in Lerato having to make such a trivial correction regarding her original statement. Secondly, the laughter provides an opportunity to de-escalate any tension that was felt during this brief disagreement. With a drop in intonation in line 17, as if she is almost speaking to herself, Lerato repeats that they are quite cultural people. Lesego (line 18) starts explaining that practicing different forms

of cultural customs is something she grew up doing before she even understood what it meant or felt that she has space to question the customs. In line 22, the interviewer inserts back-channel utterance (mm) to indicate that they are still listening but do not want to interrupt Lesego's explanation. Then in line 23, Lesego continues to explain that only a cultural person would recognize the need to acknowledge ancestors. A little while later in the interaction, from line 28, Lerato returns to the conversation to repeat and assert how they are cultural people. She gives an example of how partaking in her grandmother's cleansing ceremony is a way of "being cultural" and performing culture.

Other participants communicate very similar beliefs regarding how individuals are 'cultural' or 'African' by means of 'believing' and 'doing':

> "The same way with going to the mountain. Everybody has their own reasons for doing it but at the end of the day its being done… One will say it's because the child will get sick or its *isiko lakhe* (their culture), they have to do it, you know? Everybody is approaching it in a different manner, but they are all doing [it]." – Vee, couples interview.

> "Because we do slaughtering, we talk to the ancestors. What else? Our kids go to the mountain and those kinds of things. So those are the things that contribute to my Africanness." – Vee, individual interviews.

> "I do believe in *amasiko* (culture) and my Africanness. I believe I am Black, I believe I will burn *impepho* (an indigenous African plant) and speak to my ancestors or my Gods…" – Vuyo, individual interview.

> "Ya and to also just add onto us being quite cultural – I mean for instance this coming weekend is a month after my grandmother passed away in December. It's literally a month since and *sinomsebenzi otlhapisa* – (we have a cleansing ceremony)." – Lerato, couple interview.

Taking into consideration that culture is constructed, malleable and constantly produced/reproduced, Wright (2002) contends that part of this production and reproduction is

done through performing culture. He draws once again from Soyinka's (1975) play to illustrate this. The play shows a moment where a Yoruba king passes away and his horseman is obliged, by custom, to commit suicide or enter into a trance in order for the king to fully transition into the afterlife. Participants show similar instances of how culture can be done by performing or taking part in rituals/customs. The statements that they make act as examples of what they do or perform culture - such as "going to the mountain" "we do slaughtering, we talk to the ancestors", "burn *impepho* and speak to my ancestors or my Gods" "they are all doing [it]" and "*sinomsebenzi otlhapisa* – (we have a cleansing ceremony)".

Furthermore, this performance is not only about the people in the physical world but also those in the cosmos. In line with Wright's (2002) example, we see that participants not only perform rituals/customs in the presence of family, but they often also include ancestors or Gods because they too are central to African culture. This is further supported by Mkhize (2004, p. 41) who states that the "relationship between the living and ancestors is one of interdependence" where customs/rituals must be performed by the living in the interest of the ancestors. In turn, the ancestors intercede with God for the living, create a connection and maintain cosmic unity and prosperity between the three entities (Ngubane, 1977).

Culture and identity as inherited.

The extracts below display some ways in which participants (or their families) come to claim their culture. As participants spoke about African culture, it appeared that some of them saw culture as something 'inherited' through parents and extended family:

> "For me to be African - I can't really answer that question. I don't really have a culture… My dad is coloured and my mom is - I don't know. I have been asking her for years. So, I don't even know where she falls so… I don't know where we fall so I don't know if I can answer that." – Siya, individual interview.

> "It's always something that's, you know? Always been introduced to us as kids before we people the people of why, you know? We did that, and we practiced it until we grew up and had our own understanding of why it's done and how it is done." – Lesego, couple interview.

> "Even with my daughter she wants to go through this traditional *umemulo* (a coming of age ceremony for young Zulu women) thing but we don't do that. And then I sat her down and told her to tell her grandmother what she wants, and she said no I want *umemulo* and the virginity testing what what what. Then she said but your family doesn't do it but then she said you guys are Zulu mos so meaning that the kids feel they are part of it, so they will do it for her." – Vee, couples interview.

When Siya is asked to describe how she defines her African identity or culture, she explains that she does not have an African culture because her father is coloured and she is unsure of her mother's cultural background. Her statement suggests that, she does not see her father's coloured identity as one that can be view as African. Furthermore, her father's coloured identity and the uncertainty of her mother's identity results in her believing that she is essentially 'cultureless'.

Lesego's statement above comes after she had described her family as cultural people. She then says it had "been introduced to us as kids… we did that, and we practiced it until we grew up and had our own understanding of why it done and how it is done." This statement, once again, suggests that her parents and other family members had taught cultural identity to her. Furthermore, all the customs/rituals she had practiced were adopted unquestioningly and only given thought and meaning in her own adult life.

The idea of culture as inherited is also seen in the case of Vee and her children. Vee is Xhosa and has raised her children as such. For example, in her interview, she clarified that her son had plans to go for Xhosa male initiation or *ulwalukho.* However, her daughter has indicated that she wants *umemulo*. *Umemulo* is a coming of age ceremony for young Zulu women (Magwaza, 2008). Similar to *ulwalukho, umelulo* ushers young girls into womanhood. From a young age, young Zulu girls are taught to be respectful, well-behaved, complete domestic tasks and to not fall pregnant before she is married (Magwaza, 2008; Mpumelelo, 2012). If she is able to do all this, she is rewarded and celebrated with *umemulo* (Magwaza, 2008; Ntshangase, 2012). Vee says her daughter wants to have *umemulo* and that she should be able to have one because her one parent (Vuyo) is Zulu and therefore she is also able to adopt this aspect of Zulu culture.

Fixed versus fluid: The possibilities for changeableness in identity.

Individuals often internalize and project themselves onto cultural identities as well as the values and meanings that come with them as a means of taking up that subjectivity and fitting into the cultural structure (Hall, 1992). In the above sections, it is seen how participants have spoken about what it means to be African and then used those frameworks to construct themselves as African. In the same breath, participants still felt that these constructions were not static and available for deconstruction and redefinition. Freire's (1973) thoughts on critical consciousness are useful in understanding how these participants engage with the status quo of culture. In his work, Freire (1973) criticizes the lack of critical engagement in the education system where teachers dictate knowledge and students passively receive, memorize and regurgitate it. He further explains that the education system mirrors the larger oppressive society where individuals are not given the opportunity to think for themselves in order to grow and create new norms or systems (Freire, 1973). This critical consciousness and engagement is visible from some of the participants. They begin to question ideas about who sets the rules for Africanness and who gets to claim African identity:

> "When I have to dress in a skirt and my *doek* (headscarf), I still do that when I'm home. I am still their child. I don't disrespect them. I don't act in a matter that makes me unAfrican. What makes me African? It's got nothing to do with the sex of it. It's [about] how I behave or how I address my culture, so I have never made them clash." – Vee, individual interview.

> "For me, African means… Firstly, I don't believe you have to be a specific culture or category to qualify as being African. You just have to have some values where you must - I guess we weren't cultural but we had values and principles like respect your elders, respect and having love for your country. I don't really say that you have to wear African clothes or whatever. I don't subscribe to that… I do not like these categories that you have to bow down and wear a skirt. So, basically if you respect the principles you were raised by, love your country and especially in Africa then that's what makes you African." – Sihle, individual interview.

> "This was for us but the way it was so hard because we couldn't find a referral manual, we couldn't find a reference… We didn't have any go to place. So, we decided that it's our sort of contribution to the whole movement of revolution of culture being progressive… It's our sort of contribution to the whole movement of revolution of culture… We have to move on and the only way to move on and make culture progressive is to force it to be progressive. One person has to do it first and then everyone else is going to be okay." – Sihle, couple interview.

> "People come up with these things and suddenly we cannot change them. If I ask who said females wear a *doek* (headscarf), who came up with it? Being lesbian does not stop me from working, eating, and every other normal thing. Why is it unAfrican? You get to countries like Ghana where you are killed for being homosexual, why if you are unable to show me what is being said as Africans? We do not document anything; we just go *abantu abadala* (elders) said so." – Lesego, couple interview.

In their initial statements, Vee and Sihle talk (contradictorily) about the place of clothing in asserting Africanness. Vee states that she wears skirts and her *doek* (headscarf) as expected of her when at home and carries herself in a way that is respectful of her culture. She then questions why the matter of sex, perhaps implying her sexuality, denies or clashes with her status as an African. Shile, on the other hand, denies that Africanness is based on what one wears (such as skirts and African clothing) and rather basis it on the principles and values of Africanness (such as *ubuntu*).

Then in their latter statements, Sihle and Lesego further critically engage with aspects of what is understood as African identity or culture. Sihle challenges the progressiveness of culture and sees it as a "movement of revolution". She understands this change to be a forceful one because protesting against the status quo of any cultural or political institution requires a lot of vigour. More importantly, she speaks from a point of agency and declares that changing cultural norms is something that "one person has to do first" in order to affect meaningful change (Freire, 1973).

Lesego then interrogates the origin of the 'rules' of how to be African and why it is seemingly impossible to amend them. She starts by questioning who determined the rules regarding how African women must wear headscarves to represent themselves as respectful to culture. She then contests how being lesbian can be in conflict with being African when there are not explicit rules written by Africans that give clear instructions on what it means to claim this identity. She finally resolves that the rules and definitions are passed down from elders or older generations who are seen to be wiser. It does not seem that she agrees with these rules but there is an understanding the African elders are always respected and given seniority and therefore, the knowledge or traditions that are passed by them should be accepted without being challenged.

Ratele (2013, p. 139) explains that part of the problem with defining traditions and customs is that this was often done by giving "powerful voices such as those of headman, chiefs and kings" who worked/ruled alongside colonial and apartheid leaders to outline what was tradition and what was not. It is these same leaders who defined who could claim tradition and who could not. Furthermore, the various traditional/cultural committees and communities of elders, which exist today, are headed by "heterosexual patriarchal masculinity" with little to no queer representation (Ratele, 2013, p. 140). There is little opportunity on a macro level to begin the process of redefining tradition and culture. However, challenging this on an individual or a micro level is still meaningful and can contribute to further changes over time.

"I am African before I am a lesbian": The complexity of identity and creating the hyphenated self.

