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EXPLORING THE MEANINGS ATTACHED TO THE SEXUAL IDENTITY OF BLACK WOMEN-LOVING-WOMEN (WLW) IN SOWETO

by
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A mini dissertation submitted to the faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (Research Psychology)

Johannesburg, 2013

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Psychology by Coursework and Research Report at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

_____

Nomancotsho Pakade (513466)

August, 2013

ABSTRACT

Women's bodies and sexualities across history and race have been subjected to policing by the state, society and men. However, within the context of Black sexuality, black women's bodies have been subject to silencing during the colonial encounter.This exploratory study set to document the subjective meanings associated with the Black WLW sexual identity of 50 women in Soweto. This study seeks to contribute to the recently emerging body of literature which has documented Black women's same-sex sexualities as means to render their identities and experiences visible. Furthermore, to capture the terms used to describes same-sex practicing women. The Q methodology was used to capture the various expressions along with their subjective representation. Two main distinct accounts emerged from the analysis. The Q analysis results indicated that there are two dominant forms of gender expressions and perceptions of what constitutes a Black WLW sexual identity in Soweto. Factor A distinguished itself through conceptualising this sexual identity in a 'closed construction' of attraction, with distinct gender roles. As such women in this factor identified with a sense of being domineering in the relationship, with potential partners expected to cook and clean. On the other hand, women who defined Factor B had a more inclusive construction of the Black WLW. These women placed emphasis on being comfortable with the bodies, particularly their breasts. Additionally, they valued the notion of equality in their relationships from sharing household chores to believing that sex should be about both partners pleasuring each other. The study also unpacked the meaning of self-identifying terms used by WLW in Soweto. In the absence of historically positive terms for same-sex sexualities, specifically indigenous terms, labelling becomes a site that does not prioritise meaning but reflects the negotiation of an oppressed sexual identity. What is in a name becomes a continuous struggle of reclaiming existence and visibility with oneself, the lesbian and gay community and the broader society.

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