Crenshaw (1991, p. 1245) states that all individuals occupy "multiple grounds of identity". These identities do not exist separately, nor do they take precedence over the other. At different moments, these participants articulated that they simultaneously occupied various identities such as (South) African, woman and lesbian. However, there were times it appeared that some identities took precedence over the others, which negates Crenshaw's ideas of identity. For example, when asked about the idea that homosexuality is unAfrican, participants repeatedly stated that they were African 'first' and that their African identity was dominant over others (in this case, their same-sex sexuality). These positions can be seen in the two statements below:

> "So, if you remove me being a lesbian, I am African. I am African before I am a lesbian. Being a lesbian doesn't affect every aspect of my life. It is not the end all and be all of everything. I am African. I am cultured. That's it." – Lesego, individual interview.

> "You're African first before you marry Siya. I'm African first and, as I said, African not because you are born here, not because you conform to your culture but because you stand by the principles of being an African." – Sihle, couple interview.

When the claim 'homosexuality is unAfrican' was presented and used as an example to bar participants from their African identity as found in discourse, they promptly refuted this by means of adopting a salient identity. A salient identity is the prominent identity that an individual adopts particular settings and this identity alters based on the setting (Thoits, 2012). In addition, salience hierarchy is created depending on the identity a person is most committed to setting (Thoits, 2012). In these statements, participants appear to be reinforcing their African identity and positioning it as superior to their lesbian identity. They are seen drawing on being "cultured" and living by the "principles of being an African" to establish and strengthen their positions as African. Lesego strongly disassociates her lesbian identity by making statements such as "if you remove me being lesbian" and "being lesbian doesn't affect every aspect of my life" in order to occupy this African identity. Furthermore, this might imply that she feels that her identity as African has an impact on her everyday life in a way that her same-sex sexuality does not. Sihle states that one is African before they marry their same-sex partner and emphasizes the principles that one must live by. These proclamations can be attributed to the fact that participants were raised in African or Black households and they primarily occupied this identity. It is only later in life that they come to realize and understand their sexual identity. Hence, they may choose to take this up as a secondary identity. Alternatively, these declarations can be attributed to the reality that their race and ethnicity are visible in a way that their sexual orientation is not. Therefore, they primarily encounter the world on a day-to-day basis in this way.

However, not all participants felt this way. For example, Vee spoke in direct opposition of the above as she stated, "culture and your sexuality they must co-exist… the other one must not be better than the other one." Below, participants suggest that these identities do in fact co-exist:

> "I am dating another woman, so I can't go home and slaughter a goat, *ngishise impepho* (burn an indigenous African plant)? Because I am lesbian? It has nothing to do with that. I have just tried to make this co-exist."– Vee, individual interview.

> "I believe sexuality doesn't have anything to do with Africanness or *amasiko* (customs) or like whoever you are in love doesn't dictate if you are African." – Vuyo, individual interview.

> "I don't think they clash… I don't think they do clash because we are born like this. It's not like it's a choice that you make along the way - well some people choose but most of us, this is how we were born. That's why my family could see. So, I don't think I could say there was a clash I do get that a lot outside but that's their opinion." – Tumi, couple interview.

> "I think I have integrated those two identities as I said we weren't really cultural, but we did some customs like speaking to ancestors and slaughtering an animal. I still deeply believe in that I always told myself and I told her that being a lesbian doesn't disqualify you from anything… I am African, I am African in all aspects, so it shows that its possible and being lesbian doesn't take away from anything that you've learnt or the way you grew up or your identity or anything all... It can't be that I am no longer Sihle because I am lesbian. Sihle is who I am and who I have been raised to be and all of the values and principles that I have. That's what makes me African. You can never separate the two; they have to work together and accommodate each other." – Sihle, individual interview.

Participants' intertwined identities can be explored using Fine's (1998) *Working the Hyphens*, and Fine and Sirin's (2007) *Theorizing Hyphenated Selves* papers. The hyphen refers to that which "both separates and merges personal identities" (Fine, 1998, p. 131). Based on research on multiple identities, intersectionality, transnationality and hybridity, the hyphenated self

looks at one's participation in various life contexts (social, religious, cultural, political) (Fine & Sirin, 2007). The 'hyphenated self' or 'everyday hyphen' reveals and represents the nuanced in-between of self and other – the human desire and struggle for coherence against fracturing social forces (Katsiaficas, Futch, Fine & Sirin, 2011, p. 122).

A study by Meyer and Ouellette (2009) analyses the experiences of Black LGB identities and found that individuals opted to create coherent and unified selves rather than creating conflicting selves as expected by researchers. In the same way, there was a suspicion that participants would speak more to a conflicting or discordant identity – as partially seen in the first set of statements. Fine and Sirin (2007, p. 28) warn that researchers should avoid expecting "a false dichotomy". Rather, there is leeway for inhabiting what might be understood as two incompatible identities.

Mirroring Meyer and Ouellette's (2009) study, participants opted to create hyphenated and coherent selves regarding their cultural and sexual identities. From the statements above, it is clear they did this in two ways: they either used the hyphen to separate their identities but maintain a coherent self or used the hyphen to merge identities to maintain a coherent self in the way that Fine (1998) describes. Vee compellingly questions why she is unable to participate in particular traditional customs because she is lesbian. She resolves that one identity has nothing to do with the other. Thus, these identities should be able co-exist. Similarly, Vuyo disassociates the two subjectivities by announcing that she believes that "sexuality doesn't have anything to do with Africanness". Tumi acknowledges these independent identities but insists that they do not clash. Her reasoning for this is that "we are born like this" suggesting coherence is then created by being born into one's sexual and cultural identity. Sihle presents a contradictory statement from the one she had offered previously. Here, she opts to "integrate those two identities" in order to create a coherent self. According to Hall (1992), these kinds of contradictions are expected as identities are fleeting, dynamic and dislocate each other at different times. She ultimately concludes, "you can never separate the two, they have work together and accommodate each other." Therefore, the idea that homosexuality is unAfrican is discredited multiple times by participants who decide to either detach or unify these seemingly conflicting identities in order to create a hyphenated self.

5.4. "Adapting and aligning - whatever worked at that time": Black lesbian couples navigating and re-claiming the practice of *lobola*.

"It's a patriarchal thing": Viewing *lobola* as a patriarchal practice.

While it appeared that a number of participants had always planned to get married, they did not always see the process of *lobola* being a part of their marital journey. Each of them provided different reasons why they initially wanted to bypass *lobola*. These reasons included not fully understanding the practice, not wanting to be disappointed with how the process would go, and not being sure how to conduct this process considering their same-sex sexuality. A response, however, that appeared more frequent than others was the idea that *lobola* was a 'patriarchal thing' that only had to do with men/males:

> "Because what we normally preach in the house [is] we don't want to fall under the patriarchal system." – Vee, couple interview.

> "That's why I said let me just leave it, it's theirs - it's a patriarchal thing! They'll say no you're not a man, so you can't do *lobola*." – Vuyo, couple interview.

> "We were very much against it because of the whole patriarchal thing, and it being a male thing, you know?" – Lerato, couple interview.

Shope (2006, p. 69) states, "patriarchal power is at the core of the debate over lobolo." Participants' initial perception of *lobola* mirrors this same sentiment. The literature on *lobola* further supports and documents this from different perspectives. On the extreme side of the spectrum, Magaisa (2001) contends that *lobola* is a form of "prostitution" or sex work. Rather than being paid per client like sex workers, he argues, married women are given a once-off payment for sexual and domestic services in the form of *lobola*. Magaisa (2001, p. 132) continues to say that the patriarchy is also made evident by the fact that the cattle/cash is paid to other men (i.e. father of the bride) and maintains that through the practice "men are the traders while women are the traded objects." Using a different line of thought, Mwamwenda and Monyooe (1997) claim that *lobola* is about gender roles, power and subordination. Their argument suggests that husbands are automatically given more power in their marital relationships because of paying *lobola*. This power manifests in the domestic space where wives are forced to remain silent because *lobola* has been paid (Chiweshe, 2016; Nkosi, 2011). Chiweshe (2016) analyses the sexualized nature of *lobola*. In particular, he focuses on the fact

that the amount of cattle or cash is often increased if the bride is a 'pure woman' or a virgin. This signifies the policing of women's bodies by their mothers, fathers, future husbands and in-laws. If a woman does not meet this standard (by not being a virgin and/or having children), then she is branded as "damaged goods". The resultant effect is that her *lobola* payment decreases (Chiweshe, 2016, p. 233). Shope (2006, p. 69) concludes that even though *lobola* has various economic and social purposes the core of the practice remains largely patriarchal and "confers power and control over women to men."

Dialogue as a space for negotiation and re-negotiation of culture.

After discussing *lobola* with family members and understanding why it may be necessary and/or useful to them, and before they started the process, majority of the couples indicated that they had several heartfelt conversations about what they imagined or wanted their *lobola* process to look like:

> "It wasn't necessarily a serious conversation like - okay this is it… It was these, you know; Random chats that you have and ultimately, they build up and gradually you both know now where you stand. This is how things are *gonna* work out." – Tshego, couple interview.

> "It's actually all about communication. We communicated first…" – Siya, couple interview.

> "So, we had to sort of, you know? Sort of dictate how we see it, how we understand it and how we would like for things to roll out to family members." – Lerato, couple interview.

Their families played a part in helping them talk through and reimagine what this process would look like for them:

> "And then that's when they asked me to come so that we can discuss everything. We discussed everything. The nice thing is that they actually asked me what is it that [I] want… It wasn't like everything they said [was the final word]… No, they actually asked what is it that

> you want. How do you want everything to go about? Give us a date if possible – it was like that." – Tshego, couple interview.

> "They were like okay, so how did you guys work, how did you discuss this?" – Sihle, couple interview.

The biggest task for participants was working through how they would adapt and align the *lobola* process in a way that would be relevant and useful to them and their families:

> "I just feel with *lobola*… Everybody would approach it in a way that they understand it to them - how it - I don't know how to put it. But if everyone took it the way they wanted for it to suit them." – Vee, couple interview.

> "So, we have had to sit down together and just from what we know, [we] kind of navigate *lobola* how it would relate to us as two women who are joining into one union." – Lerato, couple interview.

> "I think it's 50/50. There are some things that we couldn't do, so [we] had to align it to the lifestyle and there's some things we had to adapt to… So, the end result – so for us it was [a means to and end]." – Sihle, couple interview.

Dialogue, then, becomes a space where *lobola* (and other African customs) can be re-defined, re-negotiated and re-claimed. Firstly, it was through dialogue with family that participants were able to understand the purposes and processes of *lobola*. They were able to move from seeing *lobola* as a patriarchal practice to one that could be useful for them. Secondly, family opened a space for discussion rather than taking ownership of the process. This meant that participants were actively involved in the process of deliberating what the process might look like. Ultimately, it is through discussion with each other and family that participants could consider what parts of *lobola* they would want to adopt for themselves and the parts they would have to keep or wanted to remain the same. Vee's statement "everyone took it the way they wanted how it suits them" suggests that there is opportunity for agency regarding this practice. This contrasts with the participant(s) in Rudwick and Posel's (2014) study who stated that they did

not feel that there was much opportunity for agency when it came to African customs such as *lobola*. Instead, there was a view that *lobola* might be a fixed practice and anyone who attempted to interpret it differently was "highly disrespectful and as giving expression to a renegade Zulu cultural identity" (Rudwick & Posel, 2014, p. 126). These discussions remind us of the importance of family and community. *Lobola*, and other cultural customs like it, cannot be done in the absence of family and community. In Mkhize's (2004) explanation of the African worldview, he emphasizes that the self is always recognized and defined in relation to others and the environment. Therefore, it is important to note how the effort to re-imagine *lobola* within a queer context is, in part, a community effort.

"*Ilobolo* to me": Participants' definitions of *lobola*.

When participants finally agreed to go through the process of *lobola*, whether it was motivated by family or out of their own accord, it was clear that they all had matching ideas of what *lobola* means:

> "To me its *leboga batho ba* (thanking the people of) the person you're getting married to for the good bring up or whatever, for her assistance and the person that she is and the person that I want to spend my life with." – Lesego, couple interview.

> "Thanking the family that has brought up your partner and also acknowledging ancestors as well and the role they play in the brining of two families together." – Lerato, couple interview.

> "*Ilobola* to me is about joining two families actually that is sending cows whether it be 50 of them or whether it be 2 or whether it is 10 of them to show." – Vuyo, couple interview.

> "It's a form of respect and… also you appreciate the family because – you actually found this person as a grown human being obviously, so you are appreciating the family for raising this person and you have found them as a full human being… Then it's a form of saying thank you for raising this person from the time she was born until now; can I now take her." – Vuyo, couple interview.

> "The concept of *lobola* to me is when one family is going to another family to show their appreciation in the form of cows or money or whatever and telling them that we are showing you that we can take care of your child. We are also coming to you to take your child away, but also leaving something behind not just taking your child away for me that's what I believe." – Vee, couple interview.

> "It's basically handing over a daughter or a son that you've raised through an exchanging of gifts. It's the only form of recognized marriage in our culture. So, exchanging of gifts, monetary value or just gifts or animals." – Sihle, couple interview.

The responses from participants reflect the literature regarding the purposes and processes of *lobola*. Firstly, it is primarily about the union of two families and *ukwakha uhlobo* (creating relationships) (Chiweshe 2016). As an extension of this, it is about showing appreciation to the bride's family for raising and taking care of her to this point where they will now take over (Chiwese, 2016; Chireshe and Chireshe, 2010). Family plays a central role in the *lobola* process as it does in African philosophy (Mkhize, 2004). The *lobola* process requires family participation at almost every step – from the beginning of the letter writing that leads the negotiation process, to the end of the process when brides are welcomed into their new family homes (Nkosi, 2011). It would almost be impossible to complete this process, in its traditional form, without the intense involvement of family.

Secondly, it is about acknowledging to those in the spiritual realm (i.e. ancestors) for joining the two families and asking them to protect the marriage (Chiwese, 2016; Mkhize, 2008). Thirdly, the process involves the transaction or exchange of cattle, other livestock, money, gifts and other goods (Chiwese, 2016; Nkosi, 2011). However, three prominent aspects of *lobola* were not mentioned by participants, which are present in the literature. The first is that *lobola* acts as a form of social control where older generations are able to guide younger couples and ensure that they follow the correct path regarding their marriage and culture (Nkosi, 2011). The second absent feature is that of *lobola* as a means of distributing domestic and reproductive resources (Chiwese, 2016; Nkosi, 2011). Finally, another prominent point (and linked to the former one here) that is found in the literature is that the children born into the marriage claim

the husband's surname and this endorses the husband's claim on the children (Chiweshe, 2016).

"This is real": The ways in which *lobola* validates couples.

The process of *lobola* and getting married is important for legitimizing the union and strengthening the marriage (Rudwick & Posel, 2014). Through *lobola* couples are able to concretize their relationship, become validated by their family and acknowledged in the eyes of their culture, community and ancestors:

> "It also validates that this is the real." – Lesego, couple interview.

> "It was amazing. It's something that I would do again because I am happy. It was a headache for a process, but it was so concretizing, you feel complete." – Sihle, couple interview.

> "I explained to her that my main thing was for us to pay this *lobola* thing and get it over and done with. It's just so that we can get some sort of approval from both our families." – Tshego, couple interview.

> "Because when we sat [Vuyo's] mom down and told her that we wanna get married… She said that I am happy people will see you guys are serious because *amarelationships wenu aphelela emoyeni* (your relationships disappear into thin air) you're not serious so now it shows we are serious. And for them to say you guys must do *ilobolo* it means they are taking us seriously. They are taking the relationship serious because the *lobola* thing *akuyona into yokudlala* (is not something to be taken lightly)." – Vee, couple interview.

> "For me, personally, my investment is that I am going to be treated like an equal. Equal when among everybody. I am not going to be treated like an outcast. I am not going to be made to feel unworthy of carrying this surname… a true *makoti* (bride) or a person worthy of carrying the surname" – Vee, couple interview.

> "It was about us finally getting married, and it will be a recognized marriage in my culture and in her culture." – Sihle, couple interview.

Lobola as a means of validation is clearly seen from both participants and in the literature. Participants use words and phrases such as "validates" "concretizing", "taking the relationship serious", "recognized marriage" and "approval" to illustrate the ways in which *lobola* makes their relationships and marriages valid. It is the seal of authentication. Vee presents a very uncomfortable but realistic experience for queer couples. She explains how going through *lobola* and getting married was the one way to get her and her partner's family to view their relationship as a legitimate one rather than another short-lived or trivial relationship. Parental acknowledgment of queer relationships is often a complicated matter (Beals & Peplau, 2003). Some parents are able to openly and fully embrace their queer children and their relationships while others, never acknowledge them to avoid giving them visibility and legitimacy (Valentine et al., 2003; Livermon, 2015). Vee's statement is an example of how *lobola* is the seal of authentication that provides this acknowledgement and validation. The other participants also provide different ways in which marriage and *lobola* provide legitimacy for them. For Vee, once again, this can be seen in her statement, "treated like an equal" and being deserving of "carrying this surname". It is through *lobola* and through marriage that she becomes "a true *makoti*". Chiwese's (2016) work on *lobola* supports this. He argues that *lobola* is a "rite of passage and a confirmation" of womanhood and, by extension, a way of becoming a true wife and mother (Chiwese, 2016, p. 234). Sihle states that getting married is a way of being "recognized" in her and her partner's culture. This can be understood using Rudwick and Posel's (2014) work, which states that marriage is often used to demonstrate cultural identity as well as gaining respect through. Therefore, the practice is not only about joining families as discussed above but also about "social visibility, acceptance, and recognition that is central to the desire to meld African tradition to queerness" (Livermon, 2015, p. 37).

Additionally, *lobola* and marriage are the entry points for couples to be accepted into each other's ancestral group and, as a result, are able to take part in family rituals or customs:

> "I think it's mainly about joining two families and joining the ancestors as well." – Tshego, couple interview.

"We're the same right? Whatever they are doing – if in her family *kuthelwa ngeyongo* then everybody is going to be done that – I'll also have that done... They just said that *ekhaya omakoti bayalotsholwa* (at home the brides are paid *lobola* for) and this is the process and you're also gonna go through the process. If *ukuthi umakoti lay'khaya wenza so nawe uzowenza* (you're a bride in this family then you do things like so and you will do this too)." – Vee, couple interview.

"Our families have merged. I know my mom knows or my dad knows where I am. My ancestors know they know you. Even when we do traditional ceremonies, she's there because she's officially one of the family – one of us, I'm officially one of them so whatever happens from both sides – it's applied to the both of us." – Sihle, couple interview.

"[It was] the most important one and we wanted to get it out of the way. The traditional wedding is the most expensive because we want to do it properly." – Vee, couple interview.

"As long as my family gets the whole thing that they will be giving their child away but in the proper procedure." – Sihle, couple interview.

"Because when you do that somewhere, somehow if you don't get blessings bad luck will follow." – Tshego, couple interview.

"Short cuts come up to bite you in the butt like after you know? You think you're
done but it's not the case. I mean we have one couple they married only in the court of law but no one else knows in the family because ya you don't want that." – Lesego, couple interview.

The role of ancestors and spirituality in *lobola* has been studied and highlighted broadly (Rudwick & Posel, 2014; Bagnol, 2008; Granjo, 2006; Sideris, 2004). Sideris (2004) says that

lobola is associated with the spiritual realm, which is vastly significant to all African communities. Ngubane (1981) adds that a part of completing this marital process is making sure that ancestors are recognized (by rituals and ceremonies) as this will bless and protect the marriage. Then, there is the preoccupation with doing *lobola* "properly". Vee and Sihle state that it is a way of ensuring that the union is fully endorsed by upholding the tradition of *lobola* (Chiwese, 2016; Graham & Kiguwa, 2004). The effects of not acknowledging or thanking the ancestors are potentially dangerous (Rudwick & Posel, 2014; Ngubane, 1981). If one gets married without doing *lobola* properly or without respecting ancestors, then the wrath of ancestors can be seen through illness or a curse (Rudwick & Posel, 2014). Tshego, for example, demonstrates this as she worries that if she does not get blessings from her family and ancestors, then "bad luck will follow. Therefore, *lobola* remains a significant way of expressing one's appreciation of ancestors. Consequently, it has to be done properly.

The different investments in the *lobola* practice.

One of the underlying curiosities of this study, although not explicitly stated, was understanding the participants' personal reasons or investments in *lobola*. Customary marriages between same-sex individuals are not recognized by South African law, and *lobola* is not needed to validate the customary marriage or a civil union (Barker, 2011; Bonthuys, 2008). During recruitment of participants, it appeared that other same-sex couples had opted to get married without going through this cultural process. So, what is the investment in such a practice? Especially in light of the ever present 'homosexuality is unAfrican' rhetoric. Below are some of the reasons that participants provided:

> "As for me, I wanted to take it out, people must know and mustn't be afraid to come out, get married and do whatever they want to do. You only live once anyway so ya. Okay, for me getting married was about, you know, joining two families as well as to get the word out there to say it's actually possible... " – Tumi, couple interview.

> "This is ours… Why should [we] be exempt? So this is just for future reference or for anyone who wants to do this process. We've done this, we're not dead." – Sihle, couple interview.

> "I think our investments were the same. We actually had the same investments. It was all about the future it was about making it easy for the upcoming LGBTI ya. It was all about making it easy for them." – Siya, couple interview.

These participants chose to go through with *lobola* for themselves and the people who like them. Tumi's response here speaks to wanting to show other queer individuals what is possible regarding marriage and *lobola*. She admits that the process is about joining two families but, more than that, it is also about letting other queer people know that it is "actually possible" to get married despite what may be said about same-sex marriage. Sihle makes a very striking statement. She states, "this is ours" implying culture, *lobola* and marriage, and goes on to ask "why should [we] be exempt" as queer individuals. Like Livermon's (2015) article on *Useable Traditions*, Sihle insists that African practices are 'useable to' Black queers even though they are continually alienated from African subjectivity due to their same-sex sexuality. Her declaration plainly indicates that Sihle counts herself as an African deserving of all parts of her culture/customs/traditions and rejects exclusion from these practices simply because she is lesbian. She, like Tumi, explains that she wants to be an example for other queer individuals and show them that this is possible. Siya proclaims that she had a similar investment in this process as Sihle and Tumi – wanting to make it easier for the future generations of the LGBTQI+ community. Therefore, even though participants chose to do this for themselves, there is a very strong and clear message about providing visibility and representation for other members of the LGBTQI+ community.

These participants have chosen to do this for family:

> "We were actually doing it for our families... We're just doing it to make our families happy because it's their thing. We say the traditional part of the marriage is theirs and the other side is ours. So, whatever traditional things we need to do is because of our families." – Vee, couple interview.

> "I think my family is more into this whole *lobola* thing and culture." – Sihle, couple interview.

The participants above opted to go through the process in order to satisfy their families, and to respect to their cultures. In Vee's statement, she explicitly states that it was more about making her and her partner's family "happy" because it was something that they wanted and found to be important. Moreover, it is clear that tradition was not as important to them as it was to family. Therefore, fulfilling this was a middle ground act for the families to get what they wanted as well as for Vee and Vuyo to have the union that they desired for themselves. Sihle's statement reflects the very same response. These responses make for interesting reflection of how and when culture and tradition are claimed. Throughout the paper and in a large portion of participants' answers, 'Africanness' is something that most of the participants claim for themselves and embody in a variety of ways. In the statement above, Sihle states that culture, traditions, *lobola* is something that is "ours" and takes ownership of it very powerfully. However, in these latter statements, there is also a sense that there is a little less investment in culture or at least particular practices than what might have been imagined or understood. Alternatively, doing it for family may be a means of seeking validation, which is just as important to participants as discussed in the sections above.

Money matters: The issue of money in the practice of *lobola*.

There are varying and sometimes contradicting statements or understanding about the role of money in the process of *lobola*. Emphasis is on the fact that the monetary transaction is not about buying the bride (Shope, 2006; Rudwick & Posel, 2014; Chigwedere, 1982). Rather it is about compensating the bride's family for the "loss of their daughter, her earning capacity, her children's *ilobolo* and the money spent on her education and upbringing" (Dlamini, 1983, p. 197). However, the views of the two participants below reveal otherwise:

> "Besides the messed up version of [*lobola*] now you must pay back the money for taking your own child to school. Now I must pay you back? You understand? Or, now my child has a car, who said get them a car? You know? I'm not buying your education. So for me it's just a - to say thank you and as a Black child to come together and be one." – Lesego, couple interview.

> "It's also the misconception of *lobola* in our culture. To say you are paying for every other thing that is your parent's responsibility - I mean we do understand the concept of Black tax but this is not it... It's like

> me thanking her family and vice versa to say yes – it's not even a huge amount where someone is just looking for R75000 just to get this thing done." – Lesego, couple interview.
>
> "Some families make a mockery out of *lobola* and they want R90000 for instance… Sometimes it becomes a thing of, I took this child to university or I did this and that, [so] pay me back. Then [you find yourself] in debt for 20 years and unmarried because I can't afford a wedding or even taking up a loan from the pressures of *lobola* from both families." – Vee, couple interview.

In both statements, Lesego expresses that the responsibility of paying back parents for their children's upbringing, education and any other additional costs should not be at the center of *lobola*. Vee's statements reflect a similar sentiment. Even more, both Lesego and Vee feel that large sums of money that are often requested from either family make a "mockery" out of the process and potentially stand in the way of couple's getting married or plunges them into debt further down the road.

The excerpt from Vee and Vuyo's couples' interview below revisits the issue of money in the *lobola* process using conversation analysis. The topic of money emerges multiple times during their interview, but the focus will be on the select sections below. The initial interaction plays out after I ask the couples what *lobola* means to each of them:

1	Vuyo: *Ilobola* (1.0) to me is about joining two families actually (0.5) that is sending
2	cows whether it be 50 of them or whether it be 2 or whether it is 10 of them
3	(0.3) to show =
4	((Vee gazes at Vuyo))
5	(0.2) ((everyone laughs))
6	Vee: I want those 50 (0.5) I want 50.
7	((everyone laughs))
8	Vuyo: You're not a princess though.
9	Vuyo: ((laughs)) Ya no matter how many there are it is a form of respect…

In her answer (line 1-3) about what *lobola* means to her, Vuyo explains that one could be sending 2, 10 or 50 cows as a customary offering for marriage. Vee then cuts into Vuyo's sentence by (line 4) turning her head to look at Vuyo as she talks about the amount of cattle that one can potentially send to the others family. This gaze incites laughter between all of us although at this point it is not clear why. Soon after, Vee expresses that she would like 50 cattle as Vuyo has just mentioned. Maraev, Mazzocconi, Howes and Ginzburg (2018) suggest that laughter can be distinguished into four categories: i) pleasant incongruity; ii) social incongruity; iii) pragmatic incongruity; and closeness/pleasure. Our laughter here can best be described as pleasant incongruity as we laugh at Vee's demand for 50 cows. Still jokingly, Vuyo tells Vee she is not a princess and, therefore, undeserving of the 50 cattle. Vuyo (line 9) laughs it off once again and continues with her explanation. Later on in the interview, we find another interesting interaction. This time, Vuyo is describing how she and her uncles went about discussing what they had planned for their trip to Vee's family home to begin *lobola* negotiations. Again, the subject of the *lobola* amount appears:

1	Vuyo:	So they said tell us what you have and we will work from there. I said if we
2		can just get a goat to slaughter for the purposes of joining ancestors =
3	Vee:	How much?
4	(.) ((everyone laughs)) (1)	
5	Vuyo:	We just wanted a goat for joining the ancestors since we couldn't drive with a
6		goat to Kimberly (0.2) They sell them on the other side so asked them to buy
7		us a goat on the other side and we'd just collect it and take it home (0.3) and 8
		then I had some small cash.
9	Vee:	How much was it?
10	(.) ((everyone laughs))	
11	Vuyo:	(0.5) Those are matters for the elders.
12	Linda:	((laughs))
13	Vee:	[One thousand?]
14	Vuyo:	[↓Did your mother tell you?]
15	Vee:	((giggles)) [I will turn around at the gate.]
16	Vuyo:	[↓Did your mother did you?]
17	Vee:	No.
18	Vuyo:	↓Did you ask her?

19	Vee:	Even my mom [doesn't know]
20	Vuyo:	[↓Did you ask her?]
21	Vee:	Even my mom doesn't know how much she was *lobola'd* for.
22	Vuyo:	(0.2) *Hhayi:*:: Even me I don't know.

As Vuyo is trying to explain the strategy that she had with her uncles, Vee cuts into the conversation and asks Vuyo "how much" (line 3). There is a pause before we all break into laughter, as this is the second time Vee is probing into this issue regarding money. This laughter can be coded as social incongruency because there is a violation of social norm (Maraev et al., 2018). Typically, brides or those on the receiving end of *lobola* are not to know the amount agreed upon for the marital transaction. This is followed by another momentary silence before Vuyo attempts to ignore Vee and continues explaining her said strategy. This time around, she is able to get further in her explanation, but Vee is not willing to surrender her pursuit and probes once more "how much was it" (line 9)? More laughter occurs because of Vee's persistent interest in the amount. Vuyo pauses for a moment before she decides to engage with Vee and tells her that the elders only know matters pertaining to money. In line 13, a string of overlaps begins to happen as both Vee and Vuyo are trying to find out how much the amount was and how much the other knows about this amount. Vee (line 13) wonders if it was R1000 and is overlapped by Vuyo asking if Vee's mother had told her the actually amount. Furthermore, in these moments of overlap, Vuyo speaks in a lower and more serious intonation while Vee maintains her usual intonation. Vuyo's firm pitch might be interpreted as sternness about this matter, the fact that it is one not to be discussed and expected to remain amongst the elders in the family. In line 15, she jokingly states (indicated by her giggle) that she will turn around at the gate if the amount is only R1000. This is once again overlapped by Vuyo's asking if Vee's mom had told her about the amount. Finally, Vee (line 17) answers and tells Vuyo that her mom had not told her about this said amount. Still firm, Vuyo asks Vee if she has asked her mom about the amount. As Vee starts explaining that even her mom does not know, Vuyo cuts in and overlaps Vee as she sternly asks, once again, if Vee has asked her mom. Vee repeats that her own mother does not know. In line 22, Vuyo finally answers Vee and explains that she also does not know the amount that was ultimately paid. In these two excerpts, we are presented with the discussion of money in the transaction process – this is typically not be spoken about between partners. Both pieces illustrate a back and forth and pushing of boundaries regarding how much money is sent and expected. Although the discussion at hand is serious, there is

repeated laughter and humour to "flood out" the seriousness of those moments (Hepburn & Varney, 2013).

***Isibongo sami*: The place of surnames in the *lobola* process and culture.**

In IsiZulu, *isibongo* refers to a surname, clan name or praise name (Gunner, 1991; Masuku, 2005). *Isibongo* "represents social identity and can be used for tracing kinship and genealogy" (Masuku, 2005, p. 14). Any children born to a couple after the process of *lobola* belong to the husband's family and take on *isibongo sakhe* (his surname) (Rudwick & Posel, 2014). Passing on a surname is significantly attached to lineage continuation and growth. This is a large aspect of African family dynamics and culture (Ekane, 2013). Out of the 4 couples in this study, only 1 of them had children. Faced with the question of whether they planned to have children and how they would navigate selecting a surname, the couples without children had this to say:

> "When we were talking about it, one thing we spoke about and agreed on was we don't have any issues with whose surname we take because we're both comfortable with taking either surname… I think for us it just means one surname brings us so much closer and having a family – we would like to grow our family and have kids and that sort of thing. So, we want that - this is us! This is what we definitely agreed upon like, this is us." – Lerato, couple interview.

> "I guess we'll just take things as they come - just going with the flow… I don't know if what I'm going to say is going to be relevant but ultimately for me like I'm going to take her surname. So, we're basically because I have always told her that I won't have kids until I am married, and I've changed my surname, okay? So, should we have kids then obviously those kids will be named after her and they are my kids. They don't belong to her family and my family. They are ours." – Tshego, couple interview.

Through continuous dialogue, Lerato and Lesego have agreed not to have one person's surname taking priority over the other. Rather, they speak about surnames as something that would unite their future family unit. For them, a surname is not about one person's family making claim over the children in the relationship but rather creating the sense of

family/community/unity that is important to African culture (Mkhize, 2004). Tshego offers a similar response. However, she has opted to take on her partner's surname. She also thinks it is appropriate for her children to have the same surname. Tshego also explicitly states that the children that are born into their marriage do not belong to their larger family units but rather they belong to them strictly as a couple. In the case of these lesbian relationships, there is no husband or husband's family to claim belonging over any children from the marriage. These couples use this as an opportunity to reform this aspect of culture and the greater meaning of the *lobola* process. From the extracts above, it appears that they used their agency to re-form and re-claim this part of tradition by asserting that any future kids primarily belong to them. There is deliberate need to create a strong sense of unity within their own immediate family first before sharing this with the extended family.

Vee and Vuyo are the only couple with children. Vee has two children from previous relationships. Both children use her maiden surname. The excerpt below details an extended interaction between Vee, Vuyo and the researcher regarding children and surnames. The discussion plays out as they explain that their children want to change their surnames (to Vuyo's surname) once the couple is married:

Linda: And then I think the whole matter - The children that come from a marriage in a heterosexual schema are belonging to the husband's family or whatever the case. So how have you guys, because you have kids, how have you guys navigated that issue around children and belonging? How have you encompassed children into the *lobola* process in terms of the surnames and belonging to whose family blah blah blah?

Vee: Yes yes yes.

Linda: How did you guys work around that?

Vuyo: Eish you see that issue – even now it's still a problem in terms of surnames and what not. Because obviously I met her with kids and I don't have kids. Obviously those kids were born out of heterosexual relationships and were raised by grandmother and grandfather. So me as a Zulu person and following Zulu culture, a child that was born out of wedlock was belonging to the grandmother and grandfather. Let's say she was getting married to a heterosexual relationship she was going to leave those children behind and be *gogo's* children - even the surname would be the grandmother's surname. Patriarchal system ((laughs)). So when it comes to that I said I won't want them

to take my surname not because I am stingy with my surname just not wanting to confuse the kids.

Linda: Okay.

Vee: But what do they want?

Vuyo: They want the surname.

Vee: They want her surname.

Linda: Really.

Vuyo: Ya.

Vee: You can ask my son now, he will tell you. He's the one who asked so when am I changing my surname?

Linda: ((laughs)) That's sweet though.

Vuyo: Ya but -

Vee: We were like no but you need to carry on our surname and he said no I don't want to.

The researcher begins this interaction by asking them their understanding of what it means to have children, surnames, and how they maneuver around the matter. Vuyo begins to clarify that by alluding to her culture. The children have the correct surnames (the maternal grandparents' surnames) as they were born to Vee while she was not married. Customarily in Zulu culture, children born outside of the context of marriage belong to and are given their maternal grandparents surnames (Hunter, 2006). If the father of the child pays *inhlawulo* (a fine paid for impregnating a woman who is not married) then he at least has access to the child/children. However, they do not take on his surname (Hunter, 2006). It is only through paying *lobola* and marrying the mother that he is able to claim them and have them take on his surname (Hunter, 2006). Vuyo feels the children should remain with their grandparent's surnames because this is what culture dictates, and it is something she believes in. Furthermore, it appears she feels that changing their surnames would "confuse the kids." It is unclear what she means by this but perhaps she feels it may disrupt their understanding of culture and how their sexuality affects this dynamic. Despite all this, it is revealed by Vee that the children want to take on Vuyo's surname. Vee then brings to attention the issue of passing on her son's father's family surname and lineage continuation but her son disregards this and insists on having Vuyo's surname in spite of this.

Vuyo: So I feel like it's going to be a tall order because *eish.*

Vee: It's tough.

Vuyo: Ya.

Vee: Because you are embracing it in a Zulu way.

Vuyo: Ya but – because to you guys it doesn't matter -

Vee: Because we're not traditional.

Vuyo: Ya to me - also I have never had a conversation with mom about this thing.

Vee: But I just feel – right? My personal view is that we must just make these kids happy it's Not about everybody else it's about them.

Vuyo: Ya, I know.

Vee: We must make them happy. If they say they want your surname just give it to them. It's just a surname.

Vuyo: Ya I know it's just a surname. I know -

Vee: And then we'll just do whatever traditional slaughtering and whatever.

Vuyo: Ya if - and that's also the problem. If we give them the surname, they'll have to be introduced to the ancestors of my family and slaughter a goat, *bafake isiphandla* (wear a goat skin wristband) -

Vee: Ya that's fine. I just feel we must do what the children want. At the end of the day all these old people are going to be dying and leaving the kids behind with heartache. The kids are going to hate us for the rest of their lives. Like my mom has this surname and I always wanted to have that surname.

Vuyo: But you are forgetting about uPapa in Kimberly you know how uPapa is with the kids.

Vee: It's a conversation that we need to have with our families then.

Vuyo: You see? ((shrugs))

Linda: ((laughs))

Vee: Because we've been having this conversation between the two of us you know. We need to introduce the conversation to them and say the kids need to introduce the conversation to them and say we want to take on this other surname.

In this excerpt, Vuyo explains that the surname issue is a "tall order" while Vee also expresses that it is "tough" task. It is at this point that they start to unpack why this process may be difficult due to tradition and going about changing the surname in an accurate way. Even though she feels it is "tough", Vee believes that the children should have the surname that they

want and that tradition and customs should not be at the center of making this change. Vuyo sees it as a difficult task because she is more invested in making this change in a manner that is culturally appropriate. It is made more complicated by the fact that they are a same-sex couple. In a heterosexual setting, once *lobola* is paid, a man and a woman who have a child out of wedlock can have the child/children simply take on their paternal surname (Hunter, 2006). However, what does the cultural process look like when the biological mother is not getting married to the biological father of the child/children? Vee resolves that a traditional slaughtering will suffice for this purpose. Vuyo then agrees but adds the importance of properly introducing the children to her family ancestors and *bafake isiphandla (wear a goat skin wristband)*. In this interaction, it is clear that Vee and Vuyo are invested in cultural processes in varying ways. This potentially becomes a barrier for some decisions. In the end, Vuyo reminds Vee that uPapa (Vee's father) is also invested in the lives of her children. Ultimately, they cannot make a decision without consulting them. They both resolve that this conversation needs to take place with family. Firstly, we are reminded that family and community are at the center of African life. Secondly, dialogue once again becomes a very important tool for re-imaging and re-constructing African identities, traditions, cultures and customs. It is through dialogue that Vee, Vuyo and their family would be able to create new ways of navigating such a process that considers and embraces the structure of this family rather than deeming it impossible.

Traditional versus White Wedding

A wedding marks the official celebration of two people joining in marriage. The ways in which weddings are carried out vary between cultures and countries. For African couples, there may be a challenge of having to choose between a traditional wedding, a white wedding or both. A white wedding can be defined as celebrating a union between a man and woman - it is the Western way of celebrating marriage. A traditional wedding can vary in definition depending on which part of Africa you are in. This kind of wedding is also typically about joining a man, a woman and their families. These weddings include a range of customs and traditions. When asked about having a traditional and/or white wedding, participants provided these responses:

> "I don't really - I'm not really up for that white wedding thing." – Tshego, couple interview.

> "A white wedding would have been enough for us." – Vee, couple interview.

> I wouldn't be able to be a part of rituals because I would not be able to do traditional things like *ukugcaba* (cultural facial incisions) because I haven't been introduced to ancestors, but they are doing family traditional things for me. – Vee, couple interview.

> "So, my uncle said it would be wrong for you to get married and we don't introduce the ancestors and just do a white wedding." – Vuyo, couple interview.

> "Sometimes you want to go the white wedding route… but it's not enough because you are an African." – Lesego, couple interview.

There is something particularly interesting in these responses and justifications. The participants provide insight into how and what a white versus a traditional wedding would mean for them and their Africanness. The weddings are about validation (by family/ancestors) and maintaining African identity (even in light of queerness). Some couples, like Tshego and Tumi, explained that a white wedding is merely not a priority for them. Others, like Vee and Vuyo, insist that a white wedding would have been enough for them. In her next statement, Vee clarifies that without a traditional wedding, she feels as though she would not be able to fit into the family or be welcomed by the ancestors. Vuyo further substantiates this by saying her own uncle felt that a traditional wedding was imperative so that Vee could be presented to their ancestors. This links back to the time-space (ancestors) and human-activity (family/community) orientation of African epistemology as explained by Mkhize (2004). What Vee speaks about here, in not so many words, is the importance of having "cosmic unity" between all these entities. She implies that it is important that she has access to all parts of culture and tradition and this is only accessible by having a traditional wedding and taking part in all necessary customs that welcome her into her partner's family as well as the ancestral realm. Even though a white wedding is what Vee and Vuyo would have wanted, they acknowledge that it would not be adequate to validate their place as African people. Lesego makes a similar argument by stating that a white wedding is a ceremony that some couples may want but it is simply not enough.

"Blessing or not": Setting the boundaries for family and culture.

Ekane (2013) asserts that African family patterns/dynamics are undergoing gradually transformation through processes of modernization. While particular customs and traditions remain at the center of African people and their culture, others are beginning to fall away. For example, particular African communities take on patriarchal and hierarchical patterns/dynamics that emphasize the larger community over the individual. However, Ekane (2013) claims that because of modernization and other such processes, these patterns/dynamics are changing. Some people are able to take on more individualistic approaches in their lives in ways they may not have been able to do before. Participants, throughout the study, continually showed the ways they attempted to uphold respect, gain approval and maintain harmony within their families. However, they also remained steadfast in the fact that they would not let this need for community and harmony take precedence over their partners and their relationships. As a result, they persistently set boundaries to protect themselves and their partners from any ill treatment, disrespect or disregard that came from their families:

> "Yes, it was a formality, but we were still going to do [*lobola*] even if [the family] gave us the blessing or not." – Tumi, couple interview.

> "I told them that Vuyo's family is coming and you're going to embrace them, you are going to accommodate them. And whatever they are bringing, its fine you will talk about it on that day. But no one is going to make them feel unworthy and no one is going to argue. If you don't want to be there, you don't have to be there! At the end of the day it's about me… So, I just told them this is what I want, and this is what is going to happen that's it. So, I wouldn't know who said what, I just gave them this ultimatum and I left." – Vee, couple interview.

> "One thing that we would say reigned was our feelings. It was like number one. Everything else had to follow. If you're not comfortable with giving - my family receiving whatever funds then we not gonna do it, we'll find another way of doing it. But luckily it worked. Our families knew that this was new, and they had to adapt to whatever that we say were comfortable with… As I said before that we did not want

> to compromise anyone's feelings. Our feelings came first, and the procedures came after." – Sihle, couple interview.

Tumi's statement presents a contrast from the way that participants spoke about the importance of family earlier in the paper. She makes it clear that her and her partner would move forward with the wedding plans even without the involvement of their fiancé's family. Freire's (1973) opinions on critical consciousness and agency can be applied here once again. Tumi asserts her agency by stating that she would go ahead with the wedding plans without the presence of family. This would certainly be a difficult task bearing in mind how immersed in the *lobola* process the family might be. However, it also provides an opportunity to think about the ways to reform the practice should families not participate. More so, this is a moment and an example of how individuals and couples are able to redefine their own sense of freedom and legitimacy in this process that is not tied to the family.

Vee's statement warns family members who have malicious feelings to stay away from the marital process. This is very different from her earlier statements that sought approval of family members and wanted them to be fully involved. She additionally center's herself in the statement "it's about me" in a way that is not typical of the *ubuntu* philosophy that requires individuals to always think of others before themselves and in relation to themselves. Because it is so uncommon to what is thought of as African philosophy, it can definitely be seen as creating a space for agency in culture. Even if it is important and respectful to abide by the rules of culture, this agency allows participants to determine and stand by their own rules regarding the treatment they should get.

Finally, like Vee, Sihle showed deep appreciation for her family, their acceptance and their involvement in this process throughout the study. Nonetheless, here she repeatedly stated that protecting her relationship and feelings came first while "the procedures came after". Once again, there is a clear sense of wanting to place her and her partner's own feelings before those of the larger family/community in a way that is not reflective of African tradition. Therefore, it is possible to resolve that harmonious relationships and joining two families is vastly important to this process but participants indicate that this cannot happen at the expense of themselves or their relationships.

"Taking her as a man and taking me as a woman": Exploring the complexities of gender for lesbian couples going through *lobola*.

The presence of gender is unavoidable when a queer couple goes through a heteronormative process of *lobola*. In different moments of the conversation, participants made an effort to detach themselves from the gender and the role that it would play in this marital transaction:

> "Regardless of gender… This is how it needs to happen." – Lerato, couple interview.

> "And again, if you remove gender roles or genders really, you still have the same concept." – Lesego, couple interview.

However, it quickly becomes clear that gender is always at the center of this practice and it is almost impossible to navigate the process without it. Heteronormativity is often recreated in one way or another. For example, Livermon (2015) notes:

> "…the provision of *lobola* may take on specifically gendered overtones, with parents of feminine gendered queer men desiring *lobola* payments. Furthermore, for many feminine gendered queer men, receiving *lobola* confirms their status as "wife" or partner to their masculine gendered partners. " (Livermon, 2015, p. 36).

Although the example used here is that of queer men, it is applicable to queer women. Those who are feminine presenting are given the role of 'woman' and 'wife' while those who are masculine presenting are seen as the 'man' or 'husband'. In the study, the implicit process of making one individual the 'woman' and the other the 'man' happened in the following ways:

> "For it to make sense to people it would be to apply their subjective thoughts to the situation. For example, Lerato asked me to marry her and I was okay great but now people already and saying she is the male figure. How does that make you [her] the male figure?" – Lesego, couple interview.

> "… Like the whole taking her as a man and taking me as a woman. We had to adapt to that so that they could best understand it." – Sihle, couple interview.

> "So, we know its two women and the family know it's two women but because they had the expectation - like okay Sihle is going to be the woman and that was the biggest fear I didn't want them to take it that way. I didn't want them to take it that it's a man and a woman, but we couldn't get over that obstacle because it's the only way that people [understand] it." – Sihle, couple interview.

> "My only fear was when you get married you get a day with your uncle where he has to lecture you like are you sure you wanna marry this person? So, my anxiety was only for that day. That was the only day I had but it went well… They ask you a hundred times - are you sure you want to marry this person? Are you sure that you are ready for this person? Like they ask you one question in different ways... The thing is they just treated us like a man and a woman. I think they just blocked that thing - that we were both women. Ya, they just blocked it. Cause even if you are getting married, that day [with the] uncles is supposed to be a man. So, they just say no I have to go. Why do I have to go? But I didn't question it because I know I know I want to be with my woman after that. So, I just went… I just did it. I don't know why they have it with two women, but we just went with it." – Siya, couple interview.

In each of these statements, we see how heteronormativity is enforced onto the couples in very similar ways. Lesego and Sihle speak about how their family members needed to gender them and their partners in a particular way in order for them to "best understand it". Even though they vehemently dispute that there is a male figure in their relationship or that one person should be seen as a man and the other as a woman, they both eventually surrender to the reality that it's an "obstacle" that they couldn't necessarily overcome because, once again, "it's the only way that people [understand]". Siya's experience is a direct reflection of how one is forced to align or acclimate to the pre-existing conditions of *lobola* even though it may not be one's

personal desire. As part of the *lobola* process, the groom is pulled aside (by the father/uncles of the bride) and faces tough questions whether he is sure and ready to get married. Even though Siya does not see herself as the man in the relationship and felt that this part of the practice should be amended in the case of two women, she was called in to play the role of the groom who is to be questioned. Furthermore, she states that the family "blocked" and disregarded that they were two women getting married. Therefore, she had to play the role of man in this instance. There is a kind of violence that can be sensed in this moment as Siya speaks about her anxiety in having to take part in this as well as not having the space to question what is happening.

More often than not, especially in butch-femme relationships, "*lobola* negotiations would follow conventional understandings of public gender performance, with the masculine performing queer woman paying *lobola* for the feminine gender performing queer woman" (Livermon, 2015, p. 37). The participants in this study explicitly stated that the way in which their processes unfolded was not determined by projected gendered roles or performances. Yet, this is somehow precisely what appeared to happen. To illustrate this more clearly: the individuals who proposed and ultimately paid *lobola* were the masculine presenting (MP) or butch partners and the families of the feminine presenting (FP) or femme partners were those that received *lobola*. Even though it appeared that they were reinforcing heteronormative relationship structures, they each defended that this was not the case and justified why they opted to navigate the process in the way that they did. Lerato (MP) proposed to Lesego (FP) and ultimately paid *lobola* to Lesego's family. They explained that this was in no way related to Lerato being given the role of 'the boy'. Rather, through discussions with family, they found that the person who proposes first, in this case it happened to be Lerato, is responsible for the portion of *lobola*. Vuyo (MP) paid *lobola* for Vee (FP) since Vuyo's family was invested in tradition and they would not allow her to get married without going through the full process. On the other hand, Vee's family did not care for traditional practices in the same way as Vuyo's family. Therefore, this process was not of importance to them in a way. Sihle (FP) felt that her family was very traditional and would not let her leave her family home without receiving *lobola* and participating in the associated ceremonies. On the other hand, Siya's (MP) family was not cultural, and ultimately did not expect much. Tumi (MP) and Tshego (FP) did not explicitly indicate why their process played out in the manner that it did but in the end Tumi was responsible for the *lobola* payment to Tshego's family. Furthermore, to emphasize their

resistance or agency, several of the feminine-presenting partners were adamant that they would have been willing to pay *lobola* if the circumstances required this:

> "For example, Lerato asked me to marry her and I was okay great but now people already were saying she is the male figure. How does that make you the male figure? What constitutes that in this figure?" – Lesego, couple interview.

> "As feminine as I am if I had asked her to marry me [then] I would be sending over my family because I would have initiated it." – Lesego, couple interview.

> "Even if I felt that I also want to pay if *lobola* and my family was believing in *lobola* and they were hardcore traditional people and they wanted it - I was also gonna do it. It's not that it's one sided because she is the butch and I'm the femme, no… It's just that her family believes. If my family's beliefs were also hardcore and saying they wanted it, then we also would have done it." – Vee, couple interview.

In the attempt to gain acceptance through *lobola*, it seems that there is a constant tug of war between resistance and sacrifice. There is an initial effort to view *lobola* as a practice that two women can participate stating that if you eliminate gender "you still have the same concept". Having said that, the process of *lobola* does not materialize this way for them. Whether it is out of their families' projection of gender or their own (unintentional) accord, they ended up replicating heteronormative ways of performing this practice. An argument can be made for the fact that these queer couples use their agency to challenge and re-construct this African customary construct. At the same time, they are forced to adapt and sacrifice some things in order to gain access to this process.

Chapter 6
Summary and conclusion

This study sought to investigate the experiences of *lobola* for Black African same-sex couples in South Africa. This examination proved to be much multilayered, as it required the analyses of many sub-sections. Firstly, there was a need to unpack what it meant to be Africa, then unpack what it meant to be queer/lesbian in the context of Africa and finally what it meant to re-imagine a heteronormative, African custom such as *lobola* in the context of same-sex relationships. Furthermore, there was an intention to understand whether African cultures, customs and traditions can be re-constructed in ways that allow queer individuals to make use of them. Alice Walker's short story titled *Everyday Use* (1973) and Xavier Livermon's *Useable Traditions* (2015) help to draw together and conclude the findings of this study.

Walker's (1973) short story is narrated from the point of view of Mama – a woman with two daughters with conflicting ideas on identity and culture/tradition. Her one daughter, Maggie, lives with her. She is a quiet, old-fashioned and traditional woman. Her other daughter, Dee, leaves home in pursuit of an education and a better life. When Dee returns home, she has adopted a new traditional name, Wangero. She now wears traditional clothing and has new interest in her African heritage. As part of reclaiming her African identity, she demands two quilts from her mother which are considered family heirlooms. However, these quilts have been promised to Maggie. When Mama refuses to give her the quilts, Wangero is angered and in a fit of rage exclaims, "Maggie can't appreciate these quilts! She'd probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use." It is evident that Wangero feels that these quilts (a symbol of heritage) are only items for display while Maggie and Mama view them as something to be used and experienced in day-to-day life. I have chosen this story and this particular moment to illustrate how individuals choose to inhabit identity, culture and/or practice – it can be rigid and left for display, it can be fluid and used every day or it can be both.

Livermon's (2015) paper provides another way of understanding and concluding this study. In his paper, the relationship between African customary practices and queerness (keeping in mind the alleged unAfricanness of same-sex sexuality) is scrutinized. Livermon looks at *ulwalukho* (Xhosa male initiation), *lobola and ubusangoma* as contexts to analyze the ways in which African traditions can be endlessly re-constructed. It is from these reconstructions of cultural practices/customs that Black queer individuals mould usable traditions that would

otherwise not be available to them. It is also in these reconstructions that Black queer individuals can form a unique understanding of self and culture.

At the forefront of most studies about gender and sexuality are narratives about coming out. The same was true for this study. The experiences of coming out were initially negative and difficult for many of the participants in this study. This was because parents and families of these participants had misconceptions of what it meant to be lesbian. One mother felt that the lesbian identity and the tomboyish appearance of her daughter meant that she, in a way, had lost her girl child. Another mother carried this same sense of loss because she felt that her daughter would never have children. Evidently, we are faced with the perpetual presence of heteronormativity. Mothers expect their daughters to grow up and wear skirts, fall in love, get married, have *lobola* paid for them, and reproduce with men. These individuals then illustrate the different ways in which they break expectations of gender performance and sexuality. Coming out to their families as queer beings was a difficult undertaking, but existing in the outside world as Black lesbians proved to be an even more dangerous task. Ultimately, their parents learnt to accept them. Notwithstanding the danger of being Black, woman and lesbian, participants found that living truthfully and openly was a much more liberating experience.

The literature found and engaged with for purposes of this study certainly spoke to the (im)possibility of defining a single African identity. In the same way, participants constructed Africa and African identities in a multitude of ways. Participants described this identity as geography/location, as a history that is shared by people, as an emotion, as a cultural practice and even as a philosophy (*ubuntu*). Being African and African culture, in the eyes of the participants in this study, involves 'doing' particular customs and holding belief systems in ancestors and the like. Later, we come to understand why and how 'doing' *lobola* is a part of personifying Africanness. These ways of being and believing, however, do not appear out of nowhere, rather, they are taught. This is where we come to understand that the participants see culture as something inherited. In the same way, using Walker's work, we find that Wangero sees the quilts (a symbol of culture) as something that can simply be passed down from one generation to another. Furthermore, when Maggie shouts that the blankets are not to be put to everyday use, she suggests that culture/customs/traditions are static (like a quilt that sits on a bed for display) rather than something that can be used daily. The tug of war between culture as fixed and culture as fluid is something that manifests in the study. While attempting to define African identities and cultures, we saw participants trying to claim and maintain a static

definition of Africanness as well as challenging it. When they choose to maintain a fixed definition of being African, they do so in order to claim this identity as a rebuttal to the notion of homosexuality as unAfrican. On the other hand, they used the notion to challenge this fixed construct of identity and to ask the question about how same-sex sexuality is unAfrican. In the end, participants created a 'hyphenated self'. This hyphenated self is a way of reconciling and accommodating these seemingly paradoxical identities.

The bulk of this study unpacked the marital practice of *lobola* between same-sex couples. The participants' initial understanding and reaction to *lobola* mirrors much of what is contained in literature. There is the perception of *lobola* as a patriarchal practice that strictly requires heterosexual couplings. However, through dialogue, participants began to think and talk about how this process can be re-imagined and re-constructed for them. This is where we begin to see Hall (1992) and Ratele's (2007) possibilities for progressive culture. When participants realize that culture is fluid and accessible to them in particular ways, they begin to explore what *lobola* means to them (and their own future families) as well as their personal investments in the practice. It is at this point that participants turn these allegedly inaccessible African constructs into what Livermon calls "useable traditions". We are also confronted by what money means to this practice and how it affects the couples. We are then re-introduced to the importance of 'doing' and 'believing' as tenets for embodying Africanness. It is revealed that going through *lobola* makes the couples feel validated. The practice gives legitimacy to their Africanness. It allows them to be acknowledged by their families and their ancestors. It also endorses them as a couple in a real marriage. This legitimacy is attached to the kind of wedding that couples have. It becomes clear that a traditional wedding carries more weight and recognition than a white wedding. However, participants also explained that they would overlook this need for legitimacy and acceptance if it came at the cost of them or their partners' happiness. Finally, the study examined the role of gender in *lobola*. It also explored how participants went about navigating this part of the process. Results show that there is a lot of compromise that takes place here. Participants, initially, tried to gloss over the important of gender, but soon found that it is an almost impossible task because at the center of *lobola* is gender. Whether it is an unintended act or by the projection of families, gender roles are imposed. Perhaps, this can be seen and understood as the participants attempt to sacrifice their need to be acknowledged as two women in order to navigate the process and ultimately gain legitimacy as Africans and as a married couple. In conclusion, this study showed that there are possibilities for the disruption of a heteronormative practice such as *lobola*.

The quotation used in the title of the study is extremely important because it helps to capture how participants viewed lobola and African culture as a whole. By stating “this is ours”, there is a very strong and clear sense of claiming everything that has to do with African identities, cultures and customs. Furthermore, “why should we be exempt” is a question and certainly a challenge to those who believe that Africanness cannot exist alongside queerness.

In their own ways, participants confirmed that culture, customs and traditions are malleable and make space for new (queer) ways of being. The participants demonstrated what is seen in Livermon’s work - Black queer individuals must use their agency to approach African customs and traditions and reinterpret what each of these things mean and look like. Their cultural and sexual identities, seen as discordant, compel individuals to create a hyphenated self to make room for their unique subjectivities. Participants redefined and challenged the construct of being African. They also confronted the meanings and processes of *lobola*. As much as they questioned the marital transaction, they also found that there would be moments where they had to adapt and align to the process as a means of negotiating and finding their place in African culture. It is clear that it is impossible to overturn the heteropatriarchy all at once. However, these Black queer individuals have begun to engage with culture in ways that illustrate that culture and its customs are dynamic and fluid entities capable of making room for difference.

Dissemination of results

The results and findings for this study were published as a research report and will possibly go on to be published in various journal articles and presented at conferences.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview guide

A. Basic Demographics

- Age
- Culture
- Language
- Gender
- Sexuality
- Education
- Occupation

B. Individual Interview

- Tell me about what being African means to you.
- Tell me what being queer means to you.
- Tell me about your gender/sexual identity has shaped your experience with family.
- Tell me about key moments in your coming out process.
- Tell me how it has been navigating your queer identity with your African identity.

C. Couples' Interview

- Tell me what you understand by *lobola* with context to your particular culture(s).
- Tell me your expectations around *lobola* with context to your particular culture(s).
- Tell me what you think *lobola* means for a same-sex/queer couple? More so about the tensions that come with being a same-sex/queer couple and African.
- Tell me how you felt about going through the process of *lobola* and why it was important to do so?
- Tell me about your journey through *lobola*. More so about the particular different practices in *lobola.*

Appendix B

Participant information sheet

"This is ours… why should [we] be exempt?": Black South African lesbian couples' experiences of identity in the *lobola* practice.

Greetings

My name is Linda Mkhize. I am in the process of completing my Master of Arts degree in Research Psychology by dissertation at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. I am conducting a research project on the narratives and negotiations of identity and the experiences of African (Black) queer couples who are currently undergoing or have undergone *lobola* negotiations.

I would like to invite you to take part in this research project by conducting an interview with you individually, an individual interview with your partner and then a final interview with you and your partner (i.e. one individual interview and one couple's interview). In order to capture the interviews, I will be audio recording them with your permission. Both individual and couple interviews will take an hour or so. I will meet and interview you in a public location convenient (i.e. quiet coffee shop) to both of us and no cost will be incurred to you during this meeting.

There is no benefit and no harm anticipated for taking part in this study. You will not gain any monetary or other remunerations for your participation. Participation is voluntary. You may withdraw from the research process at any time and your withdrawal will have no negative consequences. I do not anticipate that you will become distressed by the interview(s) but if you do, please feel free to stop the interview(s) without any negative consequences. Should you want to see someone for the purposes of support or counselling after the interview(s), please contact the Emthonjeni Centre on 0117174513.

The information captured in the interviews will be kept confidential and the identities of participants will be kept anonymous. Furthermore, in the final write up, pseudonyms will be used to maintain the anonymity of participants. Full anonymity of participants is not

guaranteed with regards to their partners as they may be able to piece together parts of their story through the individual interviews. In attempt to combat this, a printed transcript will then be sent to each participant who takes part in an individual interview. They will be able to read through the transcript(s) in order to approve and/or remove any of the material transcribed. The audio recordings and interview transcripts will be stored on the researcher's password-protected laptop for five years after the study and destroyed thereafter.

The results and findings for this study will be published as a research report, possibly published in journal articles and presented at various conferences. Should you want a copy of the final study, please feel free to email me using the email address listed below. If you have any further queries, you are welcome to contact myself, my supervisor or the Wits University Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) respectively with the details listed below:

Linda Mkhize, researcher, liindamkhiize@gmail.com, 0820862478
Dr. Peace Kiguwa, research supervisor, peace.kiguwa@wits.ac.za, 0117174537
Shaun Schoeman, hrec-medical.researchoffice@wits.ac.za/Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za, 011 717 1408

Kind Regards
Linda Mkhize

Appendix C

Consent form

Individual/Couples interview + audio recording

"This is ours… why should [we] be exempt?": Black South African lesbian couples' experiences of identity in the *lobola* practice.

By signing this consent form, I consent to being interviewed for the purposes of this study. I, therefore, understand the following about:

The interview

- My participation in this study is voluntary.
- I will answer the questions that I feel comfortable answering.
- If I become distressed at any time, I can stop the interview without consequence.
- There are no direct benefits or risks for participating in this research project.
- I understand that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained during this study.
- However, I understand my full anonymity is not guaranteed towards my partner.
- Direct quotation will be used but a pseudonym will be used to keep me anonymous in the final write up of the research report.

The recording

- I will be recorded, the audio recording will be transcribed and heard by the researcher.
- The transcript will only be read by the researcher and the supervisor after I have been anonymized.
- A copy of the transcript will be emailed to me for me to read through, approve and/or remove any material that I wish to.
- Both the audio recording and transcript will be stored on a password-protected laptop that only the researcher has access to.
- After 5 years the audio recordings will be destroyed.

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D

Jefferson (1984) transcription system symbols

Symbol	Description
(.)	Micropause - A pause of no significant length.
(0.1)	Timed pause - A long enough pause to indicate a time.
<u>text</u>	Underlining - Denotes a raise in volume or emphasis.
[text]	Square brackets - Indicates the start and end points of overlapping speech.
>text<	Arrows showing that the pace of speech has quickened.
<text>	Arrows showing that the pace of speech has slowed down.
( )	Parentheses - Speech which is unclear or in doubt in the transcript.
(( ))	Double parentheses - Annotation of non-verbal activity.
.	Full stop - Indicates falling pitch.
,	Comma - Indicates a temporary rise or fall in intonation.
↑	Up arrow - Rise in intonation.
↓	Down arrow - Drop in intonation
ALL CAPS	Indicates shouted or increased volume speech.
-	Hyphen - Indicates an abrupt halt or interruption in utterance.
=	Equal sign - At the end of one sentence and the start of the next to indicate that a turn is interrupted by another speaker (the first speaker may continue their flow of speech)
:::	Colons - indicate a stretched sound.

Appendix E

Ethics application form

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Application to the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC Non-Medical)

Use this form in applying for clearance of research involving human participants ('human subjects'[1]).

Instructions

1. Completed applications must be submitted to the Research Office by the last day of the month for consideration at the meeting during the following month.
2. Incomplete applications will NOT be considered.
3. Applications will NOT be processed without signatures from supervisors (where relevant) and the Head of School/Unit.
4. Photocopying should be done 'back to back' to save paper.
5. All submissions and materials must be typed. Handwritten submissions are NOT acceptable. Glossy and fancy binding NOT necessary.
6. All appendixes, if any, must be stapled to the ethics form and collated

The following documents must be included with your application as numbered appendices:

☑ Check list

For all research:

☑		No. of copies required
X	Completed Ethics Application Form	15
X	Copies of the research proposal	4
X	Copies of proposed questionnaires/interview schedules	4
X	Participant Information sheet	4

Where applicable (Attach to this form):

X	Acknowledgement of Informed Consent form (for participant's signature)	4
	Relevant permissions (from, e.g. company's HR department, National authorities such as Education, Correctional Services, etc.) or other legally required consent	4
	Any other required/appropriate release or consent forms (e.g.: Focus group participant consent form, consent to record (audio), model release (for video or photography), etc.	4
	Guardian consent form (for participants under the age of 14)	4
	Minor assent form	4
	Other (Please specify)	4

Declaration:

I recognise that it is my responsibility to conduct my research in an ethical manner according to Guidelines of the University of the Witwatersrand, according to any laws and/or legal frameworks that may apply, and according to the norms and expectations of my discipline.

In preparing this Application for Ethics Clearance from the University of the Witwatersrand, I have consulted the **Guidelines for Human Research Ethics Clearance Application /non-medical** (a separate document available on this web site http://web.wits.ac.za/Academic/Research/Applications.htm and have familiarised myself with the ethical guidelines specific to my discipline.

Signature 

Name of Researcher/Applicant LINDA MKHIZE

[1] In place of the term 'human subjects', University of Witwatersrand prefers to use the term '(research) participants' in order to reflect the difference between the bio-medical sciences—where 'research subjects' is more appropriate—and the humanities and social sciences.

Researcher's personal data

Surname	MKHIZE				**Name:**	LINDA							
Title (circle one):		**Prof**		**Dr**		**Mr**		**(Ms)**		**Other:**			
Department/discipline	**Humanities**												
School	SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT												
University address	1 JAN SMUTS AVE, BRAAMFONTEIN, JOHANNESBURG, 2000												
Staff / Student number	707448			**Full time**	X	**Part time**		**Staff**					
Your telephone(s)	0820862478												
Your Email:	LIINDAMKHIIZE@GMAIL.COM												
Name of Supervisor	DR. PEACE KIGUWA												
Supervisor's email address	PEACE.KIGUWA@WITS.AC.ZA												
Supervisor's tel. number(s)	0117174537												

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT:

Queerly beloved: African queer couples' narratives of identity in the lobola practice.

Is this research for degree purposes?					X	**Yes**		**No**			
If so, for what degree?		**Honours**	X	**MA**			**PhD**			**Other (specify):**	
Has it been approved by the relevant higher degrees committee or other relevant unit?	**X**	**Yes**		**No**		**Submitted & pending**					

Where will the research be carried out?

At a place most convenient to the participants (i.e. a public, quiet coffee shop). Furthermore, no costs will be incurred by participants.

What are the aims & objectives of the research relevant to human research participants (Please list; be brief)

To explore African and queer identities/experiences with regards to lobola through narrative.

List the names and affiliations of any *additional* researchers who will be covered by this ethics protocol

N/A

Has appropriate formal permission been obtained, if required (e.g. employer, government department, land owner, etc.)?

	Yes (attached)	X	Not required		Pending (must be supplied before permission is granted)

Do you have any financial or material interest associated with your research participants or with the organisations that you will work with during your research?

	Yes, current	X	**No**		**Potential conflicts of interest may exist**

If yes, please explain how you will manage any existing or potential conflicts of interest.

Protocols submitted to the Committee must have sufficient information to enable the committee to judge the ethical implication of the proposed research. Please be brief and concise but also as specific and informative as possible.

	How will data on human research participants be collected (techniques, methods, procedures)? Be brief but specific
	Formal interviews using questionnaires, schedule/list of questions, or formal protocol (**Attach all questionnaires, schedules, etc.**)
X	Informal interviews, semi-structured or open ended interviews (**Attach interview protocol, or guidelines**)
	Ethnographic observation, participant observation, other informal descriptive and / or interactive methods
X	'Focus group', seminar/discussion group, or other group-orientated research
	Community-based, participant, or 'action research' methods or technique such as drama workshops, community theatre, training workshops, participant rural appraisal (PRA), rapid rural appraisal (RRA), etc.
	Research on/in therapeutic or counselling contexts
	Observation of public performance, and/or public behaviour observation
X	Photography, video and/or audio recording (**specific separate consent forms may be required**)
	Mapping or other techniques that involve direct interaction with participants (otherwise exempt)
	Other research methods or techniques—explain below.

Details:
10 individual and 5 couples interviews; African (black) couples under going or have undergone lobola; 25+ years old; open-ended narrative questions; to be audio recorded and transcribed. To recruit participants, snowball sampling will be used. Snowball sampling will allow the researcher to use the participants they initially gain access to, to further refer them to other participants who fit the same criteria and would be willing to participate in the study.

How will informed consent be obtained?	X	Formal (Signed form)		Informal or Verbal		Other (e.g. public speech)

Explain your strategy for ensuring informed consent

Before the start of the individual and couple interviews, participants will be given consent forms detailing the processes, procedures, benefits, harms, confidentiality and anonymity of the study. They will be given an opportunity to read through the consent form and ask about any further queries they may have. They will also be notified that they will be able to remove themselves from the study at any point and that there will be no consequences for this. The form will notify participants of the fact that their individual/couple interviews will be recorded and will be used in write-up of the research report.

Attach participant's information sheets, informed consent forms, and/or other related materials

NB: ***informed consent*** in the social science and humanities research involving human participants
Where informal ethnographic or participant observation methods are used, or where signed Informed Consent forms are not possible, or for research involving group contexts (focus group, Participant Rapid Assessment, Rapid Rural Appraisal, public performance, workshops) **state how the quality of informed consent will be assured**. It is essential that direct participants in research be fully informed and agree on this basis to participate in research.

Who will the research participants be?					
Age range?	25+				
Does this research expose either the participant or the researcher to any potential risks or harm that they would not otherwise be exposed to?			Yes	X	No
Will research involve vulnerable categories?			Yes	X	No
If so, state which ones:					
How will participants be selected and approached?	Snowball sampling will be used to find and select participants. The participants will firstly have to match criteria listed above for selection. The researcher will be then approach participants via email, social media or text in order to explain and outline the study. Participants will be sent participant information sheet to read through and ask questions/address any concerns. Finally, the participants and researcher will make arrangements to meet at a place most convenient to participants.				
How will any existing vulnerabilities among research participants be addressed?					

NB: The term 'Vulnerable categories' includes, among others, children under 14, orphans, prisoners, persons with cognitive or communication disorders, people who are traumatised or currently in traumatic situations.

Can **confidentiality** be guaranteed?	X	Yes		No
Can **anonymity** be guaranteed in resulting reports, theses and/or publications?	X	Yes		No

Explain how this will be done? What will participants be told in this regard?

The information captured in the interviews will be kept confidential and the identities of participants will be kept anonymous. Furthermore, in the final write up, pseudonyms will be used to maintain the anonymity of participants. Full anonymity of participants is not guaranteed with regards to their partners as they may be able to piece together parts of their story through the individual interviews. In attempt to combat this, a printed transcript will then be sent to each participant who takes part in an individual interview. They will be able to read through the transcript(s) in order to approve and/or remove any of the material transcribed. The audio recordings and interview transcripts will be stored on the researcher's password-protected laptop for five years after the study and destroyed thereafter.

NB: While confidentiality may be desirable, it cannot be guaranteed in, for example, focus groups, or ethnographic observation. Similarly anonymity should be preserved in questionnaires, but cannot be offered in workshop methodologies, focus group research, etc. All data however should be kept confidential and safe from unauthorised access once it has been collected. Informants should have the right to remain anonymous in the final report, and this must be respected in handling of all data relating to them.

What is to be **done with the research data** after completion of the project?

The audio-recordings and transcripts will be stored on a password-protected laptop (that only the research knows that password and has access to) for five years and destroyed thereafter.

NB: 'Raw' or unprocessed data, especially **where the identity or personal data of research participants is included, must be safeguarded** and preserved from unauthorised access. Data may be destroyed after use, but **preservation in an archive or personal collection** may also be appropriate, desirable or even essential. For instance, data sets that contain **historically important information** or information that relates to **national heritage** must be preserved and should be placed in a public archive where possible and appropriate.
All data should be preserved in a way that **respects the nature of the original participants' consent**.

10. How will the results be **reported**, and who will have access to this/these?

The results will be written up in a research report as well as possibly used for publications and conference presentations. The academic and general readers will have access to the research report (with the confidentiality of participants still maintained). Participants can also access the research report if they request a copy.

SIGNATURES (REQUIRED)

In signing this form, the researcher and supervisor (if any) of this project undertake to ensure that any amendments to this project that are required by the Human Research Ethics Committee are made before the project commences.

Declaration: We, the signatories, declare that all information on this form is correct and that we will strive to maintain the highest ethical standards in this research, according to disciplinary and university expectations at all time, recognising that ethical practice in research is always a continuing process.

	Date	Name	Signature
Applicant	23/07/2017	LINDA MKHIZE	
Research **Supervisor**'s name & signature (for students)	23/08/2017	DR. PEACE KIGUWA	
Dept/**Unit Head**'s name & signature			

Appendix F

Ethics approval letter

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Mkhize

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H17/10/10**
PROJECT TITLE	Queerly beloved: Queer African couples narratives of identities in lobola practice
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Ms L Mkhize
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Human and Community Development/
DATE CONSIDERED	20 October 2017
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved
EXPIRY DATE	04 December 2020

DATE 05 December 2017 **CHAIRPERSON** J. Knight
(Professor J Knight)

cc: Supervisor : Dr P Kiguwa

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10004, 10th Floor, Senate House, University. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**

_____ _____/_____/_____
Signature **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES