

A sociological exploration of the influence of inclusive masculinity practices and experiences of homophobia among self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa

N Meiring

 orcid.org/0000-00023-3728-8912

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Supervisor: Prof J Rothmann

Graduation: June 2023

Student number: 33069174

DECLARATION

By electronically submitting this dissertation, I, **Nadia Meiring**, declare that the work presented in this dissertation is my own, produced through my own original research.

I further declare that:

- i. This dissertation is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Magister Scientiae in Sociology at the Potchefstroom campus of the North-West University.
- ii. Other authors' work and quotations are clearly cited/referenced in this dissertation.
- iii. Apart from other authors' (referenced) works, this dissertation is my own work.
- iv. The assistance of external individuals in the research process (such as, but not limited to, identifying possible participants and spreading awareness of the research) is clearly indicated in this dissertation.
- v. This work or parts thereof have not been submitted before.

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As I am writing this, I realise that this journey of writing has only come to an end for now. A new journey is about to start. But before I can conclude, there are a few individuals to whom I would like to extend my gratitude.

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“The fastest way to change yourself is to hang out with people who are already the way you want to be”.

~ Reid Hoffman

I believe that this is only the beginning. I am looking forward to the next chapter.

ABSTRACT

Contemporary masculinity theorists believe that the social dynamics between heterosexual and gay men are changing. These changes, they contend, are evidenced by the increase of overt displays of homosocial tactility among men and a decline (albeit, uneven) in homophobia and homophobia. Previous models (e.g., hegemonic masculinity theory [HMT]), according to the proponents of inclusive masculinity theory (IMT), were unable to theorise these variations in masculine expressions. Said changes continue to spill over into various social institutions, including that of contact sport. Long regarded as a hypermasculine context in South Africa and abroad, recent studies show that the game of rugby has become more inclusive towards multiple masculinities. Although research conducted in the US and UK are well-documented, the topic remains under-researched in South African academe. To this end, the objective of this study was to **explore the influence of inclusive masculinity practices on the fear of self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa of being socially perceived as gay (i.e., experiencing homophobia)**. Using a qualitative approach, I purposefully selected seven self-identified gay men who played rugby. They were invited through material sent to an inclusive rugby club and individual gay rugby players as well as through snowball sampling. I conducted in-person and virtual audio-recorded semi-structured interviews with two self-identified Black and five White men. The findings culminated in the **Exclusive-Inclusive Safe(r) Rugby Club Model (EISR-CM)**. Based on the collected data, this conceptual model demarcates the **reasons** gay men **play rugby**; the **ideal features** they ascribe to masculinity in rugby; the **reasons** why they **decided to join or refrain from joining an inclusive or exclusive gay rugby club** and the **influence of inclusive masculinity practices on the men's experience of homophobia** in their respective teams and/or clubs. Regarding the first, the findings show that the men's *primary* and *secondary gender-role socialisation* played a significant role in their decision to play rugby from an early age. They identified their fathers, brothers, male coaches and friends of their parents as key figures who motivated them to join the sport. Interestingly, in both cases of socialisation, they showed a critical inclination towards how traditional gender roles reinforced specific masculine ideals for them to aspire to: on the one hand, they recalled conforming to orthodox masculine ideals, whereas, on the other hand, the parents of some participants allowed them to express the tenets of inclusive masculinities. A second reason why gay men played (and continue to play) rugby is because of their need to *accrue gender, body and masculine capital*. This involves the participants "dialling up their testosterone" to be socially respected, integrated and revered by the teammates. This finding relates to the **idealisation of masculine features** in rugby. Continuing to subscribe to their primary socialisation, some

participants valued stoic, orthodox and muscular ideals of masculinity. Concurrently, they confirmed the “attractiveness” of such traditional masculine traits for themselves and others. They did, however, qualify their responses in this regard. Although some might associate their partiality to traditional masculine and muscular archetypes (e.g., the “gay clone”) to them performing complicit masculinity, they refrained from solely conforming to hegemonic masculinity, opting to perform their hybridity to express their personal desirability and partiality towards an idealised masculinity as opposed to uncritically subordinating themselves through *vertical homosociality*. They, therefore, expressed a propensity for *horizontal homosociality*, emotional expressiveness, inclusivity and authenticity as idealised features of who they were as men. Read together, the **reasons** the gay rugby players **decided to join or refrain from joining an inclusive or exclusive gay rugby club** and the **influence of inclusive masculinity practices on the men’s experience of homophobia** resulted in five implications. First, they joined their respective clubs to *establish horizontal homosocial brotherhoods* with gay teammates and heterosexual coaches and allies. Second, they wanted to become *advocates* for gay men’s inclusion in rugby. This resulted in some adopting the so-called “fuck you! Watch this! I can do this!” attitude to work towards gay men’s acceptance, social change and inclusivity. In so doing, third, the men got a *new-found appreciation for the inherent diversity and multiplicity of gay (and heterosexual) masculine identities and bodies*. As the findings show, this challenged the men’s personal internalised homophobia and homonegativity towards gay men. Furthermore, through championing inclusivity, the club’s management and membership strove to *educate and sensitise* men about homosexuality (in general) as well as acceptable and impermissible uses of language and behaviours (in particular). These initiatives sought to dispel stereotypes, myths and homophobia. A final meaningful contribution of the study is how men, regardless of their *age* (i.e., whether they were members of Generations X, Y or Z) showed an affinity for the tenets of inclusive masculinities. In conclusion, although the difficulty associated with the recruitment of more participants may arguably speak to South African gay men’s internalised homophobia or homophobia, the findings show how those who participated, after having joined an inclusive/exclusive rugby club in South Africa, noted experiencing higher levels of **horizontal homosociality** and **lower levels of homophobia**. This could encourage other gay men to join future research endeavours.

Keywords: Gay rugby; homophobia; homosociality; inclusive masculinities; inclusive masculinity theory; South African rugby

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.2	DEFINING HEGEMONIC AND INCLUSIVE MASCULINITIES	1
1.3	MASCULINITY IN SPORT	6
1.4	PROBLEM STATEMENT	8
1.5	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	10
1.5.1	General research question	10
1.5.2	Specific research questions.....	11
1.6	RESEARCH OBJECTIVES.....	11
1.6.1	General research objective	11
1.6.2	Specific research objectives	12
1.7	CENTRAL THEORETICAL STATEMENT	12
1.8	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	14
1.9	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	16
1.10	CHAPTER LAYOUT	17
2.1	INTRODUCTION.....	19
2.2	CONNELL’S HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY THEORY (HMT): A CRITICAL OVERVIEW.....	19
2.2.1	Defining HMT	20
2.2.2	Harder versus softer masculinities: opposing HMT.....	23
2.2.3	Critiquing HMT	30
2.3	INCLUSIVE MASCULINE THEORY (IMT).....	31
2.3.1	The origin of IMT	31
2.3.2	The conditions for IMT.....	33

2.3.3	Critiquing IMT.....	39
2.4	CONCLUSION.....	40
3.1	INTRODUCTION.....	42
3.2	THE NATURE OF MASCULINITY IN SPORT	43
3.2.1	Patriarchy and heteronormativity: “Doing masculinity” in sport	43
3.3	THE EVOLUTION OF MASCULINITY IN CONTACT SPORT: A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW	48
3.3.1	A brief historical overview of rugby	51
3.3.2	Historical overview of South African rugby and the ideal masculinity	52
3.4	SEXUALITY, GENDER AND SPORT: A CASE OF HOMOPHOBIC DECLINE OR HETEROSEXUAL IGNORANCE?.....	57
3.4.1	South African overview: Jozi Cats	63
3.4.2	The “doing” and “using” of gender and gay in rugby	73
3.5	CONCLUSION.....	79
4.1	INTRODUCTION.....	80
4.2	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	80
4.2.1	Research design and metatheoretical bases.....	80
4.3	SAMPLING PROCEDURES AND DATA COLLECTION.....	82
4.3.1	Sampling procedures	82
4.3.2	Data collection.....	84
4.3.3	Data analysis	86
4.4	BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION.....	87
4.5	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	88
4.6	TRUSTWORTHINESS AND AUTHENTICITY.....	89
4.7	CONCLUSION.....	90
5.1	INTRODUCTION.....	92

5.2	CONSTRUCTING A GAY IDENTITY	92
5.3	A GENDERED SEXUAL IDENTITY IN (AND) SPORT	97
5.3.1	The participants' sport background.....	97
5.3.2	Introduction(s) to sport: The early years	99
5.3.3	Gendered displays in sport.....	101
5.3.4	Performing masculinity in sport	103
5.3.5	Putting the “gay” in sport	104
5.4	BEING GAY AND A RUGBY PLAYER: PRESENT EXPERIENCES.....	105
5.4.1	Gay men and rugby: the reasons for playing the game	105
5.4.2	Gay men playing rugby: muscularity as precondition?.....	107
5.4.3	The “ideal” rugby player: Utopian dream or empirical reality?.....	108
5.4.4	Choosing to disclose or foreclose one's sexual identity in rugby	112
5.5	THE GAY RUGBY CLUB AND TEAM AS SAFE(R) SPACE.....	113
5.5.1	Reasons for joining an inclusive rugby club.....	116
5.5.2	“Dialling up the gay or straight”: Experiencing and expressing one's sexuality through rugby	117
5.5.3	The inclusive gay rugby club as safe(r) space.....	120
5.6	CONCLUSION	121
6.1	INTRODUCTION.....	123
6.2	THE DECISION TO PLAY RUGBY: THE MEN'S EARLY YEARS	123
6.2.1	Primary and secondary gender-role socialisation: rugby as masculine blueprint .	123
6.2.2	Dialling-up the testosterone: accruing idealised gender and bodily capital	127
6.3	RECLAIMING GAY MASCULINITIES THROUGH RUGBY: CHALLENGING HOMOHYSTERIA IN AN “EXCLUSIVE-INCLUSIVE” CLUB	129
6.3.1	Inclusivity through exclusivity	130

6.3.2	Establishing a homosocial brotherhood	132
6.3.3	Being a “champion for inclusivity”: Encouraging the “fuck you” response	133
6.3.4	Creating a safe(r) space to educate and sensitise men	134
6.3.5	“Everyone is welcome”: An appreciation of diverse identities and bodies	135
6.4	CONCLUSION	137
7.1	INTRODUCTION.....	138
7.2	ACHIEVING THE THEORETICAL RESEARCH OBJECTIVES.....	138
7.3	ACHIEVING THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH OBJECTIVES.....	143
7.4	LIMITATIONS	146
7.5	RECOMMENDATIONS.....	147
7.5.1	Recommendations for future research	147
7.5.2	Recommendations for practical interventions	148
7.6	CONCLUDING THOUGHTS	149

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1: Biographical information of participants.....	87
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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1:	Colton Underwood and Gus Kenworthy in <i>Coming Out Colton</i>	62
Figure 3.2:	Jozi Cats campaign: Queen?	65
Figure 3.3:	Jozi Cats campaign: Fairy?	66
Figure 3.4:	Jozi Cats campaign: Pansy?	67
Figure 3.5:	Jozi Cats campaign: Pillow biter?	68
Figure 3.6:	Jozi Cats campaign: Fudge packer?	69
Figure 3.7:	Jozi Cats campaign: Flamer?	70
Figure 3.8:	Jozi Cats campaign: Rugby that's so gay.	71
Figure 7.1:	Exclusive-Inclusive Safe(r) Rugby Club Model (EISR-CM).	142

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION, ORIENTATION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Masculinity, according to Connell (2008:135), “does not exist as a given but comes into existence as people act”. This implies that “masculinity is both a social process, and a set of material practices which refer to bodies and what bodies do” (Swain, 2003:300). In keeping with these introductory quotes, Connell (2008) states that, during the last two decades, different typologies of masculinity have arisen based on the research of scholars in South Africa and abroad. Initially, social scientists mainly engaged the nature of *hegemonic masculinity* – a typology originating from the work of Connell (1987, 2005).

1.2 DEFINING HEGEMONIC AND INCLUSIVE MASCULINITIES

A simplistic account of hegemonic masculinity posits it as men’s taken-for-granted internalisation and performance of so-called “traditional” (Ratele, 2014) or patriarchal forms of masculinity. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005:832), however, later refined the use of “hegemonic masculinity” in academic research due to, among others, the fact that it comprises multiple typologies rather than a single static configuration. They noted that hegemonic masculinity is a practice that is enacted by certain, but not all, men. Regardless, it still embodies the most honoured way of being a man (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), namely, being more dominant, aggressive, competitive and in control. This suggested that all men should exhibit these attributes to be considered as “manly” and, in so doing, it legitimatised the notion of women being subordinate to men. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue that, in a society, there can be more than one form of hegemonic masculinity in subgroups and that these masculinities should not necessarily be considered as “homogeneously negative” (Khunou, 2013). Jewkes *et al.* (2015:113), for example, suggest that masculinities are fluid, multiple and dynamic and that hegemonic masculinity is not the *only* form of masculinity that exists in society. For instance, in South Africa, hegemonic masculinity is shown through the use of strength and toughness (Jewkes *et al.*, 2015:114). Conceptualisations of hegemonic masculinity in the context of South Africa include references to male behaviours as being highly exploitative, oppressive and toxic, according to Morrell *et al.* (2012:13). Due to critique against the principles of hegemonic masculinity, the negative attitude towards men as the aggressors took a turn towards a more inclusive nature in recent times (Morrell *et al.*, 2013). This is due to, among others, the increase in the acceptance of the inclusive practices that men exhibit (i.e., challenges to expectations of

men to solely engage in hegemonic principles) (Anderson, 2009, 2014). So-called subordinate men (e.g., gay or metrosexual men) are now facing higher levels of acceptance and empathy because of their potential victimisation in society for not conforming to the rigid definition of masculinity (Morrell *et al.*, 2012). Morrell *et al.* (2013) write that South African gay and heterosexual men require assistance to challenge the rigid understandings of being male and to help them master the means to intervene by changing their behaviour and their attitudes.

In keeping with these stances, Anderson (2009) advocates for the provision of an additional model to explain how masculinity is understood and enacted. Hence, the *inclusive masculinity theory* (IMT) developed. Anderson and McCormack (2018:3) mention that the need to employ IMT emerged from behaviour that is *more inclusive* among heterosexual men that resulted in a change in the dynamic of friendship groups, especially in the United Kingdom (UK) and America (US) – that is, the inclusion of gay peers in their friendship groups and more emotional intimacy among heterosexual men (e.g., the latter embracing activities that were once labelled as solely *feminine*). In addition, inclusive masculinity also refers to the decrease in attitudinal homophobia and how young “straight” men increasingly exhibit beliefs and behaviours that are in support of gay people (Bridges, 2014; Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; McCormack & Anderson, 2014). Bridges (2014:80) argues that heterosexual men in his UK study showed signs of accepting and embracing so-called “gay aesthetics” – that is, behaviours and appearances that are stereotypically associated with *only* gay men. They claim to do so “without [necessarily] challenging the systems of inequality from which they emerge” – that is, they just adopt certain practices that may be associated with gay men but retain their label as heterosexual males. Furthermore, particular features and behaviours ascribed to inclusive masculinity include, as noted before, advocating for the acknowledgement of inclusive behaviours that are in support of diversity and equality, the rejection of *homophobia* by being more emotionally and physically intimate with male friends (i.e., displaying an attraction towards both sexes), and participating in activities that are deemed “feminine” (Anderson & McCormack, 2018:548).

Studies among middle-class men from universities in the US and UK support this shift in the cultural and social sphere that have brought forward a development of more “inclusive or non-homophobic forms of masculinity” (O’Neill, 2015:104). Another feature, according to Anderson (2009:7), is the gradual decline in rates of homophobia and homophobia (cf. O’Neill, 2015:104). *Homophobia* is defined as “an attitude of hostility toward male or female homosexuals” (Borillo, 2001:3; cf. Fraisse & Barrientos, 2016:1). Homophobia, originally defined by Weinberg (1972:4) as “... the dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals”, encompasses people’s irrational fear, rejection or displays on an individual or institutional level due to them externalising their disdain and intolerance towards homosexuality physically or verbally (Halperin, 2012). Related to

this is what Anderson (2009:7) terms *homophobia*. According to him, this is defined as “the fear of being socially perceived as gay”. A specific culture displays examples of homophobia where the following three conditions are observed: First, the specific culture upholds a dislike towards gay men and lesbian women; second, there is an awareness of the existence of a distinct gay and lesbian subculture; and third, the certainty exists that gender and sexuality should be conflated similar to a cisgender approach (i.e., there should be an undeniable link between a person’s biological sex and their gender and sexual identity) (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). Therefore, proponents of heteronormativity may use homophobia and homophobia as instruments to police and regulate gender and sexual identities. This implies that people have a fear of being perceived as gay (Anderson & McCormack, 2018) and men may, therefore, adopt a gendered “performance” (Butler, 1990) that resembles heterosexual masculinity in order to avoid being labelled as “gay”. In the work of Judith Butler (1990), gender is not a stable identity; rather, it is considered to be a performative identity. If we act out gender with our bodies, we in fact create it. As such, she refers to gender as “repeated acts” within a regulated frame (Butler, 1990:43-44).

Ghaziani’s (2014, 2017) work on the complexity associated with gay men’s decision to either remain closeted or disclose their sexual identity to others is worth noting here. He argues that the so-called era of “in the closet” (the late 1800s up to the 1950s in mainly Anglo-American countries) reinforced feelings of shame, guilt and fear among gay men due to their sexual orientation. These fears were informed by, among others, positing homosexuality as an illness, pathology and subordinate “other” to the supposedly normal and acceptable heterosexuality (McIntosh, 1968). This was followed, however, by the era of “coming out” (the late 1960s to early 1990s) during which sexual minorities were given the opportunity to be more open about their sexuality and to create the belief that “being gay is good” (Ghaziani, 2014:34). Focusing on Anglo-American countries in particular, studies comment on how urban contexts currently, during the “post-gay” era, tend to display more inclusive and accepting attitudes towards sexual diversity (cf. Cleland, 2016; Smith, 2011; Twenge, 2014). Smith (2011), for example, found that 87% of Western countries (including the US and UK) are moving towards the idea of approving LGBTIQ+ behaviours and lifestyles (e.g., sanctioning same-sex marriages, acceptance of sexual minorities adopting children, etc.).

Ghaziani (2014), for example, highlights these sentiments in his reference to the term “post-gay” (i.e., suggesting that gay men, in particular, are adopting a so-called new “gay paradigm”). This paradigm is characterised by an increased tendency for sexual minorities and subcultures to *assimilate into* mainstream heterosexual society in, among others, the US, UK and Canada. Ghaziani (2014:33) states that, in the US and Canada, lesbian and gay liberationist movements, for example, fought for the acknowledgement of LGBTIQ+ rights (e.g., the Stonewall riots in 1969

in New York), which encouraged and enabled certain persons to “come out of the closet in large[r] numbers”. These movements further encouraged what Weston (1995) described as the “great gay migration” to larger cities in the 1970s to 1980s. The “great gay migration” referred to the encouragement of gay people to come out of the closet and to relocate to a new area, mainly urban in nature where they would be afforded a greater degree of anonymity and acceptance (Weston, 1995:255). This was done all in the hope to find others that are just “like them”. Ghaziani (2014:34) mentions that so-called “gaybourhoods” formed (i.e., communities created and populated by mainly sexual minorities in San Francisco, New York, and South African cities such as Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg) and provided them with the opportunity to establish close-knit relationships with other so-called sexual minorities. This resulted in the creation of a “safe space” amid a potentially heteronormative mainstream society (Gevisser & Cameron, 1995; Rink, 2013). The second era that Ghaziani (2014:45) mentions is the so-called “post-gay era”. This era is where these separate “safe spaces” are not necessarily only based in the “gaybourhood” but are found more in the mainstream heterosexual world that sexual minorities inhabit. According to Ghaziani (2017), this is attributed to the cultural changes that have taken place since those first attempts at fighting for the liberation of sexual minorities.

The “post-gay era” from 1998 onwards signified the relative acceptance of gay and lesbian persons into society through, among others, attempts at assimilation, as was the case in South Africa, too (Gevisser & Cameron, 1995). Assimilation, according to Van den Berg (2016), involves that integration, on the part of sexual minorities, is considered the “normal” strategy to obtain equality. However, it may be detrimental to them because, as studies have shown, it may further marginalise them: not all sexual minorities want to be “only” tolerated or put into the mainstream society/culture. This could encourage self-denial on the part of gay persons. Its critics argue that assimilation does not necessarily value the differences in human experiences, since it is viewed to be more accommodating than focused on challenging heteronormativity (Van den Berg, 2016:29). According to Van den Berg (2016:29), the assimilationist perspective is “dangerous” because it requires the gay community to get back “into the closet” – a step that further excludes them from the mainstream and “normal societies”. Sexual minorities should attempt to challenge a reform of the “oppressive heteronormative system” that continues to serve as a measure of what is “normal” and “natural” (Van den Berg, 2016:29). Consider Eribon’s (2004:114) *liberationist* argument that assimilation further reinforces heteronormativity, patriarchy and homophobia, since it “reproduces the heterosexist performatives of straight sexuality” (Van den Berg, 2016:29) and further excludes gay people. This implies that to be accepted into the mainstream heteronormative society results in *dissimulation* (the process of integrating oneself into the dominant sexual order but at the price of *subordinating* oneself to the heteronormative idea) (Van

den Berg, 2016:30). Regardless of this critique, the “post-gay” paradigm suggests a change in the ideological and physical nature of gay spaces. Ghaziani (2014:9) is of the opinion that this results in a decrease in homophobia. Anderson and McCormack’s (2018) research provides an example in this regard. Their research among bisexual men from various cities in the US and UK revealed an increase in the inclusivity of them in everyday life, particularly among the younger generation (Anderson & McCormack, 2018:10). However, Anderson and McCormack (2018:3) also mention that, although homophobia may be declining in the US and UK, it might not be similar in other cultures where examples of such behaviour are still present. In various cultures, there are differences in class, ethnicity and religion, which are factors that influence the dynamics of masculinity. The change in masculinities has been documented in different regions in the US and UK. These local cultures in Western countries are influenced by a larger phenomenon whereby a decrease in homophobia resulted in improvement in the attitudes towards LGBTQI+ people. Thus, the decrease in homophobia is the result of attitudes that are improving towards LGBTQI+ people in these particular contexts (Cleland, 2016; Twenge, 2014). This implies that homophobia is context specific and influences the possibility of men openly expressing diverse or inclusive masculinities. This supports Anderson’s (2009) reference to the fact that homophobia is an “uneven” process and should not be applied similarly to other countries.

According to the findings of an American study, Keleher and Smith (2012) mention the tendency of people to be more accepting of sexual minorities, particularly since the 1990s, because there is a decline in attitudinal homophobia, and the condemning of homosexuality has shown signs of decrease since 1987. This finding supports the study of Galup (2015), which states that the majority of Americans favour same-sex marriage, whereas Pew (2013) indicates that 74% of people who were born after 1980 think homosexuality is something that should be accepted by society. In the context of South Africa, religious and traditional factors influence how masculinity is conceptualised, viewed and enacted, that is, high levels of competitiveness and being aggressive (Gennrich, 2013:3).

A traditional wedding in South Africa between two men refers. Said wedding resulted in controversy. News channel eNCA (as cited in Ratele, 2014:40) reported the wedding as being against the idea of “being gay is [un-African]”. This wedding was significant because the Zulu king stated that homosexuality was “unacceptable” and the then president of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, considered “homosexual relationships [as] a disgrace” (Ratele, 2013). Both these men were part of a tradition and a culture – a tradition in which gay people are marginalised and viewed as “un-African”. This marriage challenged people to rethink the definition of tradition; it thus emphasised the importance of unique definitions of preferred gender and sexual identities (Ratele, 2014:41). In South Africa, there is a struggle to differentiate between the traditional

(dominance and competition) and modern (more inclusive behaviours, i.e., emotional intimacy) understandings of masculinity (Hadebe, 2010:8). Thus, there is a continued incongruence between people's tendency to recognise that there are "multiple masculinities" rather than only having to choose between accepting *inclusive masculinity* or dominant ideals associated with *hegemonic masculinity* (Anderson, 2013; Morrell *et al.*, 2012, 2013). Therefore, there is no need to only act in a hypermasculine way and display traits such as aggressiveness or high levels of competitiveness. Messerschmidt (2012) defines hypermasculinity as exaggerated masculinity with an emphasis on power and dominance, where men make use of violence. In South Africa, recent studies show that demonstrating violence, exploitation, oppressiveness and toxic notions is mainly associated with hegemonic masculinity (Gqola, 2018; Jewkes *et al.*, 2015:115; Judge, 2017; Morrell *et al.*, 2012:13). Inclusive masculinity practices include a variety of behaviours attributed to *all* men regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

In keeping with this, one of the seminal contributors to gay masculinity, Castells (1983:157), for example, notes that "gayness" is much more than sexual preference – it is considered as an alternative way of living and enacting masculinity. This argument emphasises the interrelated relationship between one's gender and sexual identity. Some of the earliest examples of so-called "gay" behaviour were evident in Ancient Greece and traditional African society (Alvarez, 2009). People's disapproval of homosexuality can be attributed to the fact that homosexuality is considered as a Western import and "un-African" in many African countries (Dlamini, 2006:128). In the African context, homosexuality, as medical identity category, should be considered as "un-African" based on its introduction by Western colonial rulers, not on the practice of same-sex attraction *per se* (Dlamini, 2006:131; Rothmann, 2014). According to Dlamini (2006), colonial rule introduced the medical and religious condemnation of same-sex attraction and practices. Christian missionaries, for example, emphasised that indigenous African practices that favoured same-sex attraction should be replaced with an adherence to the heterosexual practice of monogamy. As such, research suggests that same-sex attraction in Africa was culturally and socially sanctioned and only vilified by conveying colonial practices on the continent (Dlamini, 2006; Rothmann, 2014).

1.3 MASCULINITY IN SPORT

Expectations associated with enacting certain forms of masculinity feature in different social institutions, including in *sport*. Traditional and conventional understandings of masculinity suggest that sportsmen are expected to display the main features of hegemonic masculinity. The context of sport, according to Connell (2008), possibly creates the views that can be identified with hegemonic masculinity that portray the competitive and dominant nature of men. Research has

shown that competitive sport has created spaces where hierarchical gendered and sexual orders are instituted and performed by both men and women (Gaston & Dixon, 2019:2). Such ideologies and practices are not only instituted to distinguish between appropriate gendered behaviour but also to differentiate between men as it relates to various types of hegemony, e.g., softer masculinities. In contact sport such as rugby, for example, the success of men as athletes is measured by defining a specific feature of masculinity, which includes inheritance of hegemonic principles such as discipline, obedience and sacrifice (Gaston & Dixon, 2019:2; White *et al.*, 2017:4). White *et al.* (2017:2) view sport as a secondary socialising agent that creates and reinforces ideals that are associated with hegemonic masculinity. This has contributed to the emancipation of men from the hegemonic structure of masculinity. White *et al.* (2012:2) claim that a process of “softening of masculinity” takes place throughout sporting codes because of the more inclusive nature of it, e.g., the acceptance of homosexuality in sport. Taking into consideration that homophobia takes place in different institutions and organisations, sporting leagues are making attempts to deal with the influences of homophobia in sport. The accounts of LGBTIQ+ athletes regarding feeling excluded from their more mainstream team members and experiences of homophobia served as main impetus to create LGBTIQ+ exclusive sports teams (Gaston & Dixon, 2019:4). Thus, the need for the creation of an inclusive gay sports space developed (Channon & Matthews, 2019). Furthermore, the need for such spaces came from the continuous privileging of heterosexuals and further exclusion of gay male players through homophobia (Baiocco *et al.*, 2018; Gaston & Dixon, 2019:4).

Jarvis (as cited in Gaston & Dixon, 2019:2), writing from an American perspective, notes that several attempts have been made by big sporting leagues, such as *American Major Leagues Baseball* teams, and sports teams, such as the *New York Yankees*, to deal with the challenges and possible influences of homophobia in sport (Bush *et al.*, 2012; Dashper, 2012; Gaston & Dixon, 2019:1). In the UK, for example, professional football players wore rainbow laces to express their commitment to calls to decrease homophobia in sport. This campaign was launched to support the notion of “kicking homophobia out of football” (Gaston & Dixon, 2019:1). However, the idea of this awareness of homophobia may not be as simple as it appears. Gaston and Dixon (2019:2) state that, regardless of the openness to the self-identified gay sportsmen in the UK – especially in football – players still face some challenges regarding the openness of their sexuality, e.g., high levels of homophobia in media representations (DCMS, 2017). In the 1980s, the UK football player Justin Fashanu’s professional football career was ended because he disclosed his sexuality publicly (Gaston & Dixon, 2019:2). More examples of sportsmen who “came out” were Gareth Thomas (a rugby player) and Tom Daley (professional diver) (Jarvis, 2015:282). However, the difference between their experiences and that of Justin Fashanu is that

they experienced more positive media support and coverage. For example, in the case of rugby star Gareth Thomas' "coming out", the British newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* reported on how his fellow teammates and management team were welcoming of his disclosure, commenting on more positive attitudes towards homosexuality (Jarvis, 2015:284). Daley explained that, when he had the thought of "coming out" he first felt unsafe because it was very risky. He expressed how competing in countries (i.e., Middle East, Russia) that are hostile towards the LGBTIQ+ community had been difficult. He added, "[i]t can be scary going to countries that aren't accepting of LGBTQ+ people". Therefore, as Gaston and Dixon (2019:2) contend, the landscape of being openly gay in sport is complex and depends on the particular time in history and the country where these changes occur (cf. Caudwell, 2011; Pringle, 2005).

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Against the above background on masculinity studies, it is evident that, regardless of the progressive provisions and protections afforded to gay persons by the South African Constitution (RSA, 1996), men in South Africa and abroad may still be expected to align themselves with hegemonic standards. All of this is to ensure a place in the heteronormative community with an acceptable "*masculine*" identity. In South Africa, hegemonic masculinity was displayed just as men would behave in sport (Hamber, 2012), which include showing high levels of aggressiveness and displaying strength and competitiveness (Anderson, 2014; Morrell, 1998). According to Bowley (2006:5), rugby, as an example of a contact sport, remains a marker of hegemonic masculinity in the country. He writes that "rugby in South Africa is regarded as a sport that real men play". Du Gay *et al.* (2000) add that male sport, such as rugby in South Africa, is one of the main forms of identification for particularly White men (i.e., regarding their masculinity).

Some South African ideologies are still connected with the more traditional view of what masculinity is (Ratele, 2014). Thus, calls for more inclusivity and plurality as it relates to masculinity challenge the traditional ideas associated with masculinity in South Africa. Hadebe (2008:8), however, attributes the reasons for people continuing to assign importance to traditional views to the fact that men have not yet rejected traditional "beliefs" and "practices" but still use these as a way of maintaining the dominance they have in the social world. Contact sport, as one South African social institution, has become an accepted and privileged space for heterosexual men to "act out" their masculinity (Gennrich, 2013:6). This creates an environment that promotes homophobia (Baiocco *et al.*, 2018; Denison & Kitchen, 2015, as cited in Gaston & Dixon, 2019). As a result, separate and exclusive sporting contexts, institutions and teams have arisen to redress the negativity of heteronormativity. The first signs of this in rugby dates to the early 1980s in the city of London where gay men attempted to come together to be operational and form their

own teams but failed to maintain any form of active profile. Regardless of these challenges, the first official gay rugby club (*Tritons*) was registered in London in November 1995 (Gaston & Dixon, 2019:4). Since then, the number of gay rugby clubs has grown increasingly across the world.

Players from the *Tritons* rugby club mention that “gay rugby” changed for the better in the UK. The gay rugby clubs were allowed to develop, and they received overt acceptance from the rugby community (e.g., drinking a beer with members of the other team after a game). Several gay players in Gaston and Dixon’s (2019:6) sample commented on how “much has changed since the advent of gay rugby teams [in the early 1990s in the UK, which highlight] the evolution and integration of gay sports clubs”. One player, for example, noted that, “[w]hen Manchester [Spartans] started, gay players weren’t allowed in the changing rooms, people refused to play with them, genuinely, for the fear of catching AIDS from them”. Thus, the amount of emotional support they received from the Rugby Football Union (RFU) encouraged an “accepting environment” by allowing gay rugby players to develop. Another example is the role of the International Gay Rugby Association and Board (IGRAB), which continues to provide resources to help interested parties in creating gay rugby programmes across the world. Initiatives include the recruitment of players and the creation of different types of rugby programmes to ensure a sustainable career and an “operational profile” for the players. The Gay Rugby Clubhouse (IGRC), established in 2016, was created to serve as a support system for gay rugby players. Support includes the encouragement of gay men to be *open* about their sexuality – thus, the disclosure of one’s sexual identity is “*something*” that should not be seen as a “taboo” (Gaston & Dixon, 2019:6). Consequently, the year 2016 also saw an increase in the number of gay rugby clubs. For example, in the UK, the *Tritons inclusive gay rugby club* was newly established in 2016 in Liverpool. This space was created with the main aim of being inclusive for all gay men. This club offered the players a space where “being a man” is defined differently (Gaston & Dixon, 2019:11). This club became a space where players could construct their own definition of masculinity that ultimately “challenged the traditional notions of masculinity” (Gaston & Dixon, 2019:10).

In the context of South Africa, little research has been conducted regarding inclusive masculinity in sport (Morrell, 2017), regardless of recommendations by scholars, including Morrell *et al.* (2012, 2013). Based on his research on how touch-rugby helped in creating stronger bonds among young boys under Apartheid, Morrell (2017:623) writes that sport remains an important area of leisure. In countries such as South Africa, it is evident from childhood that sport is connected to male gender performance and their body issues – particular examples exist among White middle-class children’s curriculum-linked schools sport (Morrell, 2017:623). Therefore, sport can have many outcomes and different uses. For example, it could promote national aggression (i.e., high levels of aggression towards someone because of their identity in a specific culture), on the one

hand, and the creation of a safe space that is inclusive and tolerant, on the other hand. From 1985 to 1990, rugby as “*the game*” (i.e., the players who were part of the game and how they reflected the gendered norms of sport) started. In this time, Morrell (2017:623) wrote how touch-rugby was considered as a safe space amid racial and political tension and pressure. This created the opportunity for men to “do masculinity better”. The game of touch-rugby was definitely competitive, but it also encouraged the idea of fair play and reflected the vision of inclusivity among men of different racial groups in South Africa.

Morrell *et al.* (2013:20) note that hegemonic masculinity hinders the acceptance of other masculinities. Thus, if men do not express hegemonic values, they are not legitimate. Therefore, Morrell *et al.* (2013:20) argue that the idea of “real men” is a cultural idea that is subject to critique and renegotiation. Thus, masculinities in South Africa are still posited along the lines of violence (Ratele, 2014). In keeping with the research objectives of the current study (inclusive masculinities among gay rugby players), it is worth considering how these definitions of masculinities in South Africa and abroad influence the experiences of gay men in contact sport.

I (the researcher) aimed to conduct an in-depth exploration of the influence of inclusive masculinity practices on self-identified gay South African rugby players in their experience of homophobia. Also, most of the studies on self-identified gay rugby players were undertaken in the UK and US. Therefore, this study is significant because it informs the reader on the possible challenges of and possibilities for these gay rugby players regarding addressing homophobia in their particular rugby teams or clubs.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.5.1 General research question

The general research question reads as follows: **What is the influence of inclusive masculinity practices on experiencing fear of being socially perceived as gay (homophobia) among self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa?**

1.5.2 *Specific research questions*

In addition to the general research question, the following specific research questions informed the study:

- What are the theoretical tenets of inclusive masculinity theory (IMT) that best describe the influence of inclusive practices on gay rugby players' experiences of homophobia in South Africa and abroad?
- What literature is applicable to explain the influence of inclusive and hegemonic masculinity practices on self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa in their experience of homophobia?
- What research methodology can be used to investigate the influence of inclusive and hegemonic masculinity practices on self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa in their experience of homophobia?
- Why do gay men play rugby?
- What are the ideal features that gay rugby players ascribe to masculinity in rugby?
- Why do gay rugby players decide to join or refrain from joining an exclusive gay rugby club?
- How do inclusive masculine practices influence gay rugby players regarding their experiences of homophobia in their respective teams and/or clubs?
- What conclusions can be drawn and what recommendations can be made regarding the influence of inclusive masculinity practices on self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa in their experience of homophobia?

1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This section outlines the general and specific research objectives.

1.6.1 *General research objective*

In keeping with the general research question, the general research objective was as follows: **To explore the influence of inclusive masculinity practices on the fear of self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa of being socially perceived as gay (i.e., experiencing homophobia).**

1.6.2 Specific research objectives

In addition to the general research objective, the following specific research objectives informed the study:

- to conduct a literature review on the main theoretical tenets of inclusive masculinity theory (IMT) and its influence on gay rugby players in South Africa and abroad;
- to conduct a literature review on the influence of inclusive masculinity practices on self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa in their experience of homophobia;
- to describe the research methodology that was used to investigate the influence of inclusive masculinity practices on self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa in their experience of homophobia;
- to explain the reasons why the gay men play rugby;
- to explore the ideal features that gay rugby players ascribe to masculinity in rugby;
- to explain the reasons why gay rugby players decided to join or refrain from joining an exclusive gay rugby club;
- to explore how inclusive masculine practices influence gay rugby players regarding their experiences of homophobia in their respective teams and/or clubs;
- to draw conclusions on and make recommendations regarding the influence of inclusive masculinity practices on self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa in their experience of homophobia.

1.7 CENTRAL THEORETICAL STATEMENT

Inclusive masculinity theory (IMT) has been used in the social sciences to study the experiences of men in the world of sport and in emerging literature on masculinities (Anderson & McCormack, 2018). IMT can be used to understand the change in the relationship between men and their construction and experience of their own and the masculinity of others (Anderson, 2009). Anderson and McCormack (2018) add that IMT focuses on the fact that men's gendered behaviour is context-specific, pluralistic and subject to change rather than homogenous or static. In keeping with this, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) expanded on the ideas associated with masculinity. They stated that the ideal form of masculinity could be challenged. Therefore, aspects of inclusive masculinity may, for example, critique hegemonic masculinity. In support of this is McCormack and Anderson's (2014) argument that men no longer only conform to the principles of hegemonic masculinity, because men today display behaviour that are connected with more

feminine practices, including emotional and physical intimacy. Borkowska (2020:3) writes about the Andersonian theory of masculinity as transcending a strict adherence to the hierarchical order of society (i.e., where men constantly want to align themselves with the ideologies of manhood). According to Borkowska (2020:3), Anderson (2009) uses IMT to capture the emotional and intimacy changes in men.

With greater awareness and knowledge of multiple masculinities, inclusive styles of masculinities became more accepted and legitimised (Borkowska, 2020:3). This recalls Anderson and McCormack's (2014) argument that levels of homophobia have been steadily decreasing – particularly in the UK and US. However, this statement is critiqued by De Boise (2015), O'Neill (2015) and Twenge (2014). O'Neill (2015:111), for example, critiques Anderson (2009) for his overemphasis on the supposed decline in homophobia and homophobia worldwide and the conflation of heterosexual masculinity with homophobic tendencies. Although homophobia is identified with masculinity, it is "not to say that homophobia is the definitive expression of what masculinity is" (O'Neill, 2015:111). In addition, Twenge (2014:6) argues that the decrease in homophobia in Anglo-American countries should not be generalised to all countries globally. Anderson and McCormack (2018) concede this critique. They acknowledge that although inclusive behaviours may encourage heterosexual men to be more accepting of sexual diversity and less defensive about their heterosexual masculinity, it does not mean that all contexts will be as accepting of such sexual plurality. McCormack and Anderson (2010) reiterate this by noting that inclusive masculinity is not understood in the same way in all contexts. Its understanding is different among and within cultures as well as among different generations. This thought reiterates Twenge's (2014:6) argument that a decrease in homophobia, in certain contexts, may result from cultural and legislative changes that encourage positive attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ people (e.g., the progressive South African Constitution that safeguards the rights of people, regardless of their gender and sexual identities) [RSA, 1996]).

Proponents of IMT recognise that heteronormativity and concealed homophobia do continue to exist, but they have also shown a significant decrease over the last few years. Anderson (2009) and Luisi *et al.* (2016:1318) argue that due to a decrease in homophobia and homophobia in society, men tend to be less inclined to police their gender performances because of their fear of being labelled as gay. For example, their research among male university students in the UK and US show that men are less likely to engage in "hypermasculine" behaviour to assert their heterosexuality. Regardless, Anderson and McCormack (2018:7) contend that heterosexuality is still "privileged" as dominant gender expression. Hardin and Whiteside (as cited in Luisi *et al.*, 2016:1319) argue that the reporting of the mass media tends to place the blame of "homosexual stigmas" on the gay and lesbian community instead of the different institutions in society. This

may be an example of implicit homophobia in society. This is supported by Kian *et al.* (2011:691), who argue that American athletes and fans have expressed examples of homophobia in the past, including posters with derogatory statements such as “we are getting ass raped today”¹. Kian *et al.* (2011:690) found that there are still various sexist and homophobic feelings and ideologies in professional sport, including name-calling such as “faggots”, “Jersey [s]hore”, “[s]nake fag” and “[B]oy George” (Kian *et al.*, 2011:690), all of which are examples of derogatory language that reflect negative attitudes towards gay men. Therefore, he states that, although the inclusive definitions of masculinity regarding homosexuality have gained some momentum, they do not always apply to all contexts. Owing to the recognition of *multiple masculinities*, research on gender has become more concerned with and focused on the personal feelings of men and what their different representations of manhood are or *should be* (Borkowska, 2020:3). Therefore, the present study used IMT because it emphasises how inclusive masculinity practices may inform gay men’s adoption of traditional and dominant hegemonic masculine traits, inclusive principles, or a combination of the two, in order to enact their sexual identity in their respective rugby teams.

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY²

This section provides a focus on the use of an **explorative qualitative research approach** to collect the empirical data of the present study. This proved to be an appropriate method because of my need to collect rich and detailed data from the participants to thoroughly explore their lived experiences as self-identified gay men in South African who play rugby. As a first step, I conducted a comprehensive **literature review** to identify relevant and recent academic and lay sources about the topic. The literature review centred around identifying the central themes and subthemes related to masculinities research – that is, focusing on the work of proponents of hegemonic, hybrid and inclusive masculinities. Additionally, I sought to peruse those academic and lay sources about masculinities in the context of rugby, in South African and abroad. Here, I engaged with scholarship that discussed previous and more recent studies about the perceived influence of hegemony and inclusivity on the experiences of self-identified gay rugby players. In so doing, I was able to theorise how homophobia and homosociality (as important tenets of IMT) characterise the experiences of gay men in rugby. I consulted published theses and dissertations completed at South African universities (NEXUS), the catalogue of books at the North-West University (NWU) libraries, internet search engines, such as Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, and

¹ Kian *et al.* (2011) conducted a textual analysis of a popular American Football online message board. They investigated how some men still use homophobic and sexist discourse when talking about sport on the Internet.

² A more detailed discussion of the research methodology is provided in chapter 4.

SAE Publications, and scientific reports and research studies on the related themes to identify the most relevant academic sources on the research topic.

The **empirical** part of the present study was informed using the ontological approach of **social constructivism** and **interpretivism** as epistemological approach. These approaches, according to Creswell and Poth (2018:24), encourage researchers to “understand [...] the world” by acknowledging that individuals construct “meanings that are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings into a few categories or ideas”. Therefore, both were applicable to the current study insofar as they enabled me, as primary investigator, to encourage the participants to freely express their subjective views about how their own inclusive masculine practices (and those of the members of their inclusive or exclusive South African rugby club) influenced their experiences of homophobia (cf. Bryman, 2016:28). These metatheoretical approaches extended to my use of an **explorative qualitative research approach**. The choice of this research design was motivated by the need to understand the interactions of the participants in their natural setting (Babbie, 2016). The approach was suitable as I sought to explore the under-researched topic intersubjectively in its natural setting to encourage the participants to relate potentially inductive, thick descriptive and subjective views (Neuman, 2014:38; Sarantakos, 2013:45).

Furthermore, the **non-probability sampling methods** of **purposive** and **snowball sampling** were used. The sample in this study comprised of seven self-identified gay rugby players living in South Africa. Apart from these exclusionary criteria for inclusion in the study, there were no further exhaustive inclusion criteria (i.e., the men’s age, race, social class, geographical location, gender identity, and whether they had disclosed or foreclosed their sexual orientation to others [i.e., “in” or “out of the closet”]) at the time of the study. Through purposive sampling, I selected participants who could provide a relevant insider’s perspective on being a self-identified gay man playing rugby in South Africa (Sarantakos, 2013:164). For the present study, representatives of an inclusive South African rugby club were contacted to potentially help with the recruitment of participants (refer to Addenda A and B). The recruitment process started after scientific and ethics approval were obtained from the NWU’s Focus Area of Social Transformation and the Basic and Social Science Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC), respectively (refer to Addenda C, D and E in this regard). The club was a starting point for sampling and data collection for this study. The representatives of said club forwarded relevant information of the study to prospective participants (including members of the club). Those participants who were interested to participate were encouraged to voluntarily contact me for more information. Given the difficulty to recruit participants through solely purposive sampling, I also employed **snowball sampling**. Relatively recent South African scholarship comments on the indispensable role of this sampling method for

those researchers who may find it challenging to recruit willing participants among the South African LGBTIQ+ community (Francis, 2017; Msibi, 2012; Rothmann, 2016; 2017).

As noted above, I obtained ethics approval from BaSSREC before I started with the empirical component of the study. Participants were given an **informed consent statement** (see Addendum F) to voluntarily read, complete and sign before the commencement of the data collection. The informed consent statement contained information about the biographical details of the researcher and their research affiliation; the objectives of the study; the particular rights, obligations and roles of the researcher and participant; the importance of observing the principles of anonymity, confidentiality and privacy; and a commitment to avoid any emotional, physical and social harm to the participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018:155; Sarantakos, 2013:18).

The empirical data were collected by means of seven **semi-structured interviews**. Two of these interviews were conducted in person and five virtually (via Zoom) using an **interview schedule** that comprised of biographical and opinion-related questions (refer to Addendum G for an example of this). Although I planned to conduct in-person interviews at the outset of the study, the South African Government's COVID-19 lockdown restrictions made this impossible. Irrespective of this potential limitation, the use of the virtual interviews allowed me to engage in the seven in-depth "conversations" with relative ease. This method also allowed the participants to partake in the interview from the comfort of their own home, and it contributed to a relative reduction in their potential "anxiety" about meeting me in person in a public space (cf. Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). The recorded data were transcribed by the primary investigator, and then the collected data were coded using **thematic analysis**. In so doing, I identified the themes that emerged from the transcripts.

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics refer to researchers upholding specific moral and academic standards during the course of their studies (Bryman, 2016). Additionally, research ethics refer to the difference between what is right and what is wrong as well as what is considered to be acceptable and unacceptable behaviour (World Conferences on Research Integrity, 2010). Ethics are important in any research process because they help the researcher to achieve certain goals while adhering to the specific standards that need to be followed to make a valuable contribution to academia. The Singapore Statement on Research Integrity (World Conferences on Research Integrity, 2010) highlights the importance of displaying the principles of honesty, accountability, fairness and good stewardship in all research.

Therefore, when conducting research in the social sciences, there are several ethical considerations to keep in mind because people are the subjects in such research. Given the potential sensitivity of the subject matter, specific care was taken with regard to the ethical considerations. These considerations helped the researcher to act according to specific standards (Shamoo & Resnik, 2015). The participants were given an **informed consent form** that clearly stated the objectives and procedures of this study. They had to sign the consent form before participating in this research. The form outlined the rights, obligations and roles of the researcher and the participant, the importance of observing the principles of confidentiality and privacy, and a commitment to avoid any emotional, physical and social harm to the participants (Sarantakos, 2013:18). This was a clear indication that they were participating **voluntarily** in the study and ensured informed consent from the participants. If a participant felt uncomfortable during the interview, they had the right to stop the interview at any time. Therefore, I did not force participants to continue against their will and respected their wishes. To ensure a reliable transcription of the interview, I asked each participant's permission to make an audio recording of the interview (Krueger, 2014:116). If they did not consent to this, I respected their wishes.

Moreover, I ensured that no **harm** (whether physical or emotional harm) was done to the participants that formed part of the study. Taking informed consent into consideration, **confidentiality** is, as noted above, important to observe (Babbie, 2016). The identity of the participants was protected by making use of pseudonyms (chosen by the participant at the outset of the interview). I did not probe for anything that *might* have been uncomfortable to talk about. In addition, I protected the **privacy** of the participants – thus not forcing the men to talk about particular matters that they regarded as personal (Bryman, 2016:395). The present study adhered to the principles of the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC) of the Faculty of Humanities. Commencement of the empirical study was dependent on the approval of this committee and its provision of an ethics number.

1.10 CHAPTER LAYOUT

Chapter 1: Introduction and problem statement

This chapter introduces the reader to the background to the specific study on self-identified gay rugby players, with an emphasis on the study's problem statement, research questions and research objectives.

Chapter 2: Hegemonic, hybrid and inclusive masculinities: a theoretical overview

The chapter provides the reader with a detailed discussion of IMT as central theoretical statement for the present study. The discussion focuses on the main tenets of IMT, for example, its emphasis on the plurality of masculinity, its association with mainly younger men (i.e., millennials) and, in particular, how inclusive practices inform experiences of homophobia among men.

Chapter 3: Gay and heterosexual, inclusivity and rugby: a literature review

This chapter discusses the contributions of current and previous research on the experiences of gay men in the context of rugby and other related contact sport in South Africa and abroad.

Chapter 4: Research methodology

This chapter informs the reader on the specific research approach and design that I used. The chapter provides an overview of the specific sampling, data collection and data analysis procedures that were used. The chapter is concluded with a focus on the ethical considerations associated with the study and a biographical overview of the participants.

Chapter 5: Inclusive masculinities, homophobia and gay rugby players: Findings

This chapter presents the reader with the empirical findings that emerged from the semi-structured interviews.

Chapter 6: Discussion of findings

This chapter provides a critical integration between the empirical findings of the study, the theory and literature associated with IMT and experiences of homophobia in contact sport among gay men.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and recommendations

The concluding chapter summarises the main findings of the study to answer the general and specific research questions. Recommendations are also made for further empirical and theoretical studies on the topic.

CHAPTER 2:

HEGEMONIC, HYBRID AND INCLUSIVE MASCULINITIES: A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Scholarship highlights that masculinities do change and that “historians have provided evidence that cultural constructions of masculinity change over time” (Connell, 2008:134). In keeping with the preceding quote, this chapter provides the reader with a detailed discussion of IMT as central theoretical statement for the present study. The discussion focuses on the main tenets of IMT – that is, its emphasis on the plurality of masculinity, its association with mainly younger men (i.e., millennials), and how inclusive practices inform experiences of homophobia among men. Preceding the discussion of and justification for using IMT, I provide a detailed background to Connell’s (1987) hegemonic masculinity theory (hereafter HMT) as point of departure. This is followed by a discussion of the main tenets of IMT as the central theoretical argument of the present study on the experiences of gay rugby players in South Africa.

2.2 CONNELL’S HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY THEORY (HMT): A CRITICAL OVERVIEW

According to Wedgwood (2009:329), Connell’s HMT is considered as one of the most influential theories in the field of men and masculinities studies; the said theory continues to impact on the field of gender studies internationally. HMT has proven to be useful due to the fact that scholars, who hail from various disciplines, adopt it to study how individual men subscribe to or challenge the reproduction of dominant (or so-called “valorised”) forms of masculinity. The key element to Connell’s masculinity theory is the importance she ascribes to the differentiation between hegemonic and non-hegemonic forms of masculinity (Wedgwood, 2019:330).

Connell (2005:77) describes hegemonic masculinity as the dominant form of masculinity, which, according to her, is viewed as the ideal form of masculinity. This entails that one form of masculinity is regarded as being the dominant form of gendered and sexual behaviour that men are expected to emulate (Connell, 2005). According to her, men continue to subscribe to said ideals because hegemonic masculinity offers the benefit of power and a higher status for men who identify as heterosexual. Connell (2005) states that the concept of hegemonic

masculinity clarifies how men inhabit more powerful positions in relation to their female counterparts in society. The hegemonic male is typified as an aggressive, unemotional, competitive and dominant individual – thus, someone who embodies a so-called “ethic of justice” (Connell, 1987:186). This dominant form of masculinity also disregards subordinated men (Segal, 2007) who do not enact the tenets of hegemonic masculinity (e.g., gay men). Thus, men who display so-called subordinated forms of masculinity could face discrimination and marginalisation (Connell, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2019:86; Namaste, 1996). These subordinate configurations comprise softer forms of masculinity (Bradley, 2007:47). The tenets of these forms of masculinities favour a horizontal (i.e., equal and inclusive) view of masculinities as opposed to the hierarchical and vertical stratification of masculine expressions – akin to HMT. Subordinate masculinities – that is, men who are either gay or too effeminate to be considered as masculine as per *hegemonic* expectations – mainly occupy the lower echelons of the stratified masculine hierarchy. Segal (2007:113) notes that said men are regarded as “traitors to the cause” of the perceived acceptable heterosexual male.

2.2.1 Defining HMT

As will be evident from the subsections to follow, IMT builds on Connell’s (1987) work. HMT, as noted, focus on how men stratify themselves and others hierarchically according to their masculinity – that is, some men are deemed more privileged at the expense of others. Demetriou (2001) terms this as an “internal hegemony”. Said hegemony is associated with specific kinds of behaviour that are considered as culturally dominant and “valorised” as ideal masculinity (Wedgwood, 2019:331). Hegemony, as Demetriou (2001) contends, does not only demarcate men based on their sexual orientation (thus, gay versus heterosexual); it may *internally* also differentiate between heterosexual men regarding their ability to exude the hegemonic tenets of, among others, aggression, competitiveness, heteronormativity and patriarchy (Connell, 1987:47-58). Those men who are unable to achieve such valorised masculine traits (e.g., gay men and heterosexual men alike) may be subjected to marginalisation and discrimination. Although some cultures emphasise the importance of hegemonic masculinities (Kimmel, 2017), scholars should refrain from using the concept in a simplistic way. They argue that one should acknowledge the hybridity, flexibility and context-specific nature of hegemonic masculinity rather than subscribing to a monolithic view (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). HMT, according to Anderson (2014), was particularly prominent during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s as a means to explain the reproduction and reinforcement of a specific form of masculinity (i.e., hegemonic masculinity) as the masculine *ideal* to which men had to subscribe (Connell, 2005).

In an interview with Wedgwood (2009:330), Connell noted that she

...saw gender as a structure or a system of social inequality, with its own logic and its own internal complexities. That was my approach to understanding gender and that had been my approach to understanding class.

In addition to the importance of structural foci regarding gender, Connell's thinking about gender extended to personal factors as well. She noted: "I've never felt, personally, very comfortable with conventional masculinities. I've always identified strongly with women" (as cited in Wedgwood, 2009:337).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity was, as noted above, devised to understand men's patriarchal dominance over women – that is, to "conceptualize how patriarchal relations are legitimated throughout society" (Messerschmidt, 2012:63) and the control of some masculinities (or men) over others. Demetriou (2001) refers to this as *external* and *internal hegemony*. He defines these as follows. **Internal hegemony**, he notes, refers to the dominance of one group of men over others. Connell (2005) contends that hegemony, therefore, extends to the dominance of heterosexual men over one another *and* gay men. However, Connell (2005) and Gramsci (1971) did not fully agree with each other on the understanding of this fundamental process of internal hegemony (Demetriou, 2001:346). On the one hand, Gramsci believed that the process is a dialectical one that involves reciprocity between men – that is, a mutual interaction between the group that is deemed dominant and the group that is (or might be) dominated. Connell (2005), on the other hand, believes hegemonic masculinity is more exclusive. This implies that the subordinated and marginalised man has no significant input/control into/over the construction of the hegemonic model and its subsequent exertion of patriarchal and heteronormative dominance. Connell, therefore, recognises that these different forms of masculinities **are in constant interaction**. Furthermore, she believes hegemonic masculinity may be influenced by the existence of so-called subordinate and/or marginalised models. She notes that through **authorisation**, the hegemonic model may "authorise" the adoption of *some* elements of subordinate or marginalised masculinities in the performances of men who are considered as hegemonic males (Demetriou, 2001:346). **External hegemony** is understood as the **institutionalisation of men's dominance over women** (Demetriou, 2001:341). Such dominance extends from the familial to labour market – for example, men in certain positions have more material advantages, higher income, and easier access to educational opportunities (Stats SA, 2021). The report from Stats SA states that, according to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey of the

second quarter of 2021, “the South African labour market is more favourable to men than it is to women”.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) and Messerschmidt (2019) contend that hegemonic masculinity remains highly significant to critical masculinity studies. However, they explain that scholars misinterpreted and erroneously applied HMT in the past. Connell, for example, contends that hegemonic masculinity offers more benefits of power and a higher reputation for those men who identify as heterosexual. Connell (2005:77) defined hegemonic masculinity as follows:

...the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.

Hearn and Morrell (2012:4), too, refers to an “embodied, collective practice, a set of social processes, as the centre in a relational gender system, to which other positions relate, [and] a normative structure, to which all or almost all men aspire”. In their later refinement of the concept, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) stated that it has been over-utilised or maybe over-emphasised; As Wedgwood (2009:335) rightfully notes, the theory was sometimes misunderstood by other researchers as being reproduced in an un-problematic and relatively easy way. This is incongruent with Connell’s initial approach to studying men – namely, emphasising how gender and masculinities are **social processes** rather than static objects (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005:841). Connell (2005) asserts that the use of the concept has not been consistent. She states that some empirical studies of masculinity explore non-hegemonic forms of masculinity in relation to/opposed to hegemonic forms, whereas other studies do not. This means that some researchers include more inclusive forms (e.g., subordinate, complicity and marginalised) of masculinity in their studies, and others only use hegemonic forms (Frosh *et al.*, 2002). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), therefore, note that these apparent individual and context-specific practices of hegemonic and other more inclusive masculinities do not occur in a neutral space. Instead, they are situational and may reproduce specific gendered relations and structures in certain settings.

Hegemonic masculinities, therefore, (re)produce specific social relations and social meanings which determine what is “accepted” and “unacceptable” gendered behaviour for people in specific situations (Messerschmidt, 2019:90). In other words, academics continue to acknowledge the use Connell’s (1987, 2005) HMT as explanation for persisting inequality between men and women alike (Messerschmidt, 2019:90). Similarly, Messerschmidt (2019:86) adds that the original emphasis on the legitimisation of unequal gender relations

remains crucial in the use of the concept and in the field of masculine studies. The initial meaning of hegemonic masculinity centred around the following:

...a specific form of masculinity in a given historical and society-wide social setting that legitimates unequal gender relations between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities. (Connell, 1987:183)

Messerschmidt (2019:86) argues that hegemonic masculinity may be retained as idealised form of masculinity through its differentiation from, what Connell (1987) terms as emphasised femininity, non-hegemonic or “subordinate” masculinities. These so-called “subordinate” masculinities encompass men who display “lesser *than* or *abnormal* and *deviant to hegemonic masculinity*, such as effeminate men” (Messerschmidt, 2019:87). In his article on the continued “salience” of HMT, Messerschmidt (2019:87) argues that hegemonic masculinities came into existence during a particular period in time and contextual circumstances; the concept, its interpretation and use, therefore, remain open to historical change (Messerschmidt, 2019:87). However, there could be a challenge for hegemony whereby older types of hegemonic masculinity could be displaced by newer, less oppressive, more humane ways of being masculine (Messerschmidt, 2019:87) – an argument to which Anderson (2014) attests, hence his use of IMT. The latter, as central theoretical statement of the present study, is discussed in subsection 2.3.

2.2.2 Harder versus softer masculinities: opposing HMT

Connell (2005) refers to three types of “softer” masculine typologies, namely subordinated masculinities (e.g., gay men), complicit masculinities (men who retain patriarchal and heteronormative benefits even if they are unable to emulate hegemonic ideals themselves); and marginalised masculinities (i.e., men who are not considered as “real men” or exuding the hegemonic ideals due to their class, race and/or ethnicity) (Connell, 2005:78). Connell (2005) conceptualised these typologies as means to comment on how gender masculinity is a “configuration of practice”; to understand it, it is important to emphasise “what people actually do, [and not only] what is expected or imagined” (Demetriou, 2001:340). In this sense, gender is not a fixed set of social norms that are passively adopted and enacted; it is constantly produced and reproduced in social practice.

(a) Subordinated masculinities

According to Connell (2005:78), hegemony contributes to a specific understanding of cultural dominance in society. Considering the overall framework, it entails that one form of masculinity

is considered as being the dominant form of gendered and sexual behaviour that men are expected to emulate. There are specific gender relations of domination and subordination between different groups of men. Connell (2005:78) further notes that it is more than cultural stigmatisation of gay identity or homosexuality. It is about the fact that gay men are subordinated in relation to heterosexual men through an array of material practices. This recalls Rubin's (1993) reference to the "sex hierarchy". This, she argues, places heterosexuality at the top of an "erotic pyramid" as the dominant form of sexual expression. As opposed to that position, homosexuality is relegated to the periphery as a subordinate "other" (Rothmann & Simmonds, 2015:5). Discrimination against gay men remains a matter of concern in contemporary South Africa and abroad. This includes political and cultural exclusion as well as cultural abuse (Connell, 2005:78). According to Judge (2014:70), gay men continue to be subjected to overt physical and emotional homophobia for, among others, not being "man enough" (Graaff & Heineken, 2017). They face discrimination due to their supposed inability to conform to practices that legitimise men's dominant positions. She adds that it justifies the subordination of men who exude gendered behaviours that contradict hegemony, that is, those who are deemed as too effeminate. This may result in experiencing homophobic violence. Said violence, according to Judge (2014:70), exerts a disciplinary approach to men due to their inability to conform to and perform their gender correctly (i.e., in a non-cisgendered way). They are, therefore, not considered as being "real men" (Judge, 2014:70).

These views on homosexuality, violence and the prevailing harsh climate of heteronormativity may have a major influence on how sexual minorities construct their sexual identities – something that limits the agency of gay men to disclose and freely perform their homosexuality (monakali & Francis, 2022; Rothmann, 2014, 2016; Smuts, 2011). For example, in the US, this includes men who now have become targets of religious rights. Another example is street and legal violence; these actions range from imprisonment, intimidation and murder (Connell, 2005:78). An Australian working-class man reflected on his experience of coming out in a homophobic culture: "You know, I didn't totally [realise] what it was to be gay. I mean it's a bastard of a life."

In keeping with the above statement, Messerschmidt (2012) explains the individualism of hegemonic masculinity, arguing that "certain men may maintain power over other men". He distinguishes between hegemonic masculinity and two non-hegemonic forms of masculinity – "**dominant** and **dominating** masculinity" – which serve to subordinate men and women irrespective of their sexual orientation (Messerschmidt, 2012:63). **Dominant masculine typologies**, according to him, prevail in social institutions as "authoritative" forms of

masculinity (e.g., hybrid dominating; protective and discursive hegemonic masculinity). **Dominating masculinities**, conversely, result in the more obvious, open, or “brute oppression” of men who exude other masculinities (e.g., gay men) (Messerschmidt, 2012:63). Furthermore, Messerschmidt (2012:63) writes:

To conceptualize fully hegemonic masculinities ... scholars must unravel dominant, dominating, and other types of non-hegemonic masculinities from hegemonic masculinity. And this distinction between hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities further facilitates the discovery and identification of ‘equality masculinities’: those that legitimate an egalitarian relationship between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and among men.

Christensen and Jensen (2014:70), for example, ask whether it is feasible to continue using the concept of hegemonic masculinity. They argued that Messerschmidt’s distinction between hegemonic (i.e., “dominance through cultural and discursive consensus as opposed to overt use of raw force, physical coercion”) and non-hegemonic masculinity (i.e., “validate an equal relationship between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and among men”) does not necessarily (and adequately) explain the emergence of alternative forms of gender and masculine expressions (Messerschmidt, 2012:72-73).

To this point, Morrell *et al.* (2012:13), writing from a South African perspective, noted that heterosexual and gay men require assistance to transgress rigid understandings of being male as means to assist them through interventions that could encourage them to challenge and “renegotiate” their views and behaviours regarding masculine expressions. According to Ratele (2008), in South Africa, men are influenced by what he terms, ruling masculinity. Ruling masculinity is an analytical tool that is influenced by hegemonic masculinity. Ruling masculinity reflects an ideal position that is shaped by cultural and economic relations among men. It shapes how men think and behave (Ratele, 2008). This ranges from participating in mass killings; non-consensual sex with women; rape; and verbal and/or physical abuse. Corrective rape is one example that reflects the challenges gay, lesbian and non-binary persons face in South Africa owing to, among others, their inability to correctly perform their gender and sexual identities as per cisgenderism (Mendos *et al.*, 2020). Their inability to do so, may exacerbate gender-based and homophobic violence, discrimination and prejudice towards LGBTIQ+ individuals (Ellis, 2020). If one were to look at legislation, for example, determining how South Africa as a democratic country has progressed in protecting and promoting the lives of LGBTQIA+ people, several examples of such milestones exist (Mendos *et al.*, 2020). With that

being said, the Constitution protects South African citizens in terms of gender, sex and sexual orientation, among other forms of diversity. Regardless of this, heteronormative and patriarchal prescriptions still result in the perpetuation of violence against gender and sexual minorities (monakali & Francis, 2022). However, the emphasis that is put on aggression and violence leads to the development of hypermasculinity. Hypermasculinity has three elements:

(1) a belief that danger is exciting; (2) viewing violence as an acceptable means of demonstrating dominance; and (3) calloused sexual attitudes, reflecting a disregard of women's rights ... Many of these characteristics, singly and in conjunction with each other, tend to increase the likelihood that men will perpetrate violence, and more specifically gender-based violence, against both women and other men. (Graaff & Heineken, 2017:623)

For example, gender-inequitable beliefs are a strong indicator of violence. The things some men do just to prove that they are “real men” are inspired by a set of ideas. The fights between men that occur during football and rugby matches are examples of such hypermasculine behaviours. In South Africa, men must constantly manage their behaviours through intense self-reflexivity to evade potential hostility from others in society (Dube, 2016; Graaff & Heineken, 2017; Ratele, 2014).

Homosexuality is rendered as subordinate masculinity at the bottom of the gender hierarchy (Connell, 2005:78). Gayness, in this so-called patriarchal ideology, symbolises a so-called lesser masculine “repository” of what is not hegemonic masculinity. Examples of such tenets that render gay men subordinate range from their partiality towards gentrification, effeminacy and taking on the role of passive and receptive partner during sexual intercourse, all of which are stereotypically associated with women (Connell, 2005:78). Hence, proponents of HMT equate gayness with femininity. Militarism, according to Graaff and Heineken (2017), often feeds into a culture of hypermasculinity, which encourages men to value aggression and strength.

We grow [sic] in this society where we having ... old people to say to us, to be a man, you need to be strong. To be a man, you need to be tough, to have a last word...not to cry, to beat up your wife. Those kinds of things that put us men into a box of being violent. (Participant as cited in Graaff & Heineken, 2017:631)

Connell (2005:79) notes that although gay masculinity is the most conspicuous example of subordinate masculinity, the category also encompasses heterosexual men. Effeminate and

gay men are, as alluded to before, placed within this category because of their supposed emotional and physical weakness (Epprecht, 2001; Matlebyane, 2020:8). Subordinated men are subjected to varied forms of discrimination, for example, “political and cultural exclusions, cultural abuse; legal violence; street violence (ranging from intimidation to murder), economic discrimination and personal boycotts”. Irrespective of these advances, scholars continue to comment on the incongruence between the Bill of Rights’ protection of sexual and gender minorities and their actual experiences in civil society (Francis, 2019; Rothmann, 2016). This is attributed to continued social conservatism (Van den Berg, 2016) – the reverence men display for traditional (Graaff & Heineken, 2016:631), patriarchal and heteronormative ideologies (Graaff & Heineken, 2017:631) that valorise hegemony (Kimmel, 2017; Marais, 2010). Matlebyane (2020:9) contends that the Constitution, given this disjuncture, is not able to fully guarantee freedom of expression in the everyday lives of those in the LGBTIQ+ community.

(b) Complicit masculinities

The normative definitions of masculinity have the problem that not all men meet the normative standard of masculinity (Connell, 2005:79). This applies to hegemonic masculinity. Those men who can conform to the main tenets of hegemonic masculinity potentially gain and benefit from patriarchy. This relates to **hybrid masculinities**. As previously mentioned, hegemonic masculinity is the dominant type of masculinity with qualities such as heterosexuality, whiteness, superiority, physical strength and suppression of emotions (Connell, 2005). Furthermore, Messerschmidt (2018) refers to different expressions of hegemonic masculinities, i.e., **hybrid hegemonic masculinity**, which encompasses supposed subordinate masculine traits (e.g., effeminacy, aestheticism, and emotionality) men may adopt strategically to further their causes in particular contexts (Messerschmidt, 2018).

Masculinities that are constructed in such a way are complicit in retaining hegemony as ideal at the expense of other masculinities (Connell, 2005:79). Consider heterosexual marriage as an example. Heterosexual men, being a father and husband, may “use” their gender (Johnson, 2009) or “undo” deterministic gender expectations (Adeagbo, 2015) as an attempt to negotiate their (and their wives and children’s) responsibilities, rights and opportunities as opposed to simply exerting dominance through overt displays of patriarchal authority. These men who arguably engage in emotion work (Anderson & Magrath, 2019) continue to draw on their patriarchal dividend through such reciprocation of respect for their wives, thus sharing in household duties. Anderson and Magrath (2019) wrote about a shift in masculinity – “more feminine versions of male gender”. Eisen and Yamashita (2019:816) believe that this provides

men with “spaces where it [is] acceptable to reject...expectations of masculine aggression and dominance and also feel comfortable with being emotionally open”. Conversely, they show these emotions only to close friends (Eisen & Yamashita, 2019:814). In so doing, Bridges (2014) and Bridges and Pascoe (2014) argue that hybrid masculinity allows heterosexual men to “borrow bits and pieces” (Demetriou, 2001) from what may, stereotypically, be considered as gay and/or feminine traits to simultaneously “undo” *and* “do” their masculinity (West & Zimmerman, 2002).

The construction of hybrid masculinity may, according to Eisen and Yamashita (2019:816), reinforce gender hierarchies by emulating the inherent tenets of the hegemonic male while, simultaneously, allowing men with the opportunity to be in touch with their feminine side. Eisen and Yamashita (2019:817) note that this permits men to accumulate “masculine capital in one arena” (e.g., going to the gym, being masculine) that can be “spent in other spaces when men engage in feminine practices” (e.g., buying perfume, taking care of the kids, cleaning the house). In so doing, the men “craft narratives that elevate them over other men”. They, therefore, do not challenge “the perception that women are weak for being caring and nurturing ... instead, these traits are borrowed by men to demonstrate their maturity and progressive nature, as they are able to adopt traits from both masculinity and femininity”. These men, therefore, according to Eisen and Yamashita (2019:817), attempt to retain “societal images of hegemonic masculinity” to benefit from said typology in two ways. First, sustaining hegemonic masculinity continues to privilege “men over women”. Examples included in the study of Eisen and Yamashita (2019:817) are football players and frat boys who embody hegemonic masculinity. Second, these men can “symbolically distance themselves from hegemonic masculinity and obscure any connection they may have to it” (e.g., non-aggressive or does not have an athletic body). Bridges (2014), among others, argues how heterosexual men’s construction of a “hybrid masculinity” centred around adopting *some* gay characteristics. Although they adopted these traits that arguably differentiate them from a stoic form of hegemonic masculine expression, participants in his study continued to describe themselves as being more “feminine” rather than gay. They, thus, sought to distance themselves from such “homosexualisation” (cf. Eisen & Yamashita, 2019).

(c) *Marginalised masculinities*

Connell (2005:81) writes that marginalisation is relative to the authorisation of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group. For example, in the US, Black athletes may be an exemplar for hegemonic masculinity; however, the fame and the wealth have no trickle-down effect (i.e., it does not afford them with the necessary social authority) (Connell, 2005:81). Equally,

hegemonic masculinity among White men, for example, may reinforce such institutional oppression that frame the making of masculinities in Black communities. Connell, therefore, understands gender as a socially constructed marker of identity that intersects and informs the life worlds of people in respect of their class, race and sexual orientation. Christensen and Jensen (2014:69), for example, write that the category of gender is unstable and is continuously and intersectionally informed, structured and reconfigured/altered through connections to other categories. Some men, for example, may benefit from the fact that they self-identify as a member of a specific class, race and sexual group that sustains their dominant position and male privilege. This is because these categories (and combination thereof) may support the dominant position and male privilege of some men because they strengthen the legitimacy of their masculinity (Francis, 2019). Writing from a South African perspective, Smuts' (2011) study about the experiences of self-identified Black lesbian women living in Johannesburg also revealed that based on the intersections between their race, class and sexual orientation, they became much more susceptible to corrective rape – experiences that their White lesbian counterparts are less likely to face.

Associated with the category of marginality, it is worth considering Pumla Gqola's (2007) work. The South African culture, according to her, is labelled as a rainbow nation. Gqola is known for the concept of *Female Fear Factory* – she calls it a “public performance” and refers to the way patriarchal institutions and men use it to instil fear in women. The rainbow nation, in her opinion, is viewed as “how we should relate to one another; what we should be able to assume and invest in one another; [and] what embracing and accepting that we are all entitled to freedom really means” (Gqola, 2007:115). The discourses on gender in the public sphere of South Africa are very conservative. Women empowerment does not necessarily manifest as transformative, since there is overwhelming evidence that women are, in fact, disempowered due to, among others, heteronormativity and patriarchy (Gqola, 2007:115). This thought is evident in recent rape, gender-based violence and homophobia statistics (Ellis, 2020) that exacerbate homonegativity, not empowerment (Gqola, 2007:115). South Africa is a gender-progressive country. According to Shange (2022), from October to December 2021, 11 315 rapes were reported against women.

Gqola (2007:118) states that South African lesbian women live in a country where they are, as per the Bill of Rights, empowered, but they cannot express their sexuality. South African women are, for example, subjected to corrective rape as a means to “cure” them of their lesbianism. Gqola (2007:118) said:

It is a ridiculous lie, and it is not new. We know what is responsible for the scourge of gender-based violence, and we need to confront violent masculinities. We need to confront and reject violent men and the patriarchal men and women who protect and enable them.

South African research on HMT is particularly pronounced in the work of Robert Morrell (1998, 2001, 2017) and his colleagues (Morrell *et al.*, 2012, 2013). He notes that there is not only one form of masculinity that should be considered as being hegemonic, but rather three: “White masculinity”, which is represented in the political and economic dominance of the White ruling class; “African masculinity”, that is, a more rural-based masculinity that is perpetuated by indigenous institutions such as chiefship (Morrell *et al.*, 2012:12); and “black masculinity”. The latter, according to him, emerged from the development of geographically separate and culturally distinct African townships (Dube, 2016; Morrell *et al.*, 2012). Black and White men are not just separated from each other by history and geography, but also hierarchically. An example of this is the meaning of the word “boy” in South African English. According to Bradford (as cited in Morrell, 1998:66), the use of the concept of “boy” is “objectionable among certain groups: used alone to refer to a grown man, *usu*, African, who is a servant”. The use of the word “boy” by White persons (men, women, boys and girls) to refer to Black men reflected a workplace reality in which African men did the “tedious work, requiring strong, energetic and powerful bodies”.

2.2.3 Critiquing HMT

Christensen and Jensen (2014) write that Connell’s work has played a significant role in the studies of men and masculinities. The concept of hegemonic masculinity plays a central role in the link between masculinity research and feminist studies because it is one of the few concepts that allows research to flourish and develop in a productive way (Christensen & Jensen, 2014; Hearn, 2004). Considering the view of Christensen and Jensen (2014), the concept is one of a few that were allowed to flourish and develop in the studies of men and masculinity.

However, Christensen and Jensen (2014:64) state that it might not solve the “basic problem” that the concept is unavoidably woven into an understanding of social relations as patriarchal – referring to **external hegemony** (patriarchal power relations) and **internal hegemony** (power relations between masculinities) (Messerschmidt, 2012). They argue that one of the limitations associated with HMT is that it does not necessarily provide space for acknowledging alternative masculinities *horizontally* but rather reinforces a *vertical*

appropriation of gender stratifications. Anderson (2014) concurs with this. He notes that irrespective of Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) refinement of HMT as a means to address critique, its proponents continue to rely on the "subordination of non-hegemonic masculinities" and valorisation of "one dominating (hegemonic) archetype of masculinity" without accounting for the reasons for the changing cultural and social dynamics among men in contemporary society. IMT, according to Anderson (2009, 2014), therefore, attempts to account for the shifts among and the co-existence of varied valued forms of masculinities amidst a culture of decreasing (albeit not entirely absent) homophobia and homophobia (Anderson, 2005, 2009). The idea of oppression of women and men alike therefore remains a "theoretical axiom in analyses of hegemonic masculinity" (Christensen & Jensen, 2014:64; cf. Beasley, 2008).

In addition to the above critique, Hearn (2004) argues that HMT's focus on masculinity is too limited and that there is a need to examine "the hegemony of men and about men" to grasp the complexity associated with men as being "both a social category formed by the gender system and dominant collective; **and**³ individual agents of social practice". Similarly, Wetherell and Edley (1999) argue that the concept of hegemonic masculinity is inadequate for understanding how men position themselves in contemporary society. They advocate for a combination between macro-sociological understandings of gender relations with the micro-psychological analysis of men's identities. These critiques informed the use of IMT.

2.3 INCLUSIVE MASCULINE THEORY (IMT)

Next, I discuss the main features of IMT.

2.3.1 *The origin of IMT*

As opposed to HMT, the proponents of inclusive masculinity theory (IMT) do not favour the view that there exists one dominant (or domineering) form of masculinity in specific contexts but rather a range of dominant masculinities. Its proponents prefer the use of IMT because the approach seeks to investigate the different and nuanced complexities of various types of masculinities (Anderson, 2009, 2014). To this point, Borkowska (2020:2) writes about the conceptual changes in masculinity studies and their impact on the field over the last few years. He, alongside Anderson (2014), proposes the use of IMT as a social constructionist approach to studying masculinities. Such an approach foregrounds the socially constructed nature of masculinities – that is, men's ability to engage their agency to intrapsychically, and

³ Emphasis added.

interpersonally, script their gendered and sexualised identities within a larger cultural scenario (Anderson & McCormack, 2018; Simon, 1996), thus, “the view of behaviour that emphasizes the shared meaning and social patterns created during social interactions” (Anderson & Magrath, 2019:79).

Anderson (2014), Magrath (2017a) and Morales (2020), among others, do not refute the importance of HMT during mainly the 1980s and 1990s. They, however, contend that the theory is no longer able to explain the shifts towards homosociality, a decline in homophobia, and increasing acceptance of homosexuality and sexual diversity among men (Anderson & McCormack, 2018). Borkowska (2016:546), for example, points to the existence of multiple masculinities. IMT developed based on these changes, particularly, in the US and UK. This is supported by the social constructionist theory, because it argues that an individual's reality should not be seen as one universal reality, but that there are multiple realities, and these realities are dependent on one's social context (Anderson & Magrath, 2019). Anderson and Magrath (2019) cite Hearn *et al.* (2012) who chronicle this shift from a sole adherence to HMT to theoretical paradigms that seek to understand men's diverse conceptualisations and performances of masculinities in contemporary society.

The main proponent of IMT is Eric Anderson. Based on his research among American men in university fraternities (2005) and in contact sports including rugby and soccer (Anderson, 2005, 2008a, 2008b, 2009), he found that his self-identified heterosexual male participants transgressed the expected hegemonic way of exerting their masculinity through interactions with their male peers (Anderson, 2014; Anderson & McCormack, 2018). He concluded that there was an evident decline (and absence) of homophobia, heterosexism and homophobia. As a central tenet in Anderson's (2009) IMT, he sought to distinguish **homophobia** from homophobia. As regards the latter, Anderson and Magrath (2019) mention that homophobia relates to anti-gay attitudes and behaviours, which may result in verbal and/or physical discrimination towards sexual minority individuals. Homophobia, according to him, provides a more nuanced way to explain men's partiality to overt displays of homosocial tactility and intimacy – that is, the reasons why younger men eschewed heterosexual, homophobic, or violent masculinity in favour of “softer masculinities”. One of the influences that led Anderson to adopting IMT was the work of Ibson (2002). In the latter's book *Picturing Men*, the author chronicled the existence of varied levels (Anderson, 2005; Ibson, 2002; Anderson & McCormack, 2018) of homophobia, differences in how people understood and engaged with homosexuality, and how close men are willing to be with each other, whether physically and/or emotionally (Anderson, 2005). Ibson (2002) showed that, in contexts characterised by increasing levels of homophobia, men are more prone to stringently police (McCormack, 2020)

their performances of masculinity and their homosocial tactility. Conversely, where there is proof of decreasing homophobia, men are less likely to be homohysterical – that is, fearful of being labelled as gay and, therefore, might be more willing to exude overt homosociality. Although the work of Ibson (2002) influenced Anderson, he wanted to further contribute to the field of masculinity studies by creating a theory that accounted for a cultural awareness that homosexuality existed as acknowledged form of sexual expression and identification, alongside varying levels of cultural homophobia (Anderson & Magrath, 2019:80).

In 2005, Anderson introduced IMT. IMT emerged from findings of more inclusive behaviours of heterosexual men in fraternities and in contact sports (Anderson, 2005, 2008a, 2008b, 2009) as well as the changing dynamics of male groups in the US and UK. IMT scholars argue, in summary, that younger males in the US and UK reject homophobia; they are prone to include more gay friends in their social group; they espouse the need for emotional and physical intimacy and closeness with other men; and they tend to recognise bisexuality as a legitimate form of sexual orientation (Anderson, 2014; Magrath, 2017a; McCormack, 2020; Morales, 2020; Ralph & Roberts, 2020). Anderson (2009) and his colleagues, therefore, contend that owing to a less homohysterical context, men are less prone to police their own and the masculinities of other. Heterosexual men, for example, are friends with homosexual men and in so doing, they “undo” homophobia due to “a virtuous cycle of decreasing homophobia” (McCormack, 2012:63). Although Anderson argues that Connell’s stratification of masculinity does not adequately account for said changes, there are a few important conditions that informed (and continue to inform) IMT.

2.3.2 *The conditions for IMT*

The research of Anderson and McGuire (2010), Anderson *et al.*, (2016) and Magrath (2017a) showed how a decrease in homophobia positively influences heterosexual men’s behaviours. However, these changes in levels of homophobia alone do not necessarily explain the change in masculinities. The key to understanding IMT is **homohysteria**. Next, I consider the three central conditions that resulted in inclusivity – that is, the periods of homoerasure, homohysteria, and homosociality.

(a) *Homoerasure*

The first condition of homohysteria is homoerasure. Anderson (2009) postulates that homohysteria is a product of modernism; it resulted from the medicalisation and policing of gender and sexuality during the late 1800s. In 1869, Karl Maria Kertbeny formulated the

category of “the homosexual”. Michel Foucault (1978) argues that this resulted in the identification and stringent policing of a person’s sexual life and identity, thus, a shift from viewing “homosexuality as merely behaviour, to that of a distinguishable sexual personhood” (Rothmann, 2014:41). People who displayed same-sex attraction were classified as so-called “gender inverters”, thus, their gender and sexual orientation contradicted their biologically innate sex (Rothmann, 2014). Thus:

[t]he nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology...Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite has been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (Foucault, 1978:43)

As a result, homosexuality became a “personage” to be disciplined, policed, and cured (Foucault, 1978:43). Through such categorisation, “the homosexual” became more visible and, as Anderson and Magrath (2019:83) argue, homophobia resulted from a culture’s acknowledgement that homosexuality exists as opposed to being more inconspicuous (Anderson, 2011b). They cite English author and playwright Oscar Wilde as the preeminent example of the homosexual during this time. Wilde was infamous for his flamboyance, and this resulted in him being subjected to three trials of 1895, initiated by his lover Lord Alfred Douglas’ father, the Marquess of Queensbury. Wilde provided a public depiction of what it meant to be homosexual. Charged with “gross indecency” due to his “escapades with young working-class men” (Rothmann, 2014:43), Wilde was sentenced to three years imprisonment and hard labour. These trials, as noted by Tamagne (2010:172), introduced specific “modes of identification” of homosexual men, arguably embodied by Wilde. These included his green carnation and his “effeminacy, idleness, immorality, luxury, insouciance, decadence and aestheticism” (Rothmann, 2014; Tamagne, 2010:172). Such visibility resulted in society’s recognition of homosexuality as a distinct sexual “personage”. Thus, a culture could not be homophobic if its members are not aware of the existence of homosexual persons. This recalls the work of Fuss (1991), McIntosh (1968) and Namaste (1996). The latter academic, for example, points to the fact that people can only be homophobic (and, per implication, homophobic) if they are aware of oppositional categories – that is, their heterosexuality is posited against another person’s homosexuality. Thus, Namaste (1996:196) asserts that each of these categories’ meanings are dependent on the other, as such “...a macho homophobic male can define himself as ‘straight’ only in opposition to that which he is not – an effeminate

gay man". So too, in McIntosh's (1968) work on the "homosexual role" – a designation applied to gay men in the UK in the late 1960s – a clear-cut dichotomous sexualised categorisation resulted. She postulates that this role resulted in "the polarization between the heterosexual man and the homosexual man". She notes that such an approach exacerbates a distinction between "permissible and forbidden behaviour" and "contain[s] deviant practices within a relatively narrow group", which, according to her, results in the following:

[t]he creation of a specialized, despised and punished role of homosexual keeps the bulk of society pure in rather the same way that the similar treatment of some kinds of criminal keeps the rest of society law-abiding.
(McIntosh, 1968:183-184)

This may have men exacerbate self-fulfilling prophecies that they are somehow deviant; that is, it is "legitimate for him and he can continue in it without rejecting the norms of society" (Anderson & Magrath, 2019:83; McIntosh, 1968:184). Fuss (1991:1) similarly refers to the "inside/out logic" that purports that the creation of the differential categories resulted in a constant dialectical interplay between the insider and outsider (Namaste, 1996:199). She explains that the "philosophical opposition between 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual,'...has always been constructed on the foundations of related opposition: the couple 'inside' and 'outside'" (Anderson & Magrath, 2019:83; Fuss, 1991:1). Said differentiation justified the medical profession to, among others, criminalise male same-sex behaviour to confirm its more acceptable, permissible and respectable heterosexual counterpart. These doctors considered homosexuals as being "mentally ill" or "morally depraved". In some subcultures, the threat of legal and social disapproval relegated the homosexual subcultures to the periphery of sexual acceptability (Rubin, 1993), resulting in their members to mostly conceal themselves as safety measure. Irrespective of their attempts at concealing themselves, the "ideal type" of homosexuality now existed, which exacerbated further stigmatisation and rejection of those persons who did not conform to heterosexual ideals.

Homosexuality was, therefore, "erased". Due to the extremity of homophobia, sexual minorities sought to obscure their homosexuality to avoid social and legal prosecution (Anderson & Magrath, 2019:84). In this so-called stage of erasure, gendered behaviour was, however, not regulated by homophobia, since these behaviours were hidden from public view to avoid legal, religious, medical, or social condemnation. In the latter decades of the 19th century, however, men started engaging in more overt forms of physical intimacy – hugging and expressed themselves emotionally irrespective of the unchanged social, cultural and legal context. Campbell *et al.* (2018:217) write that this specified a broader range of behaviour that

was available to men, albeit, still stigmatised. In a culture of decreasing homophobia, men may be able to partake in activities without overt policing of their behaviours – that is, a recognition of “multiple masculinities” as horizontal arrangement, not a vertically hierarchical form, is permitted (Campbell *et al.*, 2018:218). This does, however, not imply that society is devoid of any homophobia (Anderson, 2014). Rather, society is more accepting and values multiple forms of masculine performance.

(b) *Homophobia*

The second stage of the cultural conditions is that of **homophobia**. This concept denotes the power dynamics of changing levels and displays of homophobia. Anderson used this concept to situate IMT scholarship within specific social conditions. He argued that homophobia mainly operates in settings that are homophobic. Hence, homophobia influences or informs gendered behaviour in certain social and historical contexts (Anderson & Magrath, 2019; McCormack & Anderson, 2014). Three conditions inform the prevalence of homophobia: (1) There exists a definite awareness of homosexuality as distinct sexual orientation; (2) the cultural context is highly homophobic; and (3) the culture subscribes to a strict cisgender approach – that is, there should be a direct link between one’s biological sex (male), gender (masculine) and sexual orientation (heterosexual) (McCormack, 2020).

Homophobia is, as noted earlier, defined as men’s fear of being perceived as gay rather than a fear of homosexual persons per se (Ralph & Roberts, 2020:86). A society may become homophobic when it transitions from viewing homosexuality in a pathological way (Anderson, 2009; Ralph & Roberts, 2020:86) to a context where homosexuality is acknowledged as distinct and acceptable for sexual expression (Anderson, 2009, 2013; Anderson & McCormack, 2018). In highly conservative, traditional and religious cultures (e.g., African nations that prohibit any display of homosexuality), the effects of potential homophobia (e.g., varying from exclusion, stigmatisation and verbal abuse to arrests, imprisonment and the death penalty) (Morales, 2020) exacerbate homophobia among heterosexual and gay men (Ralph & Roberts, 2020:88).

Homophobia, according to Anderson (2014), reached its pinnacle in the 1980s and 1990s in both the UK and US. During this time, the conservative American and British governments facilitated anti-gay sentiments. This was exacerbated through Republican attempts in the US to associate the HIV/AIDS epidemic with mainly gay and bisexual men; this resulted in moral panic about sexuality, social change and how these challenged traditional family values (Anderson & Magrath, 2019). As a result, heterosexual and gay men refrained from public displays of homosocial intimacy. Irrespective of its inhibiting role for furthering homosexual

acceptance, it spurred feminist, gay and lesbian activism to engage the identity politics of sexual minority persons during this time (Anderson & Magrath, 2019).

(c) *Inclusivity through homosociality*

Homohysteria is useful for understanding the different attitudes towards homosocial tactility in homophobic cultures (Ralph & Roberts, 2020:87). Ralph and Roberts (2020:87) note how homosocial intimacy among heterosexual *and* gay men has become more common in a range of social contexts. As a consequence, scholars started to examine how this change ties in with contemporary notions of Western masculinity (Robinson *et al.*, 2018). Worth noting are studies about such overt displays of homosociality, for example, Anderson *et al.*'s (2012) study in the UK and Drummond *et al.*'s (2015) research about Australian male undergraduate students. In both studies, the researchers found that a significant number of participants had engaged in various types of same-sex kissing without identifying as gay or without fear of being labelled as such. Likewise, Magrath and Scoats (2019:53) conducted in-depth interviews with 10 men from different locations who graduated from a highly rated English university between 2006 and 2009 with a sport-related degree. The research entailed obtaining information about emotional intimacy with male friends. Magrath and Scoats (2019) found that the men engaged in various forms of physical tactility, that is, "hugging, cuddling and kissing". These men, for example, expressed their comfort with cuddling with one another or sitting on each other's laps. Yet, if homohysteria was more pronounced, men restrict such overt displays of physical or emotional disclosure. However, the male participants in all three studies expressed their disavowal with homophobia, homohysteria and heteronormativity, thus, opting for openly discussing and engaging in male intimacy.

Two examples of homosocial tactility and a concurrent decline in homohysteria are metrosexuality and bromantic relationships. In the late 1990s, Simpson (1994) coined the term **metrosexuality**. This emerged as a countercultural trend amongst young men who favoured a more refined physical appearance. Metrosexuality, according to McNair (2002:157), is "a homosexualised vision of masculinity, in the sense that this studies narcissism and attention to self-grooming are traditionally associated with gayness". Its originator, Simpson (1994), defined it as follows:

[He is] a young man with money to spend, living in or within easy reach of a metropolis – because that's where all the best shops, clubs, gyms and hairdressers are. He might be officially gay, straight or bisexual, but that is utterly immaterial because he has clearly taken himself as his own love object.

Metrosexuality is important in the process of understanding decreasing homophobia because of how it permitted heterosexual men to perform softer forms of masculinities in a less fearful way. Similarly, during this time, Anderson (2002, 2005) found that openly gay men were being accepted on their sporting teams while challenging the dominant norms and forms of masculinity by displaying the tenets of “softer” masculinities. It represented a style of masculinity that is inclusive of gay and non-hegemonic men. As a result, metrosexuality shifted from the counterculture to be embraced in mainstream society and sport; studies showed that highly masculine men wore traditional female colours, used make-up, and disassociated themselves from heterosexism and homophobia. An evident example was former Manchester United soccer player David Beckham (Jones & Clarke, 2005). Beckham came to represent “the athletic branch of show business and advertising” (Simpson, 2014:11-12). As brand ambassador for various international consumer brands (e.g., Adidas and Police, among others), he solidified his status as celebrity (Chadwick & Burton, 2008:309). He became a “hybrid of pop music and football, the Spice Girl of soccer”, providing permission to men to enact their softer side (Chadwick & Burton, 2008; Rothmann, 2022).

The change in masculinity corresponded with the sustained decrease in homophobia that continues today. Keleher and Smith (2012:1232), for example, conclude that it is more about the “willingness to accept lesbians and gays has grown enormously”. Their view is echoed by Pew (2013). The latter study found, based on research among Americans, that 70% of individuals who were born after 1980 support homosexuality, whereas 74% of Americans believe that homosexuality should be accepted by society. However, in the article of McMahon *et al.* (2020:459) about gender role conflict in gay and heterosexual men in Ireland, gender and sexuality are seen to be two very separate identity markers, yet they remain inseparably linked. Gay men who exuded masculine traits were more likely to experience gender role conflict versus those who were more effeminate. This implied the “very straight gay” (Connell, 1992) experienced more gender role conflict than their feminine or androgynous counterparts. The researchers attributed this to “the importance of adhering to restrictive masculine norms by some gay men” (McMahon *et al.*, 2020:459).

In addition to metrosexuality, the **bromance** has also become an example of increased homosociality among heterosexual men. A bromance, according to Robinson *et al.* (2018:855), refers to a “safe haven” for male friendships where full emotional disclosures are permitted between these, mainly, heterosexual men. These friendships may, therefore, become highly intimate. The reference and eventual enactment of bromances originated from so-called “buddy movies” and television programmes. Blockbuster films, such as *21 Jump Street* (in 2012) and *Due Date* (2010), among others, have drawn attention to the complex

and dynamic relationships that can be grounded in “...male closeness, trust and homosociality” (Robinson *et al.*, 2018:856). According to Robinson *et al.* (2019), men use these films as reference to define the tenets of their own bromantic connections to others. Furthermore, Robinson *et al.* (2019:856) write that bromances achieve a crucial level of cultural resonance and meanings to men. Some of the heterosexual men in their study in the UK described themselves as “holding a brotherly or girlfriend-type status with their bromance” (Robinson *et al.*, 2019:856). Consider the views of three participants in their study in this regard: “There are absolutely things I tell my bromances and not the girlfriend” (Brad); “If I found a lump on my [testicle], I’d talk to [bromance] rather than my girlfriend” (Bob); and citing the likelihood of bromances to increase personal disclosures between men, Beck stated, “A girlfriend will judge you and a bromance will never judge you” (quoted in Robinson *et al.*, 2019:859-860).

In keeping with IMT, Anderson (2009) writes that, as homophobia decreases, so too will the emotional and physical distance between heterosexual men decrease – that is, men become more comfortable to express more platonic intimacy with each other (Ralph & Roberts, 2020:87).

2.3.3 Critiquing IMT

IMT has, however, been subject to criticism, particularly relating to its reference to declining homophobia. IMT has received critique that included suggestions that homophobia is not declining; it is mentioned that the continuous presence of heterosexism is just as extreme as overt homophobia and that IMT does not take account of patriarchy. De Boise (2015), for example, claims that IMT “oversimplifies and promotes unwarranted optimism about the transformation of masculinity”. She critically assessed Anderson’s notion of “inclusive masculinity” and its implications for gender and masculinities studies. De Boise (2015:319) argues that there are some problems with the theoretical claims. As noted earlier, Anderson (2009:85) used the term homophobia because he suggests that the term “homophobia does not accurately capture the complications of how people feel about homosexuals”. Anderson claims that the fear of being homosexualised has declined and that homophobia is no longer essential to the construction of an idealised masculinity. De Boise (2015:328) argues that it is difficult to measure homophobia, because the ways that the “fear of being homosexualised” manifest itself will vary from society to society, even during the same period, considering the changing discourses on what “being homosexual” means. Drawing on the work of Connell (2005), De Boise (2015:329) states that “homophobia is not just an attitude”. Heterosexual men’s hostility towards gay men “involves real social practice, ranging from job discrimination through media vilification to imprisonment and sometimes murder”. De Boise (2015:329)

advocates for a “broader constructionist account of what exactly homophobia entails ... given that homophobia, much like sexism, may not be explicit and can be institutional as well as interpersonal”.

Furthermore, the critics of IMT are of the opinion that homophobia is not always directed at openly homosexual persons, but often towards those who are “perceived as too effeminate” (Connell, 2005:79). Bridges (2014) and De Boise (2015) critique Anderson’s (2009) argument that certain fixed traits are associated with men’s fears of being “homosexualised” by others, thus, ignoring the inherent fluidity and diversity of sexuality as a series of discursive constructs that are subject to change. As with Connell’s (1992) theorisation about the “very straight gay”, she recognised that this typology of “the homosexual”, as a discursive construction, is always contestable as to its meaning. That is, just as a self-identified heterosexual man may not always be regarded as “macho” or hypermasculine (Bridges 2014), a self-identified gay man is not necessarily only effeminate.

In response to this critique, Anderson and McCormack (2018) argue that it is important to remember that IMT does not postulate that all men from different cultures are homosocial, pro-gay, or solely subscribe to inclusive masculinities. In refining IMT, Anderson and McCormack (2018:10) concede that the decline in homophobia, particularly in developing countries, is an “uneven” process. This notwithstanding, they are of the opinion that their research shows that there is evidence of such declines in the US and UK. Furthermore, they argue that even if some individuals remain homophobic in a culture that displays inclusive masculinities, others may still refrain from homophobia. This is when most men are not afraid to act in “feminine” ways. Further, the term inclusivity does not refer to all forms of masculine and sexual diversity, but the one form that was previously, as per HMT theorisation, relegated to marginalised and subordinate status – that is, homosexuality (McCormack, 2020). A culture of changing masculinity happens when heterosexual men reduce their explicit homophobia.

2.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter highlighted different views on masculinity. As previously mentioned by Connell (2008), masculinities change over time. This chapter focused on the plurality of masculinities and how that influences the experiences of homophobia among younger men. Keeping in mind Connell’s (2005) discussion on HMT as idealised and valorised masculine expression, men continue to subscribe to said ideals because hegemonic masculinity offers the benefit of power and a higher status for men who identify as heterosexual. Conversely, proponents of IMT favour the view that there is (or, rather, should only be) one dominant form of masculinity.

They argue that there is a range of dominant masculinities in societies in different contexts. Thus, IMT seeks to foreground and investigate the diverse types of masculinities along homosocial lines. Chapter 3 builds on this chapter by focusing on how HMT and IMT extend to the experiences of men in contact sport, specifically rugby.

CHAPTER 3:

GAY AND HETEROSEXUAL MEN, INCLUSIVITY AND RUGBY: A LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the contributions of current and previous research on the experiences of gay men in the context of contact sport in general, and for the purpose of the current study, rugby in particular. The discussion incorporates research on the topic from South Africa and abroad. These studies have focused on, among others, the hegemonic and inclusive nature of the sport in South Africa. According to Brand South Africa (2018), South Africa became the first country on the African continent in 2015 to have a publicly acknowledged inclusive rugby club, namely Jozi Cats. The team has achieved and continues to raise awareness about the ideals of masculinity through their campaign called “Rugby, That’s So Gay” that went viral in 2016 (Brand South Africa, 2018).⁴ Similarly, in 2017, the team was the first African team to participate in an international inclusive rugby tournament in Madrid, known as The Union Cup, which is considered as a safe space for LGBTIQ+ persons to engage in sporting activities.

In South Africa, some men, regardless of whether they participate in sport, place a great deal of importance on sport and its use to express their masculinity and dominance. Van der Walt (2012:17) conducted a study among non-sporting male undergraduate participants from the University of Cape Town. Van der Walt (2012:22) noted that most of the participants expressed “how sports, and more specifically rugby, define what it is that constructs masculinity”. Her participants attributed this to “aggressive contact sports, such as rugby, providing a socially acceptable platform of voicing curbed frustration, anger, and the will to dominate”, all of these being indicators of dominant variations of hegemonic masculinity (Van der Walt, 2012:22).

Similarly, Stephenson’s (2012) study explored the negotiation of masculine identities among male adolescent rugby players in South Africa. He investigated how young men engaged with concepts of hegemonic masculinity and how their own and others’ gender and masculine identities compared to it. He found that the construction of gender identities and the dominant form of masculinity were still regarded as an ideal (Stephenson, 2012). His research provided

⁴ This is discussed in the subsections to follow.

insightful findings: Some of the young men prized a more dominant display of masculinity, but some alternative forms of masculinities were also identified and engaged in.

In keeping with the preceding finding, it should be clear that gender-, sexuality- and masculinity studies continuously comment on changes in the conceptualisation and enactment of gender roles (Anderson & McCormack, 2018; Messerschmidt, 2019; Stephenson, 2012). The nature of masculinity is always dependent on the interaction between men and women and between men among themselves. Studies of men and their masculine identity are not possible without positioning masculinity within the relevant context. The present chapter first elaborates on the connection of masculinity with, particularly, contact sport and its concurrent association with patriarchy and heteronormativity in rugby. Second, I foreground the conceptualisation of masculinity in contemporary contact sport, the current debates on the masculine ideals associated with men in rugby and finally discuss the current academic research on gay men in South African and international rugby.

3.2 THE NATURE OF MASCULINITY IN SPORT

One of the key developments in masculinity research has been the identification of multiple forms of “masculinities”, as noted in the preceding chapter. Connell (2005) argues that the plural term masculinities is, therefore, more appropriate when referring to masculine identities as “different cultures, and different periods of history, construct gender differently”. Although multiple masculinities may exist in any society, hegemonic expressions of masculinity are also evident (Stephenson, 2012). Its presence implies that other subordinate or marginal masculinities also exist in relation to the idealisation of hegemonic forms. The following subsection speaks to this.

3.2.1 *Patriarchy and heteronormativity: “Doing masculinity” in sport*

Herz and Johansson (2015:1) note that from the early 1990s, heteronormativity became one of the key concepts in understanding the dynamics of gender and queer studies. It has been defined in various ways. For example, Kitzinger (2005:478) explains heteronormativity as “the myriad of ways in which heterosexuality is produced as a natural, trouble-free, taken-for-granted phenomenon” that sets up unconscious and automatic assumptions about heterosexuality as the norm and all other types of sexual experience (e.g., homosexuality) as abnormal. Similarly, Russell *et al.* (2012:188) define heteronormativity as “a societal hierarchical system that privileges and sanctions individuals based on assumed binaries of gender and sexuality; as a system it defines and enforces beliefs and practices about what is

‘normal’ in everyday life” concerning gendered and sexual identities – a view to which Jackson (2006) attests. These sets of norms and beliefs work to maintain the dominance of heterosexuality by constraining and subordinating sexual diversity (e.g., the expression of gay identities) (Corber & Valocchi, 2003:4). Butler (1990) refers to the term “the heterosexual matrix”, whereas Ingraham (1996) notes the influence of the “heterosexual imaginary”. Both concepts speak to the idea that one is born and consequently socialised into adopting a specific culture’s potentially compulsory prescription about gender and sexual orientation. Butler (1993) emphasises this point by mentioning the constant reinforcement of “heterosexualised hegemony” through a repetition of sometimes unquestioned and subtle gendered performances. Such acts require individuals to, sometimes inadvertently, perform their gender and sexual orientation repeatedly in a particular way to be integrated into their respective social and sexual contexts.

Similarly, Corber *et al.* (2014:1) argue that heteronormativity creates a set of oppositional relations between femininity and masculinity (as discussed in chapter 2) that support men’s status in relation to women and sexual minorities (e.g., the LGBTIQ+ community). According to Herz and Johansson (2015:3), scholars should engage with concepts such as orthodox, dominant and hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity. Although these may be considered as generally similar, they may, potentially, depending on the context, be used to interrogate how such gender hierarchies are constructed to stratify masculine expressions in a specific context (Herz & Johansson, 2015). The concepts of mainstream and heteronormative masculinity work as an evaluation, not only of gender divisions and hierarchies but also of more specific ways of “organising” one’s individual and social life (Herz & Johansson, 2015:3). Herz and Johansson (2015:5) argue that proponents of heteronormativity condemn those individuals who do not conform to the (heterosexually) “acceptable” value system of society. Heterosexuality then becomes what Rich (1993:227) calls “compulsory heterosexuality” – that is, “the normative prescription of acceptable sexual behaviour through, among others, hegemonic masculinity” (Butler, 1990, 1993; Connell, 2005; Rich, 1993; Rubin, 1993), to which men should aspire to conform.

According to Lorber (1996), sociologists consider sex, gender and sexuality to be distinct variables with separate qualities. The human body/physique is either male or female (Bhana, 2012:310). One’s gender performance manifests in social roles that are either masculine or feminine. Similarly, one’s sexuality, from a heteronormative stance, may be based on an essentialist and binary-based division between heterosexuality or homosexuality (Lorber, 1996:144). Heterosexuality may, therefore, become the uninterrogated norm against which

variations of gender and sexual expression may be considered as deviant (Bhana, 2012; Ingraham, 2002).

As a result, the expectation may exist that, distinct categories should be created that typify men versus women, who are either masculine or feminine and gay or heterosexual (Bhana, 2012; Lorber, 1996). Sociologists do, however, acknowledge that these dynamics are socially constructed. Sociologists further comment on the normative link between these variables. According to Schilt and Westbrook (2009), cisgenderism rests on the belief that there is a definite link between gendered behaviour, heterosexual identity and social roles and one's biological sex that results in attraction between two opposite gendered and sexual identities. They argue that the proponents of this ideology tend to believe that heteronormativity outweighs the value one assigns to the identities and gender expression of sexual minority persons, resulting in reinforcing a hierarchical system of rigid beliefs, rules about issues concerning how one's gender should be expressed through certain roles to which people are expected to conform (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009:451).

Ingraham (2002) provides the term "rituals" as a means used with socialising heterosexual and gay men in doing their gender. Since gay men were not socialised into becoming or being gay, they are reminded of the importance of conforming to specific heterosexual rituals and norms to which they have to conform, owing to the fact that there does not exist any such norms or values to which homosexual persons can ascribe. If they are unable to conform to these prescriptions, they may be viewed as deviant (cf. West & Zimmerman, 2002). This may lead to the preceding reference to sexual violence in order to "correct" a perceived deviant gender or sexual identity; consider the impact of gender-based violence and corrective rape as only two such examples in South African society (Gqola, 2018; Graaff & Heineken, 2017). It is further worth considering Butler's (1991, 2004) argument here. Butler (2004:35) notes that it is necessary to study the underlying and inherent assumptions and fears of proponents of heteronormativity (Butler, 1991:23) because it may force the latter to reassess the assumptions of their world. One needs to establish a dialogue and interrogation of problems faced by this "other" (e.g., gay men) with this "other" through dialogue and physical interventions, since the heterosexual individual cannot merely assume to know, understand, or even identify with the possible physical and psychological trauma gay persons, for example, may have had to deal with at the hands of heterosexual prescriptions.

Butler (1991) reaffirmed the constant interchange, yet disjuncture, between a self-proclaimed identity through categorisation with the acknowledgement of individual diversity, on the one hand, and the need to communally identify with others in order to protect one's basic rights,

gain support or be socialised into being gay, on the other hand. In this regard, Butler (1991) writes that the proponents of heteronormativity are acutely aware of its inherent fallacies and contradictions; they therefore seek to retain its dominance through the noted repetition of gendered (and sexualised) rituals (Ingraham, 2002). West and Zimmerman (2002) contend that women and men “do” their gender to prove and sustain their “competence” as members of society is, in fact, held “hostage” by these seemingly dominant gender and sexual performances. Doing gender involves the repetition of socially constructed interactional activities that are associated with the institutionalisation of hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity through correctly performing one’s gender (and sexual orientation) – a performance that is evident the context of contact sport (cf. Connell, 1987).

In the study of Eng (2003), a model of analysis was developed to consider the ways in which sex/sexuality(ies) is/are established in the social arena of sport, particularly as it relates to how gay athletes do and perform their gender and sexual identities. The first element focuses on the *appearance of the individual* in the context of sport – that is, the physical displays of the persons and their sex/sexual presence. This refers to how sexuality forms part of how an individual appears in the context of sport, thus the sexed ways or one’s sex characteristics (West & Zimmerman, 2002) – that is to say, policing one’s physical appearance, demeanour and actual performance to manage the impressions of one’s teammates. This is how an individual acts and interacts in their peer group and friendships and in the arena of sports, similar to the noted “doing [of] gender”.

The second element of analysis identified by Eng (2003) is the athlete’s *sexual approach*. This is associated with the personal relations of the individual, including their romantic affairs and flirtation. It is evident from Eng’s (2003) study that the latter elements, based on their particular form and enactment, could re-establish what is perceived as a heteronormative and homophobic sporting environment or challenge it. The study indicated that athletes may remain “closeted” because they do not want to evoke any homophobic reactions from their general and/or significant others, meaning that an individual performs a specific sex/gender – whether it is how to be masculine or feminine – according to heteronormative standards. This recalls the concept of homophobia (i.e., the fear of being identified as gay) (Anderson, 2005, 2008a, 2008b).

Furthermore, heteronormative and homophobic contexts function as a gender scheme, instructing individuals how to perform gender “correctly”, as alluded to before. In their study about gender non-conforming athletes in grassroots and elite sport contexts in the UK, Kettley-Linsell (2020:243) note that these athletes are rendered invisible, because they do not “fit” into

the accepted ideals of how sport “should” be organised along the cisgender binary divide, meaning that male athletes should exude masculine behaviour and identify as heterosexual and not gay or queer, for example. The latter, according to them, provides a possible explanation for why openly gay athletes find it difficult to advance to a pro-athlete status because of their sexual orientation. This, according to Kettley-Linsell (2020), results in a supposed incompatibility between having a sporting career and (or even versus) being gay. These athletes are also expected to engage in more intense reflexivity as to what it means to be gay and to survive in a sport environment that could potentially be homophobic (Jackson & Scott, 2010), consequently leading to an impeded focus on their sporting performance and an overemphasis on “impression management” (cf. Goffman, 1959) of the expression of their sexual identity. Male athletes might define themselves as gay but refrain from publicly proclaiming such an identity to their heterosexual counterparts, in effect living so-called double lives (Troiden, 1998:272) through “blending in” by possibly adopting gender-appropriate behaviour in, among others, their sport teams (Rumens, 2011). These individuals may also regard a public labelling of their sexual orientation as irrelevant, recalling Warren’s (1974:94) notion of “avoidance without hiding” through an enhanced sense of self-reflexivity (Jackson & Scott, 2010). Jackson and Scott’s (2010) application of Mead’s (1962) “I” and “me” to the construction and potential deconstruction of sexual actor’s gendered and sexually orientated self is of relevance here. The “I” and “me” are so-called active agents (processes) that continuously, through self-reflection, interact with each other through an individual’s intrapsychic and interpersonal scripting. Depending on a particular social context, a gay man may, for example, be required to recall past experiences (based on primary socialisation, previous relationships, homophobia, etc.) to determine which of the two agents should dominate the other (Alvarez, 2009; Jackson & Scott, 2010:126); will the person’s unbridled and “true self” (“I”) prevail, or will the gay athlete be forced to engage their “me” to “pass” as a heterosexual man to avoid potential discrimination?

Travers (2018) emphasises how the role of sport in normalising and reinforcing heterosexual male superiority may contribute to the pressure that individuals are facing to fit within the boundaries of gender. Roberts (2013), writing from an American perspective, notes that American football players of the *Chicago Bears* in Miami, for example, are taught to “mask” their feelings and to not show their emotions. As he notes, “it’s that [,] times 100 with football players” – no player may display any signs of pain. A football player entering a locker room and showing vulnerability may be met with critique from his peers (Roberts, 2013).

3.3 THE EVOLUTION OF MASCULINITY IN CONTACT SPORT: A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Anderson (2011a, 2011b) defines contact sport as a sport that employs physical contact and collision between players. Examples of contact sports are rugby, hockey, boxing, and wrestling. Saeed and Pandey (2015:1856) wrote that “contact sports are naturally violent because it involves deliberate and forceful impacts”. In contact sports, full contact with opponents or teammates is important. Actions within or throughout contact sport include tackling, pushing, shoving and blocking (Saeed & Pandey, 2015:1856). Contact sports have been portrayed as being a **“real” man’s** game. This is largely because participants, as noted above, must use a certain amount of force. As such, contact sport is seen as a test of strength that relates to levels of masculinity. Bowley (2006:5) further mentions that contact sports are seen as an essential “masculinity-making process for men” (cf. Allen, 2016). Men are taught hegemonic principles in sport, such as increased discipline, respect, and sacrifice for the good of the team (White *et al.*, 2017:4).

Tosh (1999) writes that men, irrespective of their social class, may define and recognise masculinity in similar ways. There is an assumption that all men would match these requirements, not because it is necessarily “natural”, but because it allows for relatively easier acceptance by other men. Men may rather conform to a masculine “herd instinct” to belong (hence the otherwise incomprehensible injunction **“Be a man!”**). Someone who falls short of these requirements may be regarded as less of a man and forfeits the privileges of masculinity (Tosh, 1999). Kupers (2005) also writes that if toxic masculine values, such as dominance, lack of emotion, strength and sexual virility, are not present in the everyday performance of a man, he may fall short of being considered a “real man”. This, according to Kupers (2005:714), relates to toxic masculinity. He defines it as “[t]he constellation of socially regressive [masculine] traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence”.

In 19th-century England, masculine status was commonly recognised to depend on a man’s ability to reflect and conform to four major tenets, namely *physicality*, *authority*, *independence* and *homosociality*. These were all premised on strenuous individual effort. As the writer puts it, men are made “not by passively yielding to an internal pressure, but by the putting forth of an internal force which resists and masters” (Tosh, 1999). Tosh (1999) notes that these “socially validated criteria of masculinity also provided a common set of values through which men of one class could partly identify with men of another and stand together in support of certain social and gendered goals”.

First, *physical manhood*, as mentioned earlier, was fundamental to masculinity during the 1800s. A “manly figure” was athletic and robust; a “manly visage” suggested vigour and virility; and a man’s “manly handshake” had to be firm (Haley, 1978). Boys were sent to school to be hardened as much as to be educated. Even during times of peace in mid-Victorian England, the need for “fighting readiness” remained a priority for boys and men alike. The more demanding and dangerous sports were promoted as the sports that were allocated for them (e.g., rowing and mountaineering), which commanded most prestige among men (Haley, 1978).

The second tenet, *authority*, emphasises the importance of manliness as measured in respect of control – control over one’s dependents in the form of familial patriarchy as well as over men who were viewed as part of the inferior social class (Jackson & Scott, 2010). However, after 1828, the penalties for any type of assault became more difficult to avoid. Even domestic violence (wife beating) was conveyed more definitely within the scope of the law. Hearn and Morrell (2012:4) state that hegemonic masculinity holds power “without obvious recourse to violence or physical power”. These men occupy “a hierarchical position in society to the detriment of women and those excluded from power” (Hearn & Morrell, 2012:4).

The third aspect, *independence*, comes from the Victorian pre-occupation associated with members of the “elite” classes – that is, the independent gentleman and “labouring class” and independent working man. One would be considered an independent gentleman if you secured a public position without benefaction. The second definition – independent working man – is a bit more restrictive; it referred to someone who was not dependant in another man’s house but was the master of his own house while providing for all the material needs. As time progressed, moving to the 1900s, the notion of “independence” was displaced with references to the “breadwinner”. The “breadwinner” was an individual who is solely responsible for providing in their family’s economic needs, warranting authority over them (Chanilli, 2015; Tosh, 1999).

The final tenet of masculinity is *homosociality*. It is an essential word to represent the activities that men pursue in the absence of women. An alternative word that Tosh (1999) mentioned in this regard was “fraternity” – this word has a binary meaning but a narrower application, implying an institutional context such as a *union* as well as an ethos in which brotherhood reigns over competition. Hammarén and Johansson (2014:1) refer to homosociality as the social bonds between individuals of the same sex. In the case of masculinities, however, homosociality relates to the relationships and bonds between men. These may include “male friendship, male bonding, and fraternity orders” (regardless of their sexual orientation).

According to Tosh (1999), homosociality was less formal and more extensive than fraternity. First, it represented the social world in which a young man lived before marriage. For the bachelor as well as the married man, the homosocial world was the jury where the masculine status of a man was tested and validated. The testing and the validation of masculinity began when the first organised team sport, known as **rugby**, was started by Dr Thomas Arnold (the Headmaster of the Rugby School in England) in the 1830s. These bonds stressed the importance of establishing and observing particular moral and intellectual values, growing the *boys* into Christian *men* (Perry & Pauletti, 2011). Dr Arnold earned a great deal of public respect for this because he encouraged healthy competition. However, the late Victorian schools taught boys to respect hierarchy and stood for muscular ability – teaching traditional masculinity – that is, self-control and leadership (Perry & Pauletti, 2011). Synott and Symes (1995) argue that various modern schools in Britain still retain the remainder of Victorian ideals such as the “cult of athleticism”. Competitiveness, sport- and physical success appear to produce a “successful” masculine subject (Light & Kirk, 2002). Within these bonds associated with homosocial relationships, men compete on the grounds of who can prove to be the “manliest” among each other. Therefore “homosociality [in this regard] evidently is a part and extension of hegemonic [and dominant] masculinity” (Hammarén & Johansson, 2014:3).

Similarly, rugby in South Africa is seen as a purist masculine sport (Stephenson, 2012:3). Rugby appears to carry strong associations with a particular kind of gender or masculine identity, with strong links to the preceding colonial ideologies about gender (Stephenson, 2012:16). Schacht (1996) noted that specific traditional values, ranging from “competitiveness, strength [and] aggressiveness” to “instrumentality, and often violence, are values central to sports and are also qualities strongly associated with a contemporary understanding of masculinity” (Schacht, 1996; Van der Walt, 2012). This point extends to discussing how, in the South African context, sport was used to “maintain and perpetuate the Apartheid system” (Morrell, 1998:618). Morrell (1998:618) states that “... [c]ompetitive sport was constructed as an environment in which White upper- and middle-class males were able to sharpen their competitive skills without being challenged by alternative masculinities, which ... [was] embodied in Black masculinity”. Contact sport, therefore, became an important tradition in which the authority of “hegemonic masculinity was supported and reproduced, while women and other subordinated men were marginalised by their non-participatory status” (Morrell, 1998:618; cf. Connell, 1987; Morrell, 2017).

Having discussed the evolution of masculinity in contact sport, a further discussion regarding the ideal masculinity in rugby appears useful considering the focus of this study. Rugby, as a

sport, also appears to be positioned in a privileged space in South Africa and seems to still favour heteronormative hegemony among men.

3.3.1 *A brief historical overview of rugby*

The sport that we know as rugby originated in 1823 in England, Warwickshire (Coetzee, 2016). It started when a schoolboy, William Webb Ellis, caught a ball during a football match and ran to the opposite side of the field's goal area. There, he put the ball down for what we now refer to as a "scoring a try". This was the start of what is officially called rugby (Smiles, 2012). Before this, in 1820, the game of rugby was played in a similar way to that of soccer. Players were allowed to catch the ball and kick it out of each other's hands. During this time, there was no limit on the number of players allowed to play the game (Smiles, 2012). For example, a school in England would play the game as follows: one team could comprise 75 players, whereas the other team (i.e., "the rest") comprised of 225 players (Coetzee, 2016; Rugby School, 2021). If it happened that a team scored a "try" (i.e., placing the rugby ball over the designated try/goal area), they would not gain points; they got the opportunity to take a "drop at goal" (i.e., kicking the ball in between the goal poles) (Rugby School, 2021). This was challenging because there were so many players on a side – a game could last up to five days.

The uniform the players wore was first introduced in 1871. Before this, the players participated in their ordinary school clothes. In 1867, the team was downsized to only 20 players per side and by 1876, only 15 players per team were allowed, as we know the game today. In 1871, the first national code was introduced into rugby (Rugby School, 2021). Prior to this national code, the boys in the team determined their own rules and even modified the rules until the 1880s (Rugby School, 2021). At the time, the game had no referee, and the players would wear shoes with nails to make the game more brutal and aggressive (Coetzee, 2016; Rugby School, 2021). This is where it started – when boys were considered good enough for the main teams, they were given a follow-up cap. The first university match took place in 1872 at the Oxford and Cambridge Universities. The first international game took place in 1871 where Scotland played against England at Raeburn Place, Edinburgh (Rugby School, 2021).

Rugby in other countries, such as France, were introduced in the 1870s. By 1892, there were over 20 rugby clubs in France. In 1910, all the French rugby teams joined the British Five Nations Championships (Mužek, 2015). Thereafter, in 1978, together with England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, France was joined the International Rugby Board. Although rugby developed so early in the above-mentioned countries, the sport was introduced in Italy in 1928. Similarly, rugby was introduced in Japan

in the town of Yokohama in 1974. According to Mužek (2015), the Japan rugby team has participated in the Rugby World Cup from 1987.

In the South African context, rugby started in the form of football in 1862. The first match took place in Cape Town in 1862. South Africa participated in the World Cup in 1995 and also hosted this tournament (Mužek, 2015). Having given a brief historical overview of rugby, a further discussion of the historical overview of South African rugby is useful, considering the focus of this study.

3.3.2 Historical overview of South African rugby and the ideal masculinity

The previous section gave a historical overview of rugby. The history of South African rugby as well as the ideal form(s) of masculinity in rugby are now discussed.

(a) “Black” and “coloured” rugby: transcending exclusion through passion

According to Winch (2022:30) a man named George Ogilvie introduced rugby to South Africans. He was the principal of *Bishops School* in Cape Town from the year 1861 until 1885. Rugby in South African schools as well as in the South African Army started at the same time. The first game that was recorded took place between officers and civil services at the Green Point Stadium in Cape Town in 1862.⁵ For about 10 years from that date, rugby was not played regularly. Only in 1875, the first rugby club, *Hamilton Rugby Club*, was founded; in 1876, this was followed by the *Villagers Rugby Club* in Cape Town.

There is a common myth that rugby used to be mainly a White elitist sport – thus, historically a sport that was only played by White South Africans (Boshoff, 2004; Odendaal, 1995). Black South Africans were only allowed to play rugby officially after 1994. The history of Black and Coloured rugby players is rich in detail. An article written by Boshoff (2004) notes that the history of Black rugby players is often not mentioned when the history of South African rugby is discussed. This point notwithstanding, there was indeed a passion among Black players irrespective of the discrimination they faced when playing the game (Bolsmann & Burnette, 2015; Boshoff, 2004; Merret *et al.*, 2011).

In the Coloured communities, rugby was first played in the 19th century. Cupido (2014) writes that rugby in the Black and Coloured communities dates back to about 1886 when they started their own clubs and competitions. The *Western Province Coloured Rugby Union* (WPCRUCU)

⁵ The match took place on 21 August 1862.

was formed in 1886 and in 1898, the *City and Suburban Rugby Union* (CSRU) was formed. Rugby in the Coloured community was encouraged by teachers. They used it to teach young men particular life skills, which included physical and mental toughness. To this day, Coloured rugby has a very strong following in the Western Cape. This is attributed to the fact that irrespective of the challenges that they have faced to establish their own rugby club, their passion and drive for the game remained intact. In an interview conducted with Graham Abrahams (the then Director of Enterprises and Regulatory Affairs at *SuperSport*) in June 2016, he mentioned that there were more Coloured rugby players in the Springbok team than Black players. This is a testimony that Coloured and Black communities have always been passionate about the game of rugby. It is evident that Apartheid was the reason for lack of inclusion and not a lack of a passion for the sport.

Similarly, the Coloured community faced challenges to establish their own rugby club in Cape Town. Their “passion” for the game, however, resulted in acquiring land for rugby under what was then known as the *Provincial Union*, known as the CSRU, in greater Cape Town in Mowbray area. Here they played rugby matches every Saturday. In the 1950s, the land was confiscated by the Apartheid Government under the pretence of education. The then owners were paid the mere sum of 7 000 pounds for the land and were told to vacate it (Coetzee, 2016). After this, they moved to the Cape Flats and restarted their efforts to create a context conducive to continuing playing rugby. This area still exists today. It is used by the *Western Province Rugby Union* as their alternate field to Newlands. Consider Errol Tobias’ (the first Black player to tour overseas with the Springboks to the UK in 1979) reflection about playing rugby under Apartheid:

My goal was to show the country and the rest of the world that we had black players who were equally as good, if not better, than the whites, and that if you are good enough you should play. (Jones, 2020)

Rugby played by Black South African men was a crucial part of their social lives during Apartheid, as it established a strong sense of community, support and a shared sense of passion for the game (Coetzee, 2016). The first Black rugby teams were formed in Grahamstown. The then *St Andrews College*’s headmaster, Reverend Mullins, introduced rugby to the Black community (Smiles, 2012). The first Black club was established in Port Elizabeth in 1885 (Boshoff Gary, 2004). The Eastern Cape became a “fortress” for Black rugby. “Black rugby”, as Coetzee (2016) calls it, was not confined to the Eastern Cape. Rugby played by Black men was expanded to the then Transvaal province (now Gauteng) where the *Swallows* and *United Rugby Club* were formed. In 1935, the *South African Bantu Rugby Board*

was established (Coetzee, 2016; Odendaal, 1995). Considering all the above-mentioned dates regarding the beginning of different Black rugby clubs, it is Coetzee's (2016) contention that there are varied views on which club was established first and by whom. However, it shows us that the history of black and white rugby started at the same time in South Africa.

Stephenson (2012) mentions a continuing transformation in South African rugby as regards "whiteness" in South African rugby. *The South African Rugby Union* (SARU) mentioned that there was a need for rugby to be more racially integrated – in other words, rugby in South Africa must be representative of the diverse population. For example, Coetzee's (2016) timeline indicates the first Black rugby player, Chiliboy Ralepelle, was the *first* Black captain for the South African rugby team in 2006. This was followed by Pieter de Villiers, who was appointed in 2008 as the first non-White coach to train the South African rugby team (Coetzee, 2016). Dylan Jack, journalist for *SA Rugby* magazine, reported that SA Rugby communicated to unions about *Black Lives Matter*. There were plans for a collective stance to be taken against racism and inequalities (Jack, 2021). At the time, South African Rugby clearly stated an ideology: "South African rugby is committed to an environment where all are welcome, irrespective of race, colour, creed or gender".

(b) *South African rugby as a "white" game*

The national rugby team of South Africa, better known as the Springboks, are ranked among the world's top rugby teams. Nevertheless, despite the efforts to boost black participation, rugby remains dominated by White players (Brulliard, 2010). Morrell (2017) attributes this exclusion from the game, apart from legal restrictions for Black people to play rugby, to the fact that they were not familiar with the game because it was not a sport that they had the opportunity to optimally engage in at a younger age. Morrell (2017:629) quotes the founding member of South African touch rugby, Richard Lyster, in this regard. He notes that it was familiar to White people:

[M]ost of us had a background in rugby – we played it, we knew the feel of it, we knew the basic rules of it. Some people didn't know the rules at all. And I think that's why you didn't get women and black people – it's a foreign concept to many people in those days.

Former South African president Nelson Mandela used sport to bring people together. He believed that sport could cross social and political divides that politicians would not be able to do. The Rugby World Cup of 1995 is an example of how the former president used the game "to build a nation". He said the following on 10 May 1994:

Never, never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another and suffer the indignity of being the skunk of the world. Let freedom reign. The sun shall never set on so glorious a human achievement! (Mandela, 1994)

The image of the former South African president wearing a replica of then Springbok captain Francois Pienaar's jersey before the 1995 World Cup final gained huge support among the Afrikaner community. It resulted in people expressing a "sense of national identity and pride" during the World Cup (Winch, 2022). This was endorsed by Mandela's way of using sport to build a nation. Mandela embraced the rugby team throughout the tournament, and this was seen as a "symbolic gesture" of establishing unity among South Africans after Apartheid (Winch, 2022).

Preceding the undeniable impact of the Rugby World Cup in 1995, Morrell (2017) recalls how, in 1985, a group of White men started playing touch rugby in Durban. He notes that this was just one example of many such instances throughout South Africa during that time (Morrell, 2017). He recalled that "[p]laying rugby was a national obsession". White boys were obligated to learn the game during their formative years. Morrell (2017:619) writes that racial segregation during Apartheid was legally enforced, and social interactions and identities were transformed with Apartheid's racial impositions. In his study on touch rugby among men during this period, he focused on how White men openly resisted and worked against Apartheid as a controlling mechanism of legalised racial discrimination. None of these men were playing competitive contact rugby. Their gathering reflected an attempt to express the experiences of marginalised persons (based on their race) and to also establish a sense of community to establish a place where the men could establish "bonds of friendship competitively reinforced by throwing around a rugby ball" (Morrell, 2017:620).

This study comments on how rugby was seen as a means to encourage racial reconciliation after the 1995 Rugby World Cup. However, Booth (1998:93) cautions thinking that this equates the sport solely with its integrative abilities and inhibits racial prejudice altogether. He attributes this to the fact that one needs to consider the "origins, functions, and practices of racism in the institution of sport. If one is unable to do this, you will fail to explain the precise properties of sport that make it the medium of integration". After 25 years of democracy, racial tensions still exist in the country, and this is evident through sporting participation and division (Winch, 2022). Examples of this include the writing of Oates (2019), who commented on the fact that 5% of White people in the country dominate most of the economy. They can afford the best nutrition and have access to the best facilities: "[They] [White people] have access to that

preparation ahead of [B]lack players”. Citing the work of Jacques du Toit, a University of Cape Town scholar, Oates (2019) indicates that, regarding the playing times of Black rugby players and White rugby players between 2007 and 2012, the latter group had much more playing time than their Black teammates. This, according to Du Toit (as cited in Oates, 2019), was ascribed to a hierarchy of race in which the White race group was seen as superior to the Black race group.

Irrespective of race, throughout the history of rugby, the game has always been associated with masculine beliefs and values. While rugby has been associated with particular ideals, it also reinforces an ideal masculinity – dominant masculinity (Stephenson, 2012). As previously mentioned, dominant masculinity refers to “being rough, show high levels of aggressiveness”. Thus, in South Africa, rugby is interpreted as being a “man’s game” because of the physical and rough nature of the game inculcating values such as courage, self-control and stamina. Morrell (2001) writes in this regard that rugby emphasises physical confrontation, determination and skill. He and others attribute this to the fact that South African rugby is commonly viewed as a space where gender relations are formed, influenced and highly reinforced without a second thought (Fallon & Jome, 2007; Ferguson, 2000; Stephenson, 2012).

In South Africa, rugby at test or international level demands physical intimidation (Niehaus, 2014:75). Rugby players engage in a “physical onslaught” in the scrums. The players’ “bodies are used as weapons” – the strong players are called “heavy artillery”, and the fast, open-side flank is called a “missile”. This links to Van Campenhout and Van Hoven’s (2014) statement that the rugby field is seen as a “battle”. Niehaus (2014:75) writes that the players put their bodies on the line. If injuries occur during a game, it is seen as a sacrifice for a greater purpose, which, in this case, could be a victory during a match. Niehaus (2014:75) writes that test matches demand heroism, “mental and physical bravery, fearlessness and total commitment without once thinking about one’s own safety”. A former player, Corné Krige, notes, “I have said many times in my life that I would rather die than to lose a game” (Niehaus, 2014:75).

Having discussed the *historical overview of South African rugby and the ideal masculinity*, a further discussion of sexuality and gender in sport appears useful, considering the experiences of athletes.

3.4 SEXUALITY, GENDER AND SPORT: A CASE OF HOMOPHOBIC DECLINE OR HETEROSEXUAL IGNORANCE?

On the one hand, Scheadler *et al.* (2021) comment on how some lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender athletes have had positive experiences coming out and being accepted in their respective sports. On the other hand, other authors have noted that such acceptance of sexual minorities is stifled due to heteronormative attitudes and behaviours (Anderson, 2009; Fink *et al.*, 2012). Some athletes have noted homonegativity (i.e., the purposeful and negative attitudes towards the LGBTQI+ community) (Krane, 1996) and heterosexism (i.e., the institutionalised beliefs and practices of discriminating against sexual minorities) (Doull *et al.*, 2018). Doull *et al.* (2018), writing from a Canadian perspective, note that these challenges are still persistent in various sports. Toomey *et al.* (2018) indicated in a recent study on athletes' perceptions of "gender minority athletes" that 70% of student athletes reported hearing homophobic and homonegative comments towards or from athletes and/or coaches. Similarly, in a study of Denison and Kitchen (2015) on homophobia in Australian sport, 60% of their participants revealed that gay athletes were only partially accepted in sport teams because of their supposed lack of masculinity. An Australian soccer player noted the following in this regard:

I'm not surprised soccer is one of the most popular sports among gay, lesbian and bisexual athletes. My game sets the standard for participation around the world. However, while many gay people are playing this amazing game, most also still feel the need to keep their sexuality secret. I believe one of the biggest reasons people remain in the closet is the homophobic language they hear. This extends to the slurs and chants heard from spectators. Not only is this homophobic behaviour causing gay players to feel unwelcome. (Robbie Rogers as cited in Denison & Kitchen, 2015:8)

Furthermore, Scheadler *et al.* (2021) argue that sport is rooted in traditional masculinity. This is conducive to promoting heteronormativity, the stereotypes about gender and sexuality, as well as the expectations for the behaviour of coaches and athletes (Anderson, 2005). In other words, the greater the identification with masculine norms and heterosexuality, the more inclusive contact sport may (or even, will) be to men. Conversely, a lack of such displays of dominant and stereotypical masculinity and being gay may be less desirable (Scheidler *et al.*, 2021). Herek (2000) attributes this to the sexual prejudice theory. This theory indicates that LGBTQI+ persons experience more challenges than people from the heterosexual community.

Vilanova *et al.* (2020:23) write that during the 1980s and 1990s, contact sport “maintained strong institutional cultures in which hegemonic masculinity was produced and defined; an athlete was thought to represent the ideal of what it is to be a man – an ideal that ran counter to what was considered feminine and/or gay”. This notwithstanding, cultural homophobia, according to McCormack and Anderson (2014), has shown a decrease in Western countries such as the US and UK over the past several years, and this has impacted on the experiences of gay men in sport. The growing acceptance of sexual diversity has encouraged scholars to reconsider the relationship between gay men and sport worldwide (Anderson 2014; Anderson *et al.*, 2016; McCormack, 2012; Weeks, 2007). In the 1980s and 1990s, there was very little empirical data of closeted gay male athletes and no research of openly gay men in sport (Pronger, as cited in Cavalier, 2019:94). In Spanish sport, for example, athletes raised the question as to whether it was easier to come out as a gay athlete, since same-sex marriages were legal in their country. However, Piedra *et al.* (2014) undertook a study on Spanish Physical Education Teaching Education (PETE) courses that suggested that sport still takes place in a context that may be rooted in a heteronormative gendered order. They attributed this to the fact that homophobic attitudes persist irrespective of legal changes that sought to curtail such discrimination – a finding to which Anderson and McCormack (2018), De Boise (2015) and O'Neill (2015) attest in the American and European context. For example, Victor – a professional Spanish water polo player – who came out publicly in 2016, recalled his experiences as a gay athlete (Vilanova *et al.*, 2020). As athlete, Victor recalled that he had to adhere to heterosexist norms. Therefore, as part of this, homosexuality was stigmatised and remained a taboo (Vilanova *et al.*, 2020:26). With Victor knowing all this, he tried to deny his sexuality. He noted:

People around you make you think. Ignorance makes you think that it is something weird, something bad, so I just thought ‘well, that’s something that will go away.’ I just suppressed it. ... Because it’s different, it’s not usual, because it’s not what you are seeing. (as quoted in Vilanova *et al.*, 2020:27)

Victor stated that because he was an elite athlete, he had to conform to unwritten norms that informed his gender performance. Citing the work of Anderson (2005), Vilanova *et al.* (2020:27) reported that, although Victor complied with the physical expectations of a professional male athlete (i.e., strength and height), he remained fearful of disclosing his sexual orientation: “A part of me feared being rejected.... or are they going to accept me?”.

In Victor’s case, he found that people can be homophobic but still treat one with respect. When he spoke about respect, he referred to the fact that his colleagues discussed with him that

homophobic language still took place in his training group, but it was not directed towards him as an openly gay athlete. Victor noted that this helped with creating an inclusive environment for the team. Although he was one of the first professional athletes to be openly gay, he did not receive any support from the Spanish Sports Federation – something he attributed to potential homophobia on their part (Vilanova *et al.*, 2020). He, however, still lives in, what Piedra *et al.* (2017) classify, as a “semi-inclusive” state (i.e., homophobic discourse is still at play in this context). On the surface, the lack of “openly gay” athletes implies the persistence of homophobia. Vilanova *et al.* (2020:34), however, are of the belief “that because gay men are significantly under-represented” in some sports associated with masculinity, there may be a number of reasons for this. One should, according to them, avoid making a simplistic association between their invisibility and homophobia, that is, “the absence of evidence is not evidence of [their] absence”.

Irrespective of this, Denison *et al.* (2020), writing from an American perspective, found that their participants who ‘came out’ as lesbian or gay, to their teammates, were more likely to report being a target of homophobic behaviour. Furthermore, their research comments on how 53.8% of rugby and ice hockey players self-reported their experiences of being subjected to homophobic language (Denison *et al.*, 2020, 2021). The use of homophobic language such as ‘faggot’ or ‘dyke’, is quite common among athletes, irrespective of their heterosexual peers reporting pro-gay attitudes (Denison *et al.*, 2021; Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2017; Magrath, 2017a). Magrath (2017a) echoed this sentiment based on the findings of his study among teenage football players in the UK. He noted that some male players continue to use homophobic language despite them articulating inclusive attitudes towards their gay teammates. They use such language to police gendered behaviour as opposed to deriding homosexuality (e.g., “That’s gay” or “shut-up, you faggot”) and to express their “verbal disagreements” in their “competitive environment”, among others (Magrath, 2017a:156; cf. Denison *et al.*, 2021:392).

Examples of such homonegativity were noted by Scheadler *et al.* (2021). They reflected on the words of one of the participants in their study about the “attitudes of [student athletes towards] gay, ally, and anti-LGBT+ coaches” who stated being gay could be perceived by heterosexual persons as being weak. Statements such as these were made towards a gay volleyball coach from the National Collegiate Athletic Association: They “...would not fit in”; “I would not discriminate, but why is it necessary to state your sexuality?” These troubling accounts suggest that being openly part of the LGBTIQ+ community may result in encountering more homophobia. This may, to some extent, explain why there are so few openly sexual minority athletes in high-profile sports. Some reasons for this may include,

among others, how players or fans continue to ascribe to heteronormativity (whether knowingly or unknowingly), rather than necessarily being homophobic (Denison *et al.*, 2021). A recent UK Parliamentary Investigation (Digital, Culture, Media, Culture, and Sport Committee, 2017) called for action by sports' leading bodies to end homophobia and homophobic behaviour. The investigators argued as follows:

[We have] serious concerns over the effects of low participation among LGB youth on their mental and physical health and well-being ... It appears that young players and athletes sometimes feel (due to fear of being the target of discrimination) that they have to make the active choice between either coming out or continuing to participate in their chosen sport.

Examples of the homophobic behaviours were stipulated (e.g., “jokes, humour, assaults, bullying, slurs”) and noted that they were common, specifically in male team sports. However, Anderson *et al.* (2016) state that the above mentioned differs from the conclusion of different studies suggesting that LGBTIQ+ sports people who come out in team sport do not necessarily experience such discrimination. This, according to Anderson *et al.* (2016), could be ascribed to the differences between different sports and social contexts. Alternatively, it could be due to the differences in the understanding of “homophobic behaviour”. As such, we have seen changes in definitions for what constitutes homophobia and homophobic language over the last few years in South Africa and abroad. This, scholars contend, “has had a profound effect” on the use of specific discourse (McCormack *et al.*, 2016:748).

McCormack (2011b:664) was one of the first scholars to write about said changes as part of the use of, what he terms, homophobic, fag-, gay- and pro-gay discourse. Fag discourse, according to him, seeks to control, discipline and police the gendered behaviour of men along the gendered masculine lines. He contends that it does not necessarily further marginalise or discriminate against sexual minorities (McCormack, 2011b:668). Its use, therefore, is context specific. Anderson and McCormack's (2018) refinement of IMT attests to this. They argue that one should always consider the changing cultural and social dynamics regarding the use of gender and sexuality discourse (Anderson & McCormack, 2018:553). In-keeping with their work, McCormack *et al.* (2016:747) use the intent-context-effect-matrix to explain that certain phrases are not inherently (and necessarily) homophobic. One should rather seek to understand the “intent with which they are said and the context in which they are used”. Although the phrase “fag” can still be used as an offensive slur, this particular context lends itself to its usage in a “pro-gay” rather than a discriminatory manner (McCormack, 2011b:668).

Secondly, gay discourse is used to either refer to/denote a person's sexuality in one context or, conversely, typify particular behaviour that men regard as "nonsense" in another. McCormack (2011b:670) uses the concept of "cultural lag" to explain the positive association of gay discourse. McCormack (2011) argues that team members may in fact use phrases such as "that's so gay" and "don't be gay", yet concurrently disassociate its use from pathological or homophobic meanings that people may assign to it (i.e., its use is "pro-gay" to establish bonds among men) (McCormack, 2011b:669- 670). Thus, "... [w]hereas this language was almost always homophobic in homohysterical cultures, it is complex and contested in settings where homophobia has declined" (McCormack *et al.*, 2016:762).

A topical example of the dualistic experiences openly gay athletes face is that of Colton Underwood. He is a former NFL player and star of the 23rd season of the American reality show *The Bachelor*. He embarked on a journey to embrace his new life as an openly gay man during the COVID-19 pandemic (Nosa, 2021). He told the American journalist Robin Roberts in an interview on *Good Morning America* that he came out as gay after years of rumours about his sexuality (Bhuvad, 2021). Underwood is probably best known for being on *The Bachelor*. In his opinion, he joined said show due to his personal uncertainty about his sexuality – to potentially accrue answers. During the show, he refrained from engaging in sexual intercourse for this reason. His virginity was a big part of his role in the show. At the beginning of COVID-19, he came to terms with himself while processing his decision of being gay. At that time of the interview with Roberts, he was ready to be honest and open – not only to himself, but to the world. He noted during the above interview, "I ran from myself for a long time, hating myself for a long time, and ... I'm gay." He noted that regardless of these challenges, he was content with his life at the time: "I'm the happiest and healthiest I've ever been in my life and that means the world to me" (as cited in Bhuvad, 2021), foreclosing his sexual identity was "dark and bad" for him. Suicide crossed his mind. Consider his narrative in this regard:

There was a moment in L.A. that I woke up and I didn't think I was going to wake up...I didn't have the intentions of waking up, and I did. And I think for me that was my wake-up call, that, 'This is your life. Take back control'. I think looking back even beyond that is...even just suicidal thoughts and driving my car close to a cliff, like, 'Oh, if this goes off the cliff, it's not that big of a deal.' I don't feel that anymore'.
(Underwood, as quoted in Wagmeister, 2021)

The news shocked many. *Bachelor Nation* (i.e., his fans and the production team) was very supportive of him. Following his disclosure, he filmed a documentary series for Netflix. The

series centres on the months preceding and following his coming out (Holmes, 2021). In this series, he addresses his past and seeks to embrace his place in the LGBTIQ+ community. He notes, “[e]verybody’s coming out stories are different, and I’m grateful to be able to add my story to the conversation”. Underwood’s story, in Yohannes’ (2021) opinion, is essentially a “story about the modern culture of the sports world”. *Coming Out Colton* addresses how the homophobia Underwood experienced in his hometown of Indianapolis, Indiana, his high school and, in particular, the locker room, exacerbated his experiences of “shame and fear” that kept him in the closet (Yohannes, 2021).



Figure 3.1: Colton Underwood and Gus Kenworthy in *Coming Out Colton* (Sources: Daily Mail, 2021; Entertainment Weekly, 2021)

Throughout the second episode entitled “Football”, Underwood engages with gay athletes and confronts his high school coach to discuss the homophobia he experienced on and off the football field (Yohannes, 2021). Consider his account in this regard:

The most toxic parts of the locker room [...] were allowed by the coaches and the people who are supposed to be there to look out for these kids. When I heard them be okay with homophobic slurs or a joke that had to do with homosexuality, it just drove me further into the closet.

Underwood and one of his friends, Gus Kenworthy, a former freestyle skier, met with three gay ex-NFL players – Michael Sam, David Kopay, and Esera Tuaolo – who reflected on their

time in the league and coming out (Yohannes, 2021). David Kopay recalled how he defied the opinions of his parents and others to attend the funeral of the first man he loved (Yohannes, 2021). Tuaolo spoke about how Kopay's book, *The David Kopay Story*, saved his life. Similarly, Underwood recalled how Sam faced criticism and ostracism after becoming the first openly gay football player to be drafted in the NFL (Yohannes, 2021). He noted that hearing their stories, "the one thing that sticks out to me is, nothing has fucking changed". One of the major themes of the series is how much young athletes rely on their teams and coaches (Yohannes, 2021). This was reflected in the days preceding Underwood's discussion with his coach: "I'm more nervous to talk to my coaches than I am, like, my parents". He attributed this to the fact that his coach was like a parent to him: "[t]hat is what keeps people in the closet, is because a lot of the toxic parts were allowed and deemed part of the culture". Across all levels of sport, coaches are essential in the lives of athletes (Bloom *et al.*, 2014; Kim *et al.*, 2016; Watson *et al.*, 2011). Although coaches are central figures in athletes' lives and contribute to establishing a good relationship with their athletes based on trust and openness, some may unintentionally exert hypermasculine or homophobic behaviours that impact on the emotional and psychological health of their athletes (Schinke *et al.*, 2018). Research suggests that homophobia and stigma may result in the gay athlete contemplating suicide and inflicting self-harm. Conversely, a safe and supportive environment, free of such discrimination, has been shown to be psychosocially beneficial (Denison *et al.*, 2021).

The next section discusses the inclusive nature of an all-inclusive rugby club in South Africa and how it encourages people of all sexualities to engage in sport irrespective of their sexual identity.

3.4.1 South African overview: Jozi Cats

As mentioned in the previous section, regardless of the hegemonic nature of South African sport, South Africa was one of the first countries in Africa with a gay and inclusive rugby team called *Jozi Cats*. *Jozi Cats* is a fully inclusive gay, straight and/or bisexual full-contact rugby and touch rugby team from Johannesburg, South Africa. According to its founders, the initial aim of Jozi Cats was to provide an opportunity for gay, straight and bisexual persons to play and enjoy rugby (Jozi Cats, 2020). As Africa's first competitive gay inclusive rugby team, their mission is to assert the value of gay and bisexual rugby players as competitive sportspersons in the rugby community. This, according to their official website, is demonstrated through their progress as regards their inclusiveness and creating an inclusive environment; they provide an alternative space for the greater LGBTIQ+ community for competitive social touch rugby through their participation in year-round touch rugby leagues. Of utmost importance, in this

regard, is that the club aims to be a role model for the gay community and a successful example of inclusive, supportive and reciprocally respectful interactions between people along intersectional lines – different sexual orientations, racial and cultural groups comprise its membership. *Jozi Cats* has been described as no ordinary rugby team – they are the first gay rugby club in Africa to take part in an international rugby league that took place in Miami in 2019. One of the *Jozi Cats* players, Robert, told an interviewer of the French news site France24 the following: “To create a platform as gay people to play rugby without judgement is amazing” (France24, 2018). Robert joined the team when he saw their posts and advertisements. The new recruitment drive featured posters of team members accompanied by seemingly homophobic terms: “queen”, “fairy”, “pansy”, “pillow biter”, “fudge” and “flamer”. Initially, according to France24 (2018), the idea behind the posters was to “make fun of prejudice”. Refer to figures 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7 and 3.8⁶ for examples of these representations of the rugby players.

⁶ Figures 3.2-3.8 was provided courtesy of the *Jozi Cats*’ creative director, Chris Verrijdt.

QUEEN?



WHETHER YOU ARE OR WHETHER YOU AREN'T – WE NEED YOU FOR JOZI CATS – AFRICA'S FIRST GAY AND INCLUSIVE COMPETITIVE RUGBY CLUB. LIKE [FB.COM/JOZICATS](https://fb.com/jozicats) FOR MORE INFORMATION AND UPDATES.

JOZI CATS – RUGBY THAT'S SO GAY!



Figure 3.2: *Jozi Cats* campaign: Queen?

FAIRY?

A man with a full brown beard and short brown hair is the central figure. He is wearing a black short-sleeved shirt with white trim on the sleeves. He has large, green, translucent fairy wings with black veins and small white dots on his back. He is holding a silver wand with a star-shaped tip in his right hand, which is crossed over his chest. He has a serious expression and is looking directly at the camera. The background is dark and textured, with a faint green circular glow behind the word 'FAIRY?'.

WHETHER YOU ARE OR WHETHER YOU AREN'T – WE NEED YOU FOR JOZI CATS – AFRICA'S FIRST GAY AND INCLUSIVE COMPETITIVE RUGBY CLUB. LIKE [FB.COM/JOZICATS](https://fb.com/jozicats) FOR MORE INFORMATION AND UPDATES.

JOZI CATS – RUGBY THAT'S SO GAY!

The logo for Jozicats is located in the bottom right corner. It features a stylized black and white cat head inside a circular frame with pink and white segments. Below the cat head, the word 'JOZICATS' is written in white capital letters on a blue rectangular background.

Figure 3.3: *Jozicats* campaign: Fairy?

PANSY?



WHETHER YOU ARE OR WHETHER YOU AREN'T – WE NEED YOU FOR JOZI CATS – AFRICA'S FIRST GAY AND INCLUSIVE COMPETITIVE RUGBY CLUB. LIKE [FB.COM/JOZICATS](https://fb.com/jozicats) FOR MORE INFORMATION AND UPDATES.

JOZI CATS – RUGBY THAT'S SO GAY!



Figure 3.2: *Jozicats* campaign: Pansy?

PILLOW BITER?



WHETHER YOU ARE OR WHETHER YOU AREN'T – WE NEED YOU FOR JOZI CATS –
AFRICA'S FIRST GAY AND INCLUSIVE COMPETITIVE RUGBY CLUB.
LIKE [FB.COM/JOZICATS](https://fb.com/jozicats) FOR MORE INFORMATION AND UPDATES.

JOZI CATS – RUGBY THAT'S SO GAY!



Figure 3.5: *Jози Cats* campaign: Pillow biter?

FUDGE PACKER?



WHETHER YOU ARE OR WHETHER YOU AREN'T – WE NEED YOU FOR JOZI CATS –
AFRICA'S FIRST GAY AND INCLUSIVE COMPETITIVE RUGBY CLUB.
LIKE [FB.COM/JOZICATS](https://fb.com/jozicats) FOR MORE INFORMATION AND UPDATES.

JOZI CATS – RUGBY THAT'S SO GAY!



Figure 3.6: *Jozi Cats* campaign: Fudge packer?



FLAMER?

WHETHER YOU ARE OR WHETHER YOU AREN'T – WE NEED YOU FOR JOZI CATS – AFRICA'S FIRST GAY AND INCLUSIVE COMPETITIVE RUGBY CLUB. LIKE [FB.COM/JOZICATS](https://fb.com/jozicats) FOR MORE INFORMATION AND UPDATES.

JOZI CATS – RUGBY THAT'S SO GAY!



Figure 3.7: *Jози Cats* campaign: Flamer?

RUGBY THAT'S SO GAY!



WHETHER YOU ARE OR WHETHER YOU AREN'T – WE NEED YOU FOR JOZI CATS –
AFRICA'S FIRST GAY AND INCLUSIVE COMPETITIVE RUGBY CLUB.
LIKE [FB.COM/JOZICATS](https://fb.com/jozicats) FOR MORE INFORMATION AND UPDATES.

JOZI CATS – RUGBY THAT'S SO GAY!



Figure 3.8: *Jozi Cats* campaign: Rugby that's so gay.

Jozi Cats club chairman and player Teveshan Kuni justifies the use of such posters as recruitment measures as follows:

We are a small club with no budget, so we thought we'd launch a recruitment campaign that might get picked up by a few local publications, especially in the LBGTQI community. We've been floored by the response. (Muller, 2016)

Another player, Larry, from the *Jozi Cats* who played as their prop, noted that he did not even mind to pose for the posters. He posed as a “fairy” (see figure 3.3). He noted that there were no negative responses to the poster, “or people stayed quiet...or it did reach them yet” (as cited in France24, 2018). Kuni (who posed in figure 3.4) said in 2018 to *The Guardian* (2018) that they started *Jozi Cats* as a space where the team members could be both gay and a rugby player. This thought is evident in figure 3.8's “rugby that's so gay” catchphrase. He mentioned that they wanted to challenge the presumption that because you do not look like the “standard” rugby player, you cannot be a “normal” rugby player. He noted: “We completely just want to show people that rugby is a sport like anything else. It's skills, it's fitness, it's love and its dedication” (Wong, 2016). The club is somewhere that players can play social and competitive rugby in a safe and non-judgmental environment.

In another article written by Robinson (2016) for *MailOnline*, the club aimed to provide gay players with a “safe haven for enjoying the sport”. The campaign, according to Robinson (2016), was launched to “boost numbers” and tackle homophobia in rugby. The club's creative director, Chris Verrijdt, used these homophobic slurs in the campaign pictures and slogans to subvert homo-negativity and heterosexism. This speaks to how the LGBTIQ+ community reclaim labels that were previously used against them. In so doing, they direct the words toward a potentially heteronormative and homophobic audience as political messaging (Epstein, 1996; Jagose, 1996). These stereotypical labels accompany Figures 3.2-3.8. They range from “queen”, “fairy” and “pansy” to “pillow biter”, “fudge” and “flamer”. The latter three categories denote gay men who take-on the submissive role during anal intercourse (i.e., the bottom), men who enjoy anal intercourse (in general) and overly effeminate gay men, respectively (Urban Dictionary, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d). The former three concepts have, stereotypically, been used in a derogatory way to posit gay men as overly effeminate, “bitchy” or weak (Urban Dictionary, 2022d). Critics of these concepts and its use over virtual platforms or the internet, bemoan its role in exacerbating the binarism between heterosexuality and homosexuality (Duffy, 2015). Hence, Verrijdt, sought to use the concepts to subvert heteronormativity and homophobia. Verrijdt (as cited in Wong, 2016) argues:

Although South Africa is generally considered to have a progressive attitude toward the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community...the team decided early on that they wanted a concept that would be both disruptive and sensitive...We could represent them [the players] visually and walked the fine line between acceptable and offensive.

Verrijdt noted that some of the team's players continues to struggle with their sexuality. As such, additional consideration was given to make the campaign as "all-encompassing as possible". Although they opted to use these "controversial terms" for the campaign, Verrijdt acknowledged that they could face some criticism, but ultimately, believed that any opportunity to create dialogue around LGBTIQ+ issues was a positive thing. He continued:

Our job, ultimately, is to get the word out there that there is a place where you can be gay and a rugby player and be who you are without fear of discrimination...When the naysayers and haters have their say, it will show that we still need to have these kinds of conversations in South Africa and wherever discrimination still takes place. (as cited in Wong, 2016)

This social media presence of *Jozi Cats* seeks to create an online community for interested parties. Consider their social media follower numbers: on Instagram, they have 2 204 followers, and on Facebook they have 4 576 followers. With two such social media platforms, it provides them with the opportunity to inform and educate people about who they (as *Jozi Cats* members) are and what they are doing.

3.4.2 The "doing" and "using" of gender and gay in rugby

(a) Doing gay in rugby: "being a real (gay) man"

Rugby players, as noted earlier, do masculinity by imitating "hierarchical images" of what a "real man" is – who is strongest, who can endure the "most pain", and who exudes stoicism by distancing himself from any displays of femininity through hegemonic or dominant masculinity (Stephenson, 2012). Rugby teaches men to be dominant and forceful (Schacht, 1996:562). Therefore, rugby cultivates values associated with "aggressiveness, strength, toughness and competitiveness" (Stephenson, 2012:23; cf. Kerr, 2019). Stephenson (2012:24) states that words and phrases such as "physical", "pain", "blood", "pride", "rough" and "hard" are often used to describe "play in a rugby game, highlighting the importance of physicality and indeed success over obstacles to succeed" (Kerr, 2019; Pringle, 2005; Schacht, 1996). Although an older source, it is worth considering Pleck and Sawyer's (1974:3)

view in this regard. They note that, through contact sport “our masculinity is tested in immediate physical competition with others. Moment by moment, our performance is measured in relation to others. Both in winning and in losing, the masculine role exerts strong influence” (Pleck & Sawyer, 1974:3; as quoted in Stephenson, 2012:24). The rugby field provides men across the generational divides with a sense of belonging. On the one hand, “young men can experiment and shape their masculine identities” whereas, on the other hand, “an older generation of men to re-experience or identify with these qualities that may no longer be valued in other situations or contexts” (Stephenson, 2012:24). Light and Kirk (as cited in Stephenson, 2012) study, which focused on young men’s experiences of rugby training and the personification of a “traditional”, hegemonic form of masculinity, found that some of the participants spoke about the “good old days” when hypermasculinity was “not openly questioned”, but rather provided rugby and themselves with a “privileged status”. In Pringle’s (2005) study on high school rugby players in New Zealand, some of his participants noted that rugby is an integral source of attaining “social acceptance” among their peers. One of these participants, for example, recalled how this aided him to be accepted into the rugby team and his new school (Stephenson, 2012).

While it may not be its manifest function, rugby may serve to “reproduce the ideology of male supremacy because it acts as a constant and glorified reminder that males are biologically and thus inherently superior over females” (Kane & Snyder, as quoted in Schact, 1996:562). Although there are female rugby teams, including the *Saracens women’s team* in London, overall, the association between rugby and displaying “a particular kind of physical resilience, stamina and strength ... precludes women playing this dangerous game” (Stephenson, 2012:25). This assumption, according to Stephenson (2012:25), may also explain why rugby remains a “refuge for hegemonic masculinity” amid the changing social dynamics about masculinities and among men themselves (cf. Anderson, 2009, 2014).

(b) Using gay in rugby: negotiating agency and possibility on and off the field

Considering the future gay rugby players, Devin Ibanez describes himself as a “rugby maniac”. In 2019, he played for the *New England Free Jacks*. It was also during this time that he decided to come out as a gay rugby player. He came out in a social media post, saying “I...decided to embrace what I once felt embarrassed of and be proudly and shamelessly myself” (as cited in Buzinski, 2020).

He noted that posting a photo of his boyfriend alongside him empowered him to further express his desire to be his authentic self, since he was one of the very few rugby players who

were openly gay (Buzinski, 2020). The responses to him coming out were positive and came from all over the world, including France, Belgium, Scotland, and England. He recalled:

...everyone has been overwhelmingly supportive and amazing. I've even gotten some messages from players who played on the same teams as me who told me a bit about their own stories. And that's all I really want. Just to connect with those who had similar experiences and hopefully inspire those who are going through the same things. (as cited in Buzinski, 2020)

In an interview with Outsports.com (2021), he noted that he wanted to become a role model for other LGBTIQ+ rugby players who find it challenging to reconcile their sexuality with their sport. Ibanez noted that rugby had changed his life and inspired him to do things he never would have considered possible (Buzinski, 2020). But he also found that rugby was “not a welcoming place” for openly gay players. He continued: “I want to help change that because this sport has something to offer us all in the same way that we all have something we can offer to the sport”.

Recent studies on the topic of gay men who form part of inclusive and/or exclusive rugby clubs are worth considering. Gaston and Dixon (2019) found that the *Triton* players, a rugby club in the UK, noted that they were experiencing examples of decreased homophobia and homophobia due to examples of increased inclusivity. The players attributed this to the fact that they were playing rugby against “those” (i.e., heterosexual) clubs whose players “reflected progressive attitudes (and therefore diminished cultural homophobia) among men in wider society more generally” (Gaston & Dixon, 2019:9). This, they contend

... supports the idea ... [of inclusive masculinity], not only in the sense of contemporary masculinity being more tolerant of traits and behaviours that are not seen to be implicit markers of homosexuality when displayed by heterosexual men but in the inverse sense as well: gay men are not necessarily solely tied to embodying specific traits/behaviours either. (Gaston & Dixon, 2019:9)

One of the players commented that “inclusive/gay teams” were no longer required, as their club and those similar to them, “had accomplished the goal of inclusion, rendering the need for gay teams unnecessary” (Gaston & Dixon, 2019:10; cf. Anderson, 2011a).

Van Campenhout and Van Hoven's research (2014) about the negotiation of masculine performances on and off the field provided New Zealand rugby players the opportunity to

carefully negotiate and navigate their disclosure and expression of their gender and sexual identities. Specifically, they explored the varied masculine performances of members of a rugby club within its different spaces. Their findings showed how “*different spaces provided different experiences, different milestones and different experiences of personal growth*”⁷ (Van Campenhout & Van Hoven, 2014:1103). All of these contributed towards developing an attachment of club members to the rugby club. They found that the respective members’ performances depended on the different spatial contexts of the club. Although hegemonic masculine ideals were evident (Morin *et al.*, 2001), not all of these spaces exhibited the same masculine performances. Van Campenhout and Van Hoven (2014:1094) note that “[m]asculinity can attach to bodies, objects, places and spaces well beyond the apparent confines of biology and sex”.

In their discussion, they differentiated between *front* and *backstage spaces* of the club, which, according to them, were characterised by the presence or absence of “an audience judging performance” (Van Campenhout & Van Hoven, 2014:1094). Drawing on Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical approach, they noted that the front stage was regarded as a space where the performance addresses the audience, whereas the backstage was where the players prepared themselves for their “public performance”. Applied to their study, the backstage referred to the changing room where presumably no member of the public was present. The front stage spaces, that is, the rugby field and the clubhouse, are both visible to the public but required differential performances based on the specific “codes and rules” of their audience. On the field, the rugby players had to exude a “highly regulated” performance that reaffirmed their status as “heroes” (Morin *et al.*, 2001). The performances in the clubhouse, however, allow men to “let go”, albeit along hetero-masculine lines. For example, most of the conversation that took place in the clubhouse were about sports, cars and women. John, a player from the club said, “[e]veryone is there for rugby and if you have nothing else to talk about you talk about rugby” (Van Campenhout & Van Hoven, 2014:1097).

According to Van Campenhout and Van Hoven (2014:1097), one of the main topics of discussion in the context of the clubhouse was that of portraying “*public masculinity*”. Such masculinity is performed front stage, which allows the audience to identify who “we” are and how “we” behave. Such performances, according to Campbell (2000:565), can be described as “conversational cockfighting”. Men engage in an exchange of their “extensive knowledge of the game of rugby, the rugby club and club members” (Van Campenhout & Van Hoven, 2014:1100). Additionally, the players partook in drinking games to prove that they are able to

⁷ Emphasis added.

maintain their self-control whilst intoxicated. The latter allows men to overcompensate for their potentially lacklustre athletic prowess on the field, that is, them having been judged as being “less masculine” in relation to their teammates. John, a player, noted “...the disciplines of drinking are not only done to show an individual’s masculinity but are considered to ‘bring the boys together’” (Van Campenhout & Van Hoven, 2014:1098).

They found that the backstage space of the changing room offered players a context for expressing varied emotions. These ranged from “vulnerability” to expressing their need for support and safety (Van Campenhout & Van Hoven, 2014:1100). The researchers also referred to graffiti on the changing room walls that read “Varsity Hard! 2010”, “AURFC” (Auckland University Rugby Football Club) and “Snake Pit”. Through this, the players gained a sense of ownership of the club and, according to Robin (Director of Rugby at the club), created “a ‘homely’ atmosphere but one linked to rugby culture” (Van Campenhout & Van Hoven, 2014). Mark, the team coach, confirmed the importance of the changing room in the following quote:

Yeah, the dressing room is very important from the point of view that, when we had our values meeting right at the beginning of the season, we came up with our philosophies, values, rules and tactics for the team: we [were not] gonna lose at home...The changing room is our fortress, and nobody penetrates that fortress. (Mark as cited in Van Campenhout & Van Hoven, 2014:1099)

Roy (one of the players) reiterated the role of the changing room as a backstage space for preparation. He explained that, before a match, he is:

... always like nervous and just trying to get into the game mentality. I was getting myself into the zone of I can do it. Sort of becoming a bit cocky and arrogant I guess. Knowing that ‘I can do it’, that I had to believe so, then I would do it. (Van Campenhout & Van Hoven, 2014:1101)

As a front stage, the rugby field requires players to perform their masculinity in public. Consequently, they are “judged on both their *rugby skills* and their *masculine performance* against the backdrop of the popular discourse on the rugby masculinity field” (Van Campenhout & Van Hoven, 2014:1102). A rugby player may, therefore, refrain from overt displays of emotionality when he experiences pain, “to maintain their masculine identity”. Van Campenhout and Van Hoven (2014:1102) attribute this to avoid having his audience

negatively assess his masculinity (cf. Adams *et al.*, 2010; Howe, 2001; West & Zimmerman, 2002).

In keeping with this study, it is worth reflecting on similar studies that sought to map the diverse, complex and fluid construction and performance of one's sexual orientation in, what could be, a highly heterosexual environment. As is evident, contact sport has been recognised as an advantaged space for heterosexual individuals and an environment that has "supported" heterosexism and homophobia (Denison & Kitchen, 2015). Based on their research, Rivers (2011) states that sexual minorities are prone to experience harassment sometime during their careers in a sporting environment. Owing to such negative experiences, Gaston and Dixon (2019:4) contend that homosexual people might have had or fear such homophobia and, as a result, could feel rejected from participating in sport or, alternatively, create an alternative context that is devoid of homophobia. These so-called negative experiences manifest in varied forms; "gender policing" is one such an example. It is used through specific discourses to ensure that men correctly perform their heteromascularity in particular sporting environments, akin to the use of fag and gay discourse (McCormack, 2013). Derogatory labels (e.g., sissies, poofs, fags) may also be used to emasculate or feminise those men who do not conform to the traditional norms of masculinity (Bullingham *et al.*, 2016:278).

At present, sexual minority athletes and sport clubs experience greater visibility (Channon & Matthews, 2019). The demand for the creation of safe(r) gay sporting spaces resulted from the preceding references to sexual minority athletes who were made to feel unwelcome or who were excluded from mainstream sport (Channon & Matthews, 2019). Consequently, sexual minority sport teams were created to counter the heteronormativity of traditional sporting spaces with their socially constructed alternative (i.e., "gay sports spaces") (Whitehouse, 2019). The origin of these changes, as noted in chapter 2, were those shifts in intimate behaviours between men in fraternal and sport contexts (in the UK and US) (Anderson, 2014). Studies show that young men, who may self-identify as heterosexual, are more partial towards socially interacting with their gay peers and expressing both emotional and physical tactility with other men irrespective (McCormack & Anderson, 2014). An example of this is Anderson *et al.*'s (2011) research on sport team initiation rituals in the UK. They monitored these behaviours over a seven-year period. During this time, there was clear examples of a decrease in cultural homophobia. The study found that during initiation the male athletes "were forced to kiss one another as a form of doing something that was normally stigmatised to prove their worth, loyalty and desire to be on the team" (Bullingham *et al.*, 2016:277). However, "by the end of the study, team members willingly engaged in same-sex kissing, not as a form of hazing but as a form of homosocial bonding and support" (Bullingham

et al., 2016:277). These findings are examples of how sportsmen regard homophobia (and not homosexuality) as unacceptable, thus, there has been (as argued in chapter 2) a positive attitudinal change towards homosexuality in general and in sport in particular (Anderson & McCormack, 2018; Anderson & McGuire, 2010; Bush *et al.*, 2012; McCormack & Anderson, 2014).

3.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on the contributions of current and previous research on the experiences of gay men in the context of contact sport and, for the purpose of the current study, rugby. The discussion integrated research on the topic from South Africa and abroad. These studies focused on, among others, the hegemonic and inclusive nature of rugby in South Africa.

The nature of masculinity always depends on the interaction between men and women and between men among themselves. Studies on men and their masculine identity are not possible without positioning masculinity within the applicable context. This chapter elaborated on the connection of masculinity with contact sport and its concurrent association with patriarchy and heteronormativity in rugby. Masculinity in contemporary contact sport was conceptualised along with the current debates on the masculine ideals that are associated with men in rugby. Current academic research on gay men in South African and international rugby was discussed.

This research explored the experiences of self-identified gay rugby-playing males, noting that they were likely to occupy a somewhat hegemonic position within their social worlds. This study also sought to explore the ways in which this might have enhanced, shaped and possibly constrain their understanding and expression of being male and masculine in a homohysterical culture.

The next chapter discusses the methodological approach that was used in this study to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER 4:

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

A social constructionist ontological approach and explorative research design were used to achieve the general and specific research objective of the study – that is, an exploration of the influence of inclusive masculinity practices and experiences of homophobia among self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa. I adhered to specific metatheoretical, research design and methodological principles. This chapter informs the reader about these considerations with a specific account of the sampling procedures, data collection methods and data analysis procedures that were used. The chapter also provides a detailed demarcation of the biographical information of the seven research participants and concludes with a discussion of the ethical considerations that were applicable to this study.

4.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the specific metatheory, explorative qualitative research design and the corresponding research methods that were employed in the present study. An explorative qualitative research approach was used in this study. This was an appropriate design because of the need to gather rich, detailed data from participants to thoroughly explore the lived experiences of self-identified gay men in South African rugby.

4.2.1 *Research design and metatheoretical bases*

The study was informed using the ontological approach of **social constructionism**. This approach was applicable to the current study because I focused on the subjective views of self-identified gay rugby players as it relates to how inclusive masculine practices influence their experiences of homophobia, homosociality and homophobia, among others. In keeping with this, I also employed the epistemological approach of **interpretivism**. Neuman (2011:103) describes interpretivism as the systematic analysis of “socially meaningful actions” of one’s participants in order to emphasise how social actors subjectively construct and experience their social, gendered and sexual selves. This approach, therefore, relates to Max Weber’s *verstehen*, i.e., the researcher foregrounds the subjective “views, opinions and perceptions of people as they are experienced and expressed in everyday life” (Sarantakos, 2013:40). This facilitates the understanding and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds that they are in. Interpretivism assigns importance to investigating

the views of research participants based on their in-depth accounts of their subjective life worlds (as gay men in an exclusive and/or inclusive rugby club, in the case of this study) (Babbie, 2016). The main focus was, therefore, on their unique gendered and sexualised performances as per the tenets of inclusive masculinities (i.e., how they navigate said performances as means to disclose or foreclose their sexual orientation to their teammates) (cf. Babbie, 2016; Bryman, 2016).

An **explorative qualitative research design** was used to investigate the research questions of the study. The choice of this research design was motivated by the need to understand the nuanced interpretations of their everyday experiences and interactions of the participants in their natural setting (Babbie, 2016). Said approaches are used when relatively little is known about the topic under investigation (Sarantakos, 2013) – a criterion that was undoubtedly applicable to the present study. As argued by Sarantakos (2013), this method is used by researchers to research phenomena that have not been studied very often, such as self-identified gay male rugby players in a South African context as opposed to those in the UK (Anderson, 2005; Gaston & Dixon, 2019) and in New Zealand (Van Campenhout & Van Hoven, 2014).

Moreover, explorative research provides a context that is highly interactive between the researcher and the participants. This provides the researcher with the opportunity to ask open-ended questions to accrue detailed accounts courtesy of the participants. The interview schedule provided a semi-structured deductive guide to the interview (i.e., based on my reading of previous scholarship about the topic), but it was flexible enough to adapt to the subjective and inductive contributions made by the participants. Scholars have similarly adopted said approaches in their investigations of rugby players and how they potentially exhibit inclusive, hegemonic and orthodox masculinities. Gaston and Dixon (2019), for example, collected their data using an explorative design and focus groups among the gay and/or inclusive rugby club players (i.e., the *Tritons* in Liverpool). Their research also engaged in discussions about the “want” and the “need” for gay/inclusive rugby clubs. Gaston and Dixon (2019) used this fairly “new” rugby club to engage in discussion because they believed that it would give them a better understanding of gay rugby in an era of decreased homophobia (Gaston & Dixon, 2019:5). Writing from a South African perspective, Maake *et al.* (2021:5) noted that using a qualitative approach aids the researcher to adopt a “...better understanding and of the participant realities”. Anderson similarly noted that “[he utilised] qualitative methods to also examine the influence of the structure of team sports”. The central features that are associated with this design include the emphasis on the natural setting of participants (Geertz, 1973) and providing “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) to achieve qualitative credibility,

conformability and transferability. This contributes to emphasising the importance of understanding the lived experiences of one's participants as opposed to generalising the findings (Babbie, 2016; Bryman, 2016). In keeping with these features, I undertook an in-depth investigation into the influence of inclusive masculinity practices on the experiences of homophobia among self-identified gay rugby players. This design was suitable for the study because I explored the under-researched subjective ways in which gay men reflexively navigated the decision to disclose their sexual orientation to their team members or to choose to refrain from doing so (Neuman, 2014:38; Polit & Beck, 2012; Reid-Searl & Happell, 2012).

Thick descriptions are evident in sociological inquiries, especially using research methods that include the present study's adoption of semi-structured interviews (cf. Geertz, 1973). This, according to Geertz (1973:312), is defined as the "researcher's own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to". The latter, according to Denscombe (2004:233), is necessary to convey the complexity of the situation through an immersion of the researcher (Brown & Gortmaker, 2009:421) in the field of study and generating detailed accounts. In the present study then, I focused on the unique experiences of self-identified gay rugby players and how inclusive masculinity practices influenced their understanding, construction and enactment of their masculinity in the context of rugby. The use of an explorative qualitative research design further directed my methodological focus when it came to the processes of sampling and of collecting data (Bryman, 2016).

4.3 SAMPLING PROCEDURES AND DATA COLLECTION

This subsection discusses the sampling procedures, data collection methods and data analysis process used in the present study.

4.3.1 Sampling procedures

Acharya *et al.* (2013:332) define a sample as the selection of participants who represent "the population which the researcher is studying". I used the **non-probability sampling methods** of **purposive-** and **snowball sampling**. Non-probability sampling is a popular method in qualitative research where a researcher selects a sample for their study based on specific criteria and/or knowledge that the participant may contribute to the study (Sarantakos, 2013:164). The sample in the present study consisted of seven self-identified gay rugby players living in South Africa. Apart from them being self-identified gay men living in South Africa at the time of the study, there were no other exclusionary criteria; prospective participants were thus not excluded based on their age, race, social class position, gender

identity (i.e., whether they identified as more masculine or effeminate), educational status, nationality, and whether they had disclosed or foreclosed their sexual orientation to others (i.e., whether they were still “in” the closet at the time of the study).

Furthermore, I employed **purposive sampling** due to the specific need for the participants to be self-identified gay men who play rugby (cf. Sarantakos, 2013:164). The main objective of this method is to select a sample that can be regarded as representative of the population under study. Sarantakos (2013:164) mentions that the fundamental criteria that are associated with the sample is the “knowledge and expertise of the respondents and their suitability for this study”. However, purposive sampling does have limitations. The perspectives communicated by the participants may not necessarily be applicable to all gay men who play rugby. This notwithstanding, it is worth noting that it is not the objective of a qualitative study, such as this one, to generalise the findings to the larger population studied but rather to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018:245). For the present study, representatives of an inclusive South African rugby club were contacted to assist in identifying potential participants for the study. The members of the noted club considered their club to be one that was welcoming and a “harassment-free” environment (i.e., anybody, irrespective of their sexual identity and expression, was thus welcome). The club was used as an initial starting point for sampling and data collection for this study. As a starting point, the director of the club was contacted via e-mail. The e-mail included a formal summary outlining the title and objectives of the study and the researcher’s institutional affiliation and contact details. After this introductory process of gaining entry into the club, further snowball sampling occurred. Browne (2008), Francis (2017), and Sullivan and Losberg (2003), among others, underscore the difficulty associated with sampling members of the LGBTIQ+ community – a factor that cannot be understated in light of my own experiences in the present study. It proved difficult to identify, contact and arrange an interview with the participants due to their “hidden” nature (Rumens, 2008, 2011). This difficulty was also reported in other studies among sexual minorities (e.g., Maake *et al.*, 2021; Rothmann, 2016; Tshilongo, 2018; Van der Schyff, 2022). Maake *et al.* (2021:7), for example, wrote that due to the sensitive nature of their study (i.e., the construction of Black gay male identities) as well as the fact that gay people would rather remain silent about their identity, it was difficult to identify participants for the study. Maake *et al.* (2021:7) wrote the following in this regard:

...sensitivity of the topic and the fact that black gay men in the identified heteronormative spaces (mining) hardly disclose or talk about their sexual identities, made it difficult to easily identify participants, hence the small sample.

As an avid LGBTIQ+ rights advocate and ally, I am very passionate about the topic of the present study. Therefore, I wanted to make a meaningful contribution towards researching the lives of self-identified gay individuals (i.e., those persons who may constantly be silenced through fears of homophobia and experiencing homophobia) (cf. McCormack & Anderson, 2014). Irrespective of my commitment to safeguarding the rights of the participants and contributing to research on this under-researched topic, it was difficult to recruit participants. They questioned my agenda, as I self-identify as a heterosexual woman. Further, irrespective of some participants' initial willingness to participate, they failed to meet with me. This could, among others, be because of my position as an "outsider". Maake *et al.* (2021:3780) mention how entering their participants' personal spaces made it difficult to accrue information: "I was entering THEIR space as a researcher seeking information from them". To redress this limitation, I allowed prospective participants to complete a questionnaire (consisting of questions like those asked during semi-structured interviews) on their own. This, however, did not alleviate the problem of recruiting participants.

I then opted to request one of my existing participants to consider referring me to potential participants (i.e., **snowball sampling**). He assisted me in this regard. I was able to identify him as gatekeeper and referent. Through this sampling method, I was able to recruit six of the seven participants. Therefore, **snowball sampling** proved invaluable to recruit participants. This sampling method has proven valuable for undertaking research among minority groups, including gay and lesbian persons (and for the purpose of this study was beneficial to engage with self-identified gay rugby players). I followed the example of others who conducted research on similar topics, for example, Msibi's (2012) study among South African queer youth, Francis' (2017) study on LGB learners in the Free State, and Rothmann's (2016, 2017) research on the "hidden" community of self-identified gay academics in South Africa. Snowball sampling enabled these researchers, as it did me, to engage, through the referrals of their initial participants, other individuals, who made significant contributions to their studies. After concluding an interview, I thus requested the participant to share my contact information and details about the study with other persons who might be willing to participate in a semi-structured interview. Interested parties then contacted me to discuss their potential participation. I was able to recruit six participants using said method.

4.3.2 Data collection

During the process of qualitative research, the researcher gains information by performing certain data collection strategies such as **semi-structured interviews**. This data collection method was relevant for the purpose of the study because it provided information that aided

me to understand the results and to observe changes in the perceptions of people (Kabir, 2016). I collected the data using a semi-structured interview schedule comprising closed- and open-ended questions. The former represented the biographical questions, whereas the latter encouraged participants to elaborate on their answers (Sarantakos, 2013). In line with the Protection of Private Information Act (hereafter POPIA), “data subjects must be free to withdraw without undue effort” and also “consent must not be bundled with the acceptance of terms and conditions” (USAf, 2020:25). I only collected biographical and opinion-related information relevant to the present study. The biographical information included the participants’ self-chosen pseudonym, their sexual orientation, race, age, and current geographical location. Moreover, according to POPIA, de-identification should be implemented in a research process. De-identification ensures that no identifiable information about the participants can result in re-identification “by any reasonably foreseeable method or through linking it with other information that identifies the data subject” (USAf, 2020:11).

The opinion-related questions were both inductive and deductive. Deduction allowed me to compile questions based on an in-depth reading of topics that emerged from previous studies on the topic (see chapters 1–3). Deductive topics included foci on the self-identification of participants as gay; the role of gender and sexuality in their childhood in sport; the focus on gender and sexuality whilst playing rugby at the time of the study; and lastly, the gay rugby club and/or team as a “safe space” (refer to Addendum G for the full interview schedule). In addition to this approach, I adapted the interview schedule based on the inductive themes that emerged during the course of the interviews. Additional themes included, among others, the use of homophobic language, gay banter, the “undoing” of gender, and attempts to overcompensate as “the good gay” (i.e., “dialling up testosterone and dialling down feminine qualities”, and “I identify as masculine, but I can rock a dress if you want me to”). Another prominent theme was the importance of allies and participants’ experiences of toxic masculinity. I engage with this more in chapters 5 and 6.

Bryman (2016:10) defines semi-structured interviews as the process where the researcher and the participant engage in a formal interview, albeit in a more conversational way, to encourage the participant to share their subjective experiences freely. Given the sensitivity associated with the current research topic, said approach allowed me to intersubjectively (Sarantakos, 2013) establish rapport with the seven men. This encouraged them to thoroughly elucidate their views. This allowed opportunity for more flexibility during the research process, since I was able to ask additional or alternative questions when the noted inducted themes arose during the interview.

One of the benefits of using semi-structured interviews is that the researcher may prepare a flexible interview schedule beforehand that allows for a “conversation” to take place between the researcher and the participant that results in additions to the schedule (Bryman, 2012:471). This allowed the participants to be more open and express their opinions freely rather than merely choosing from a predetermined list of responses. Krueger and Casey (2014:124) suggest that constant non-verbal communication (e.g., head nodding, physical discomfort, eye contact, etc.) by the researcher to the participant makes the participant feel at ease. However, due to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic at the time of the study, additional care had to be taken with regard to the use of semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Owing to the health risks associated with COVID-19, participants had the option, based on the South African Government and the Department of Higher Education’s lockdown levels of restrictions, to participate in telephone, *Skype* or *Zoom* interviews. In the article of Sullivan (2012:56), *Skype* interviews in comparison to face-to-face interviews also made it relatively easier for the participants to express their true selves to me (the researcher). This is also supported by Drabble *et al.* (2016:3), who note that online and telephone interactions increase sense of security on the part of the participant when data collection is undertaken for studies dealing with “sensitive topics”. The use of *Skype* interviews does not (and as is the case for the present study, did not) compromise the quality of data collected because the medium echoes an actual face-to-face interview, including the representation of oneself to another through eye contact, smiling and frowning, and other non-verbal and verbal cues do not necessarily go missing during such interviews (Sullivan, 2012:56). Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, only one of the interviews took place in person. Four of the participants were interviewed via *Zoom* and the remaining two participants decided that they would rather answer the questionnaire in their own time with as much detail as they felt comfortable disclosing.

4.3.3 Data analysis

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) state that qualitative data analysis involves “working with the data, organising the data, breaking the data into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing the data, and searching for patterns in the data”. According to Babbie (2016), qualitative data analysis refers to all forms of analysing data that were collected by making use of different qualitative techniques. After the process of collecting the data, the data must be organised for the researcher to analyse the findings (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

I critically analysed the data by making use of **deductive and inductive thematic analysis**. According to Thomas (as cited in Tshilongo, 2020:102), inductive reasoning refers to methodologies that use in-depth interpretations of data to develop different concepts and

themes. I identified themes by engaging with literature and identifying themes while in conversation with the participants. These themes emerged from a close reading of the transcribed interviews through open coding. Sarantakos (2013) identifies this as the process of “organising the minds” of the participants. **Coding**, according to Gomm (2008), helps the researcher to effectively explore people in general; that is, while using qualitative research, it can be described as the process of creating ideas and concepts (Bryman, 2016:445; Given, 2008:85) from the empirical findings of a study by re-reading the interview transcripts and notes that resulted from the research. The course of coding, especially in qualitative research, is regarded as “the important first step” to “label, separate, compile, and organize data” (Bryman, 2016:445). This entails going deeper into the meanings that shape their different realities. **Open coding** helped me to identify subthemes in the study together with their meaning that are representative of the stories of the participants pertaining to their construction and enactment of their gay masculinity in the rugby context (Sarantakos, 2013). In addition to said approach, I used **selective coding**. **Selective coding** is a selection of a specific category (e.g., the influence of inclusive masculinity practices on self-identified gay rugby players) and then relating it systematically to other categories (e.g., the experience of homophobia in such contexts) (Bryman, 2016:444-445).

4.4 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Table 4.1: Biographical information of participants

Pseudonym	Age	Sexual orientation	Race
Dave	41	Gay	White
He/him	37	Gay	White
Jay	33	Gay	White
Kyle	29	Gay and bisexual ⁸	White
Puma	31	Gay	Black
The Rugby Player	47	Gay	White
Soala	31	Gay	Black

⁸ Although Kyle “sometimes identifies as bisexual” (his words) due to, what he described as his “androgynous gender identity”, he opined that his “... expression remains ... exceptionally masculine. ... I present as masculine as I can. If I could grow a beard, I would”. This speaks to the interrelatedness of his masculine gender identity and

The table above provides an overview of the biographical information of the seven participants who participated in the study. Six participants were self-identified gay men living in the Gauteng province in South Africa, and one participant self-identified as gay and bisexual. He also resided in Gauteng. All seven participants were from South Africa; however, two of the participants relocated to Canada and the Netherlands, respectively, in the period following the interviews. Thus, at the time of the interviews, all participants resided in South Africa. Regarding the race of the participants, five participants identified as White, and two self-identified as Black men. The youngest participant was 29, and the oldest participant was 47 years of age.

4.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

When conducting research in social science, there are specific ethical considerations to keep in mind. Given the potential sensitivity of the subject matter, specific care was taken regarding the ethical considerations. These considerations helped me to act according to specific standards (Shamoo & Resnik, 2015). Each of the participants were given an **informed consent form** before the commencement that clearly stated the objectives and procedures of this study, the contact details of the researcher and her institutional affiliation. Information, in this regard, outlined the rights, obligations and roles of the researcher and participant; the importance of observing the principles of anonymity, confidentiality and privacy; and a commitment to avoid any emotional, physical and social harm to the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:88; Sarantakos, 2013:18). Refer to Addendum F in this regard.

Before the commencement of said interviews, participants had to provide informed, voluntary, explicit and specific consent. Informed consent means that the participants fully understand your research and make a voluntary and informed decision to take part in the research process. Explicit consent entailed that they confirmed their understanding of and commitment to the purpose, methods and intentions of the study (Ngozwana, 2018:25). According to USAf (2020:26), “consent has to be given through a clear, unambiguous, affirmative act”. Specific consent according to Universities South Africa (USAf, 2020:26) involve consent that is always related to a specific processing purpose. If a participant felt uncomfortable at any time during the interview, they had the right to stop the interview and withdraw; it is worth noting that none of the participants did so. To ensure a reliable transcription of the interview, I requested permission from each of the participants to make an audio-recording of the five interviews

his gay male sexual orientation. Both are based on the social constructions of society along cisgendered lines. It does not, however, imply that he is no longer gay.

using the “record session” option on Zoom (Krueger, 2014:116). All participants consented to an audio-recording.

Furthermore, I ensured that no **harm** would come to the participants (e.g., whether physical, emotional, or psychological in nature). Anonymity, also termed pseudonymity, permitted the seven participants to choose their own pseudonym before the commencement of each interview. Said pseudonym was used for the purpose of conducting the interviews, transcribing the interviews, engaging in analysis, and writing up the findings. In so doing, Mukungu (2017) argues that participants are in fact given a sense of agency by choosing their own pseudonym as opposed to me assigning this to them. The actual name and surname of the participants only appeared in the signed informed consent statement. Taking informed consent into consideration, **confidentiality** is, as noted above, important to observe (Babbie, 2016). With confidentiality, the identity of the participants was and will continue to be protected by ensuring that none of the information (whether biographical or opinion-related) can be traced back to them. This involves data storage of the interviews on my password-protected personal computer. Nobody other than me has access to these files (interview audio and filled questionnaires).

In addition, the **privacy** of the participants was also protected – thus not forcing the men to talk about matters that they regarded as personal (Bryman, 2016:395). By observing these principles, I stringently adhered to the principles of the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC) of the Faculty of Humanities. Refer to Addenda D and E for copies of the BaSSREC Ethics Certificate and annual monitoring approval certificates (Ethics number NWU-02093-20-A7).

4.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND AUTHENTICITY

When a researcher enters the process of research, it is important to ensure trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, and the authenticity of the findings. First, **trustworthiness**, according to Babbie (2016), seeks to assign neutrality to the findings of the qualitative inquiry to afford it credibility (Rothmann, 2014:219). When a researcher wants to achieve credibility, they must be conscious of a few things. Given the sensitivity of the present research topic and the nature of the chosen metatheory and research design (i.e., social constructionism and qualitative research), it was difficult to conduct more than seven interviews. As such, providing in-depth (i.e., thick descriptive) accounts of the life worlds of the seven men, it was of the utmost importance to ensure that they were representative of similar men in similar circumstances.

Second, Bryman (2016:302) **credibility** entails obtaining “multiple accounts of social reality ... in order to obtain confirmation that the investigator has correctly understood *that*⁹ social world”. I did this by recording and transcribing the interviews of the participants (with their explicit consent). This ensured that I retained the thick descriptive accounts that the participants shared with me. Furthermore, I used member-checking by having the participants confirm that I correctly transcribed the interviews and captured the meanings that they sought to share with me (Creswell & Poth, 2018:245). Third, **dependability** is another concept that is important when conducting research. It refers to keeping a so-called “audit trail” of the complete records of the study, that is, from the initial problem formulation through to the interview transcripts, data analysis and report (Bryman, 2016:303). To achieve this, my research supervisor assessed the findings and its interpretation to evaluate whether the conclusions are supported by the research findings. This process, therefore, required that the supervisor acted as the auditor of the present study to “establish how far proper procedures are being and have been followed” (Bryman, 2016:303).

Finally, **authenticity** is defined by Cope (2014:89) as “the extent to which the participants’ emotions and feelings are portrayed through exploring their experiences of the phenomenon”. Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Bryman, 2016) describe authenticity as an acknowledgement, appreciation and respect of diverse worldviews and values that different individuals and groups bring to their interpretation of their life worlds. It also compels the researcher to help the participants and the intended readership to “better understand...their social milieu” (Bryman, 2016:303) by considering the diversity of views from the participants and the researcher themselves (Cope, 2014). Bryman (2016:547) in addition says that “participants continuously and actively shape and re-shape their social realities through interactions with other social actors and objects”. I confirmed authenticity by reporting the narratives of all the gay men – not only those that could advance the present study’s research objectives, myself as researcher or the individual participants (cf. Van der Schyff, 2022).

4.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined the research design and methodology employed in this study on the lived experiences of self-identified rugby players in South Africa. As is evident, I opted to apply the tenets of social constructionism and interpretivism to complement the use of qualitative research methods, that is, non-probability sampling (purposive and snowball sampling), semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis. In total, seven participants provided informed,

⁹ Emphasis added.

explicit and voluntary consent to share their nuanced perspectives on the topic under investigation. Next, in chapter 5, I provide a detailed account of the findings I accrued during the semi-structured interviews.

CHAPTER 5:

INCLUSIVE MASCULINITIES, HOMOHYSTERIA AND GAY RUGBY PLAYERS: FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Consider the following assertion of He/Him, a self-identified gay male rugby player, as point of departure for the discussion that follows. He reflected on how he sought to challenge his own and the internalised homophobia of others through rugby:

You know, it's like an internalised homophobia that gay men walk around with, specifically in a South African culture. I mean, I've seen it globally. I've travelled a lot. I've seen and met a lot of different gay cultures. But, you know, there's internalised homophobia, within gay men as well. So, you know, you beat up on yourself. ... You, yourself, create...stereotypes of what it means to be gay... which is freaking ridiculous. So, I became aware of that in myself. I became aware of my own biases, our own internal stereotypes of what it means to be gay, and you know, I sort of broadened the spectrum...so how to change, it gave me more permission to be even more fucking gay. (He/Him, White)

This chapter presents the findings from my semi-structured interviews with self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa. The chapter is structured according to the summary topics emanating from the interview schedule and the inductive themes that emerged from the in-person discussions. The (sub)sections provide a comprehensive insight into the life worlds of the seven participants regarding their experiences on inclusive masculinity practices and homohysteria in their respective rugby teams and clubs.

5.2 CONSTRUCTING A GAY IDENTITY

The first subsection of the interview schedule centred around the participants' gender and sexual identity. Said questions inquired whether (or not) they **self-identified as gay**, the **reasoning** for this, and **how they navigated their personal and sexual identities** personally and socially.

The first question read as follows: "What are the **reasons** you ascribe to identifying as gay?" Puma (Black) commented that although he "lean[s] heavily towards gay...I experience a

mixture of both [i.e., attraction to men and women], thus sort of bisexuality". He continued along a social constructionist line: "What is important for me, from an attraction perspective, is the actual human beneath the skin". Likewise, Kyle answered that he sometimes "self-identifies as bisexual ... I find men and women sexually attractive". The Rugby Player and Dave responded similarly to the question. The former noted, "because I am attracted to men, I have fallen in love with them". Dave believed "I am very much a gay man" – a statement Jay and Soala attributed to the fact that they were "attracted to men", an attraction that Jay considered sexual and emotional. Dave, however, qualified his response by mentioning his initial uncertainty about same-sex attraction when he was younger: "I realised I was attracted to men at age 9 but did not know what it meant". Somewhat similarly, He/Him responded that "[w]hen I was in primary school, early on, from the age of around 6 ... I was just somewhat different to the other boys".

The second question sought to investigate whether their identity markers required them to emulate or conform to specific **stereotypes**, akin to so-called gay sensibilities. Of the seven participants, only one, Soala, denied the need to emulate stereotypical behaviour. According to him, "I focus on living my authentic self and pay very little regard to stereotypes". Conversely, The Rugby Player (White) answered "no". His reason spoke to the conflation of sexual orientation with gender performativity (i.e., he expressed his discomfort with flamboyance). He said, "I've never, when I was younger, ascribed to [stereotypes] even though there might have been sort of a need to conform in a certain way. But the way the world is moving, I don't feel personally, that I've got any pressure to perform" in a certain way. Conversely, Puma (Black) spoke to how flamboyance characterised his gendered performance. He noted, "Yeah, so when I was in primary school, I used to be a lot more flamboyant. Everyone else knew that I was gay. ... Being you ... sometimes it wasn't very pleasant". After going to high school, he consciously changed his gender behaviour. He recalled that he behaved more "like the more senior students that I saw, [i.e.,] the most senior sort of male students that I saw, I simulated their behaviour, [i.e.,] how they acted. And I just presented in that way".

The gendered stereotypes also informed Dave's view. He underscored the importance of his "body consciousness". This is because he presented as more masculine and not as flamboyant; that is, he did not fit into the typically more effeminate "gay look" some people ascribe to male homosexuality. He noted that there were stereotypes to which to conform in this regard. He said the following:

... [although] it's difficult to pinpoint every stereotype, ... body consciousness is a big one. It's the problem of living up to everyone's expectation of what a gay person is supposed to be and act like. I've never been flamboyant, and this leads to some uncomfortable discussions. I've had to come out as gay more than once, and it's an ongoing problem, people do not always believe that I'm gay and I end up having to convince them I am – both personally and professionally. Then there's the problem where every girl you meet believe that they are automatically your best female friend (hereafter BFF) when they find out you're gay. They want to ask you about fashion tips, hair, makeup, etc., when I know very little about any of those topics. (Dave, White)

He/him elaborated on whether and how he ascribed to specific gay stereotypes. He said, "Yeah, of course all of them you know". He mentioned one specific stereotype – "big boys don't cry". This, according to him, relates to simply facing your everyday struggles – that is, to "get on with it", be more of a man and "stop being soft". He related this to the derogatory Afrikaans word directed towards gay men, namely "moffie". While he was growing up under Apartheid, the term was "sort of thrown around like a normal slang word". To avoid such stigmatisation, he engaged in sport. He decided to play tennis. This choice of sport, however, exacerbated subtle (read covert) homophobia. He recalled being "picked on by the students and ... by the teachers". He said:

...rugby was part of my upbringing, like every South African kid.... I was targeted for not playing it, because I was actually a very good rugby player as well.... I was really authentic [i.e., he identified with the game of rugby] and competitive. Yeah, discrimination was part of my every day in primary school. (He/Him, White)

His male teachers were guilty of such bullying as they "were all the rugby coaches. I mean, it was bad. It was as bad as I would put my hand up in class for help, and the male teachers would literally walk right past me". Such treatment resulted in an inner "explosion" of sorts in his internal "little gay rainbow ... I would ask, 'What the fuck?' 'What's wrong with you?' Then I would be called into the backroom and be given a hiding [by the teacher]. So as far as stereotypes go, [I] went through all of this". He mentioned that all of this happened to him because he was very good in tennis and did not want to get injured; otherwise, he could not have pursued his tennis dream of trying to go to Wimbledon.

Pertaining to stereotypes, Jay believed at the time “in some ways, yes, ... [he] definitely conform[s] a lot more to masculine stereotypes. Mostly because it is how I feel but also because other gay men find it attractive”. Other gay men’s expectations intersected with his conservative Afrikaner upbringing. He remembered being “conscious about presenting myself as masculine through speech, body language and other general behaviour”. Furthermore, he mentioned that he grew up in a “loving” and “supporting” household: “neither of my parents ever tried to moderate my behaviour or tell me to ‘be a man’ or ‘act like a man’, for which I am very grateful”. Secondary socialisation from his peers, however, continued to necessitate him to do his gender correctly.

Identifying as partly bisexual, Kyle commented about specific stereotypes: “So, I’ll start off with a very stereotypical one. From a ‘straight’ or the heterosexual perspective, there are certain stereotypes that I tend to conform to. I wouldn’t say that I have to [do so]. I don’t have to do anything. I don’t tend to conform to everything”. Yet, “... when I get drunk, I get gay”, meaning that he “becomes crazy”. He noted, “if I’m hanging out with a lot of straight people, specifically, I’m hanging out with bros, which is who I grew up with. I conform to the ‘ja-broer’¹⁰ [attitude] through like rugby”. He contended that doing so, in this context, was amazing. “Yeah. And I conform to that pretty fast”. He explained this as by distinguishing between more stereotypically straight and gay behaviours. Pertaining to the former, he could:

... flip on a dime when I’m hanging out with [other men of his rugby club] or with any of my LGBT friends, my cutie friends. Then from the gay side, there are some interesting stereotypes as well because, you know, from the hetero perspective, I’m half gay, and from the gay perspective, I’m half hetero[sexual].

As is evident from the above discussion, the rugby players’ **gender identity** played a meaningful role in their everyday lives. I asked them how they would describe their gender identity. The Rugby Player answered as follows: “I would say that definitely more masculine”. His reference to masculinity resonated with his fellow participants. He/Him, for example, generally identified as being a “more hypermasculine gay man”. In doing so, he referenced the fact that he, like other South African gay men, “wear a lot of masks [by] being hypermasculine”. Reflecting on the reasons for starting their inclusive rugby club, the club allowed its members to present their gender and sexual identities,

¹⁰ Afrikaans vernacular used to refer to conforming to expectations in a specific group, for example, rugby in this regard.

... on different spectrums of ... sexual expression. [This] actually allowed me to become more okay with being more flamboyant, ... feminine and expressive in the club. So yeah, but that's my expression, I would say. I'm quite a 'mess'. I mean, I grew up on the farm [driving a] tractor. (He/Him, White)

Reiterating my previous reference to the importance of body consciousness, Jay mirrored the above tendency to exude masculine traits depending on the context. He said:

...[I] strongly identif[ied] with typical characteristics and feelings one would associate with masculine identity. As a man, I like to occupy the space around me, I am bigger than other men. Because of this, they respond to me like I am [bigger] and that makes me feel confident. I like to feel dominant, self-controlled, independent, healthy and strong. I gym 5–6 days a week to maintain overall health and muscle mass – this enforces my feelings of masculinity.

Androgyny was also a feature participants opted for in their gender expressions. Puma recalled the difficulty to establish a balance between his gender identity and sexual orientation. Doing this:

... was the one of the first challenges that I had [as a gay man], like, yeah actually, like [acting] more like a girl or a guy. I think very quickly, in high school, I realised that, no, actually, I'm a guy. This is gendered man. I'm not a female, but I just happen to have a sexual attraction to other men.

This implicit challenge to cisgenderism characterised Soala's view – that he was “primarily masculine, but [he] believe[s] that everyone has a mixture of masculinity and femininity within them”.

Kyle was confident that his gender identity “is definitely androgynous”. Interestingly, however, his narrative provided a contradiction of sorts. Consider his view in this regard:

I love wearing skirts just as much as I love wearing tank tops and wifebeaters when I go to festivals. I used to do that as an excuse to dress as flamboyantly as I could. Now, [it is just part of] my identity. However, my expression remains exceptionally masculine. So, in my day-to-day life, I wear tight fitting

T shirts and I go to gym. I present as masculine as I can. If I could grow a beard, I would. (Kyle, White)

The next subsection builds on my foregoing discussion. I provide an in-depth elucidation of the seven participants' reflections about the intersections of their gender and sexual identities with their initial introduction to sport when they were younger.

5.3 A GENDERED SEXUAL IDENTITY IN (AND) SPORT

As point of departure, I inquired about their **sport background, who introduced them to sport in school** and the **reasons why the latter encouraged them to participate in those specific sports**.

5.3.1 The participants' sport background

Although The Rugby Player did not consider himself as someone who was "really sporty" because of his initial lack of interest in sport, cricket, soccer and hockey were his initial go-to options when he was younger. He said:

During the 1990s, you know, people used to call [the hockey stick] the "mof stok" [i.e., faggot stick] because, in retrospect, the more 'obvious guys' like me, like huddled together. I've also played cricket once, and I was told that I threw like a girl or, or throw like a, you know, someone who is gay.

He added by saying that in South Africa, the derogatory use of "moffie" [i.e., "faggot"], "was kind of like thrown around all the time. So, I would be told that I throw like a gay or like a "moffie". Due to experiencing such overt verbal discrimination, he refrained from sports participation. He noted:

I think deep down inside, I knew that I was gay, and I would do whatever I could ... for people to kind of like me. It was more for me to kind of overcompensate. But unfortunately, that wasn't necessarily being more masculine. Because I still participated in drama. I played netball with the girls. Yet, at the same time my struggle was that I could be playing soccer with my male friends and then, one minute [later], play Barbie with my girlfriend? And they [male friends] didn't [do so]. And for me, it was just, it was something else to do. I had fun; you know? So, yeah, it was always a struggle. (The Rugby Player, White)

Puma (Black) reflected on the challenges he experienced based on the type of schools (i.e., public schools) he had to attend. Due to the “misfortune of the kind of schools that I ended up going to, there wasn’t a lot of sporting activities available [other than] soccer”. Athletics and soccer were the only options he could choose from at the time, as rugby was not available. Likewise, Jay also at first participated in athletics when he was seven years old. He was “a good sprinter and reached provincial level a couple of times. By age 10 a teacher wanted me to play rugby because I was bigger than most boys around my age”. Soala (Black) participated in a variety of sports during his formative years in school, including soccer and netball in primary school. When he moved to the city of Johannesburg at the age of 26, he started playing touch rugby and started competing in the *In2Touch leagues*¹¹ and played for the Gauteng provincial team in the interprovincial touch tournament in 2019. He also joined his company’s men and women corporate action netball league in 2019 for one season; for this he was named as the best male player of the league.

In addition to hockey, soccer and athletics, He/Him recalled that his first introduction to sport was through the game of tennis. In addition to this, he started playing cricket a few years later, joined his primary school’s swimming team – “so, I was an all-around athlete. I played every, almost every sport in primary school, except rugby”. By not playing rugby, he became much more of a “target in terms of discrimination”. He continued as follows:

... the more I think back about this as an adult, there was so much wrong with us. It was, you know, when you’re that young and you are still just kind of finding out who you are and what you’re about, a conservative, hypermasculine and educated view of our society really does not do kids much good. (He/Him, White)

Dave similarly noted that at the age of 10, he did long-distance running. He “attempted rugby but didn’t find it appealing”. Much of his views were informed by previous references to the patriarchal and overly masculine behaviours of the coaches: “I found the attitudes of the coaches to be toxic”. He added that he partook in karate (JKA) after school: “I really enjoyed it and earned two silver medals during one event”. He stated that due to relocation for work and starting his professional career, he did not continue with this. Before joining his current rugby club, he mainly focused on work and not sport. Likewise, Kyle did not find team sports

¹¹ A company that organises touch rugby leagues or tournament suitable for everyone regardless of ability, age and gender.

such as rugby appealing. According to him, sports that are more individualistic as opposed to communal tend to be less focused on one being gay:

I wasn't one for a team sport in the beginning. My father ironically put me on a motorcycle, and I've been riding bikes pretty much ever since. I stopped riding for the five years. I was in high school and then started again pretty much as soon as I left. So, I've been on two wheels and four wheels as my predominant sport for most of my life. Obviously, there was not really much room for that kind of discussion in in that kind of sport because it's a more of an isolated sport and you're wearing helmets, a lot. It's about technique, it's about experiences. Beyond that, I played a bit of rugby in high school, although I hated every second of it. ... It was it was compulsory sport and I'm a rebel. So, I tried every chance to get around it. (Kyle, White)

The next subsection focuses on the person(s) who introduced the participants to sport.

5.3.2 Introduction(s) to sport: The early years

Parents, according to the participants, were a major influence in their decision to participate in sport. The Rugby Player noted:

...[my] parents were very sporty. ... I loved watching rugby; that was the one thing I loved – the adrenaline. I used to exercise along with my entire family. My brother played rugby. So, I would do whatever to be part of that team 'spirit'.

In addition to said group activities, he participated in more individualised forms of sports such as running. He attributed his comfort with what he termed “solo sports” to his discomfort with partial or full nudity in front of others. He recalled that “I was really overweight as a kid. So, I would feel uncomfortable getting changed in front of the other guys. I mean, it's my sort of my body issues”. At the time of the interview, he felt much more comfortable with his toned physique: “Now I'm starting to feel positive about the way that I look. But [that required] a lot of self-coaching and training”.

The role of fathers provided varied insights from the participants. On the one hand, He/Him recalled how his father encouraged him to play rugby because, “yeah, my father worked from home, [so,] I got most of [my] nurturing [i.e., TLC], from a masculine figure, not a feminine figure”. Similarly, Kyle mentioned that his parents “pushed him” to play rugby in his school

days, whereas his teachers encouraged him to swim. This notwithstanding, following high school:

*... when it was **my** choice to play rugby at that point, ... it was a big deal for me to actively and intentionally play rugby as opposed to being forced into it. So, I think it was reclaiming the sport for myself at the time.*

On the other hand, Jay remembered that he

... willingly participated in sports as I enjoyed competing, especially in athletics. A teacher pushed me to try and play rugby and my teammates and friends motivated me to stick with it. Despite being Afrikaans (and rugby being important in Afrikaans culture and households), my father was not too keen on me playing rugby as he was concerned about injuries.

As opposed to group pressure, Puma engaged in sport based on his personal “interest and curiosity”. Soala’s encouragement emanated from a parent of one of his friends:

In primary school, sports were compulsory and all the boys, played soccer. So, I did as well at first but then realised I had very little interest in soccer. So, I joined the girls, playing netball and I really enjoyed it. I was quite a talented shooter at the time, so I stuck with it.

Varied **reasons** resulted from the participants’ reflections on why their generalised others encouraged them to participate in their respective sports. **Overcompensation** was again noted as an antecedent to playing rugby. The Rugby Player noted that he played rugby:

... [b]ecause I had to. [If it were a choice], I’d be much happier. But then it also sorts of like tapped into ... my need to overachieve. So, I was in the choir and the school play and debating and sports. So yeah, I think that probably tapped into my competitive side. But I think it’s because I knew that I was different. So, I needed to compensate in all aspects of my life. (The Rugby Player, White)

Parental influence and encouragement were also noted, particularly as it related to the participants’ fathers. The parents of Soala’s friends played a significant role in this regard. Playing netball, according to these parents, reflected how “brave” he was for participating in a sport that was (and still may be) associated with women. He/Him said that his father, whom he described as his “best friend”, was very encouraging. Although his father was

understandably ignorant about homosexuality and to some extent homophobic (e.g., using the word “moffie”), he invested a great deal of time to encourage and assist He/Him to excel in sport. “Coming to terms with my sexuality”, he continued, required support from his father as his “safe space and my best friend, and as we were best friends, you know, we did everything together. That was because I told my mother first. It was easier to tell my mother. [Since] my father [was my best friend], the fear of breaking up that friendship or losing that friendship, of not being loved or accepted was a major [issue]”. He eventually told him, and it strengthened their relationship.

Kyle, too, associated his love for motorcycling with his father, because “my dad loves motorcycle riding more than almost anything”. His physical appearance resulted in Jay engaging in sport:

I was a fast runner and bigger than the boys around my age. By age 14, I weighed 89 kilograms and was the fastest guy in our grade. I played wing, so by the time I got the ball I could outrun other players and score a touchdown or barrel through them.

Gender expectations, as per his teachers’ views, according to Kyle, made him follow the gendered rulebook of contact sport participation. He noted, they were “just trying to get me into kind of any sort of physical activity”. Kyle’s view resonates with the focus of the next subsection about **gendered displays in sport**.

5.3.3 Gendered displays in sport

Competitiveness, as The Rugby Player reflected, added to his enjoyment of rugby. Puma associated his answer with his age:

... [i]n high school I didn’t feel a lot of pressure to behave a certain way. And while I was participating in athletics, and I think I’d reached the point where ... I wasn’t as bothered about what people thought about my sexuality.

In keeping with previous scholarship about the challenges sexual minority persons may experience during their coming-out process, Puma added that he was:

... very, very scared of anyone finding out about my sexuality, you know? So, for the most part, I didn’t really physically behave differently. Okay. Except, sort of, like, while I’m doing the sport, but then sometimes socially,

and just trying to avoid any sort of discussions or questions that would go down the lines of sexuality or flag [me being gay] in any way. So, when I'm just hanging out with the boys after a match, and I try and avoid talking about, you know, the sport, ... I just felt like my contribution to those more manly conversations wouldn't be sufficient. (Puma, Black)

Interestingly, he noted that when one is engaged in the sport on the field, “no one actually cares” about your sexual orientation. Soala participated in a variety of sports – netball, soccer and rugby. As regards netball, his main concern revolved around how his perceived “male physicality” would be called unfair and said to be putting his team in a more favourable position. “Fortunately,” according to him, he was the “shooter and, as such, this was not necessarily a problem”. The soccer environment provided a similar situation. Consider his reflection:

... as a child, to fit in with the boys in the class, one would try to not appear feminine. However, I never really experienced any backlash from being my authentic self which I believe exhibits some traditionally feminine traits – but I think that was because I was a particularly strong goalkeeper and an asset to the team. (Soala, Black)

The theme of individualism resonated with He/Him. He said that he mainly:

... gravitated to individual sports, where I didn't rely on a team. Because so often what my experience was of team sports, ... [was] that I was going to be the one that was going to be ridiculed. I was going to be the 'moffie', I was going to me, if there was a mistake, you know, it would be blamed because of you because I wasn't quick enough and so on. (He/Him, White)

Being gay, in his opinion, was likened to a degree of “weakness. ... Especially in that sort of hypermasculine culture. Like in those days [the 1990s], absolutely”. Although Jay was very self-aware of being different (i.e., about his “thoughts and feelings”) when he was younger, playing rugby helped him to fit in. Consider his thoughtful reflection:

Knowing that I was gay probably also helped me to fit in. For rugby I had present myself as masculine and 'normal' to fit in with the team and other players. I probably overcompensated sometimes because I knew I was gay. In general, though, once you are in a team every member feels like they are

your friend, and I really enjoyed the sport. After school I kept playing because it was a fun and the camaraderie of a team was welcome. (Jay, White)

Kyle's love for motorcycling also aided his appreciation for gender egalitarianism because, "I feel like once the helmets are on, ... no one cares which is which. That is great". He provided a different view about rugby. He attended an all-boys school. He played rugby for the school and observed that there was "100% a whole bunch of gendered activities" on and off the field. Pertaining to the latter, he contemplated the effects of the practice of hazing:

[this] would typically take place in the shower, you know? The camaraderie that you have and all the stories that you tell [the other men] in the locker room which are just disgusting, now that I think about that. That was all very gendered and specific in that case.

Furthermore, the participants were asked to reflect on how participation in these sporting activities informed their masculine performances.

5.3.4 Performing masculinity in sport

Consider The Rugby Player's view as point of departure: "So, it definitely made me kind of, like, dial up the testosterone and dial down any kind of feminine qualities". In so doing, he sought to emulate "the captain of the rugby team, or the water polo team. Thus, those guys that I wanted to aspire to be like because they were good looking. The attention they got; they had the bodies that I always kind of wanted".

Puma commented on the importance of engaging in open communication with others regarding his gender and sexual identity. Having been quite "fortunate in that I've had very good relationships with the people who coached me", his sexual orientation "didn't really bother them". His passion for rugby resulted in him becoming a "champion for inclusivity, and of various gender profiles in sport". Due to this, he decided:

... it was worth opening the conversation and having discussions with various rugby clubs, and demonstrating that you don't actually have to be, you know, you don't have to change your behaviour or be a very 'butcher' masculine, or whatever, to play a sport such as rugby. I think that was one of the things that I just did to 'sort of' stand out and be 'sort of' understood and not having to change who I am in order to participate in the sport. (Puma, Black)

He/Him echoed Puma's assertive stance through using the sometimes-negative responses towards gay men playing rugby: "I use ...the pressure and the ridicule and the discrimination to say, 'Fuck you! Watch this! I can do this!'" Jay stated that rugby:

... is considered a masculine sport, there's a lot of rough and tumble. Growing up and living in a country where people love rugby you get hyped-up by the people around you. The harder you play and tougher you are, the more people respond to you.

Presenting as more masculine, he recalled receiving a "generally positive response from people. It props up your feelings of self-worth and because its rugby, masculinity plays a role". Similar to this, Kyle's current love for rugby took some time to achieve, mainly because of the fact that he was not always considered as being:

... the strongest. ... So, [initially] it was very difficult for me to assert dominance over anyone else. I was ...very submissive, emasculated in my rugby matches, which, you know, the lack of enacting masculinity in itself, is worth mentioning and ... definitely played a role.

5.3.5 Putting the "gay" in sport

The question that informs this subsection reads: "Did you feel that being gay would affect you sport participation?" Soala answered "not at all". He attributed this to the fact that "by the time that he was openly gay", he had no interest in sport. His need to expand his social circles of sexual minority friends led him to his current LGBTIQ+-friendly rugby club. Albeit for different reasons, He/Him refuted the importance of another person's validation to encourage him to play rugby. He said: "I think what also drove me more perhaps, [was the fact that I was] into the individual sports thing, [not] having to rely on teammates".

Conversely, other participants regarded them being gay as a key indicator of their gender performativity on the field. The Rugby Player, for example, noted that if his teammates in high school were aware of his homosexuality:

100%. ... Yeah. I think if you had [come out as gay], there would have been even more bullying and ostracization by the kids. Maybe not so much as the teachers, but there were some teachers that would just drop in homophobic slurs.

Jay mirrored these sentiments. In his opinion, if people “had known that I was gay, it may have affected my participation or my ability to be included or accepted in a team. I didn’t pick rugby for myself initially but once I started, I really enjoyed it”. Commenting on his passion for motorcycling, Kyle stated that by openly disclosing his homosexuality would not have been accepted:

Absolutely not. Again, you know, with a helmet on, it wasn’t a concern. In competitive riding. They just want you to go there. In fact, you know, there’s rumours now, about the top riders in the world ... stuff like, are they gay? Or aren’t they? No one knows. And very often, Cal Crutchlow is a great example of this. He goes, ‘Why does anyone care?’ (Kyle, White)

In rugby, however, “yes”, Kyle believed that rumours about the sexuality of the then Springbok player Frans Steyn (2006–2021) resulted in a “scandal” of sorts among rugby fans. This, in Kyle’s opinion, was very problematic:

[Steyn was] such a great fantasy player as well. Because he always scored points. To see them turn [on him], ... the same dude, nothing has changed. You just found out this aspect of him that may or may not be true. And suddenly you hate him.

Said scandal revolved around Steyn’s perceived homosexuality. This resulted in him publicly refuting any such claims, telling the media “*Ek is nie gay nie*” (“I am not gay”).

The next section discusses the participants’ experiences of their gender and sexuality in rugby at the time of the study.

5.4 BEING GAY AND A RUGBY PLAYER: PRESENT EXPERIENCES

This section centres around the participants’ reflections about their present-day experiences playing rugby, the reciprocal association between one’s contact sport participation and self-objectification, the idealisation of a specific rugby typology and disclosing one’s sexual orientation to the team.

5.4.1 Gay men and rugby: the reasons for playing the game

The Rugby Player answered “no” to his initial choices regarding playing rugby. He noted:

[it was] actually something I want to say at the beginning. I've never actually played rugby. ... What was part of my frustration is that I wanted to [do so] my whole life because, I mean, one of the photos of me as a new-born was me with a rugby ball next to me.

Yet, since his primary school did not offer rugby as sport option, he had to play soccer. Problems with his eyesight in high school led to him engaging in the sport from the age of 16. Persisting medical issues continued to limit the frequency with which he was able to play rugby as part of his inclusive rugby club. Puma's love for the game was tenable during our interview. He exclaimed:

[he]... [a]bsolutely love[s] it. You [are] married to it. You remember us winning the 1995 Rugby World Cup, and leaping [for joy] in tears on the couch. It was the first sport that actually touched me in a very memorably [way]. And since then, I've always had an interest in rugby. I just never had a platform to play it. And the first opportunity that I got to play rugby; I took it.

Mirroring this enthusiastic response, Soala noted that he has “really grown to enjoy the sport” due to how it also contributed to him making “some really good friends”. Jay and Kyle echoed his sentiments. The former answered:

...[t]hroughout adulthood I played off and on. Initially to stay active and play with friends. Later I joined a club because I moved to a new city and wanted to make friends. Similarly, I eventually ended up joining [his current inclusive rugby club] when I heard about a gay and inclusive rugby team.

Kyle similarly reflected on the importance of establishing a sense of community, which, initially, he likened to an “impossible” feat. Yet, he soon came to the realisation that this was indeed an ideal that could be achieved among primarily (albeit not exclusively) gay men. He said:

I was like, hey, like, let's play, you know, some rugby. Let's go to the club and see what happens. And [then I went], 'Hang on a second. This is a club for LGBT people that plays [sic] rugby. Yes. I couldn't sign up fast enough!' Throw my money at the impossible. (Kyle, White)

He/Him attributed his involvement in mainly touch and contact rugby to his role as mentor, trainer and coach. Taking on these roles allowed him to take the lead with growing the competencies of his club's members pertaining to "the contact rugby stream of the club".

5.4.2 Gay men playing rugby: muscularity as precondition?

The participants were asked whether playing rugby "influenced the way in which they experience their **physical appearance**" – that is, whether the game required them to be thinner, more athletic and/or rugged. The Rugby Player affirmed the association between his muscularity and playing rugby. He noted, "Yes, absolutely. Because I'm a big guy, like I weigh 98.2 kilogrammes and I'm 1.8 [metres tall]. I [also] come from a long line of rugby players". Others' perceptions and preconceived notions also played a role. When other people saw him, they assumed "that I am [a] straight rugby player. So, it's people's perception of me". Similarly, Jay answered:

I have always been a bigger guy due to genetics, [my] active lifestyle and sport. If I feel big and strong, then I feel masculine. Feeling self-confident and good about my physical appearance is directly tied with my sense of masculinity and sexual confidence.

His proficiency as flanker made Puma a "kind of rugby athlete who has to do a job that requires [him to be] fast [and] strong ... I trained to try and be a good-looking flanker". This, however, did not influence how he enacted his sexual orientation because, as he noted, "[p]ersonally, I haven't had, especially more recently, I haven't had ... a need to behave differently just because [I'm gay]". Intense bodywork also aided Soala to attain a "more fit appearance". Engaging in gym work informed the way he "experienced my physical appearance, particularly because I picked up a lot of muscle quite quickly" – a change that contributed to his presence on the rugby field. He/Him attested that because rugby is "a high, ... impact sport, you have to be prepared to get hurt. ... You probably are going to get hurt, you know?" Moreover, attaining more muscle mass:

...was [an] epic courage builder. You know, knowing that I had this team, it made me feel like I'm stronger together [with them], if, you know, I'm going into battle, but my teammates going into battle [with me]. So, yeah ... it just made me feel ... stronger. It made me feel more willing to put my body on the line.

In addition to the joint endurance along with his teammates, Kyle reflected about how his inclusive rugby club facilitated an appreciation of **diverse body types**. He noticed how “very happy ... they [their teammates] are [with themselves] and that you know [which] categories they fit into”. Being able to “constantly play rugby and be with them”, he came to realise “that ... it was great to be able to play with all sorts of different body types. And it gave me a confidence boost, you know? To be able to be with guys who were super confident in their bodies”. Playing with his teammates allowed him to negotiate which position suited him best because, as he humorously recalled, “I’ve learnt that my bones are made of cotton wool. I’m not built to play contact [rugby]. ... So, that’s sort of my own physical sort of identity – if I can call it that. I realised that that my body is not made for that”.

Having reflected on their bodily appearances, I next asked the seven men to demarcate their personal ideals associated with being a man playing rugby.

5.4.3 The “ideal” rugby player: Utopian dream or empirical reality?

Notwithstanding his previous comfort with being more muscular, The Rugby Player acknowledged how playing rugby, in his opinion, encouraged the appreciation of **diverse body types and behaviours**. Consider his thoughtful view about specifically **gay rugby**:

... that’s one of the things that I love about rugby. ...The whole game is designed for people with different body types, you know? [For example, for] the wings, obviously [they] have to be like leaner and more ‘sprinty’. The locks, obviously [are] more, like bigger. And that’s what I love about ... gay rugby, or the LGBT rugby movement. ... It doesn’t matter, there is some way for you to fit into the team. And that’s why rugby is the most powerful sport on the planet. To be able to promote inclusion, because you literally need all shapes, sizes [and] skills to make a rugby team.

Puma agreed. He, like The Rugby Player, “love[d]” rugby because “... it welcomes all shapes and sizes. You know, bulky, tiny [and] chubby”. Regarding physicality, Jay added:

[for some of the] positions, you do need to be bigger and muscular. For example, playing a forward scrum position. But that doesn’t mean you are excluded from playing rugby. There are forward positions that work if you are not a big guy, such as [the] scrumhalf or, alternatively, a backline position where players would generally be more athletic [rather] than big and muscular.

Kyle attested to the above views. He explained that “I’ve seen bodybuilders [playing rugby], I’ve played against bodybuilders that played number one, which was terrifying [because of their size]. ... I think your ... hookers have to be flexible, just because of what is needed in the scrum. And they will have to have a great pass into the line-up”. Therefore, Jay, Kyle and Puma found it difficult to conceptualise what was meant by “the ideal rugby player”, since being more inclusive superseded stringent and predetermined criteria for team membership in his mostly gay rugby club. This, Puma argued, is “what the sport needs”. He/Him attributed the “beauty of rugby as a sport” to “the diversity ... it requires. [i.e.], lots of different types of physicality”. Akin to The Rugby Player’s narrative, He/Him differentiated between the various positions in rugby that contributed to its inclusive potential:

... [A] prop is a different shape and size to a wing or a flank. They perform different functions, you know? [Other players are] very different in size, shape and the functions they perform. And the way they think, you know? You’ve, [for example], got the strategic players. So, all of this influences, I think, the character of a rugby player.

To this point, The Rugby Player argued that his rugby club provided gay, trans and straight members with a “safe space that isn’t like a nightclub or something else where they can just be who they want to be and play rugby and be part of this ... community”. This provided the players with a “brotherhood, [similar to that] of a sibling, ... of people who are just like them, and happen to play rugby”. His fellow players, like him, had grown “tired of the stereotype” associated with the requirement that rugby players had to necessarily be “macho”. Heterosexual men, in his opinion, also face discrimination if they do not conform to certain heteronormative expectations. According to him, “[w]e often forget that straight guys also get called ... homophobic slurs”. Irrespective of their sexual orientation, his team members were “sensitive”. One example is the fact that one of their coaches was heterosexual:

He’s 23. He just wants to teach people to play rugby. So, he teaches it. So, he’s straight. His girlfriend actually said to him, ‘You need to go and help out [members of the inclusive rugby club]’. He loves teaching. ... He teaches primary school kids to play rugby. He came on as our technical coach because he was also tired of that whole ‘macho thing’ and [players] having to live up to it. (The Rugby Player, White)

Irrespective of the inherent physical and skills differences among players, He/Him postulated that “every player must be athletic and have a strong sense of physicality and a strong muscle

mass, [otherwise] they're going to get severely injured. So, yes, you must be rough and tough and strong". Such common denominators do, however, not imply binary-based typologies of idealised gay men. He/Him questioned such binaries and how people who espoused stereotypical traits of an ideal rugby player impeded the opportunity to appreciate rugby's inherently diverse and inclusive characteristics. He questioned whether playing rugby necessarily required that one has:

... to give up being [either] heartless or empathetic [to exude] good sportsmanship? Because you have physicality and all of that? No. And I think that's what's masked, is it's always been [this] either/or [view] ... when you break it down to the basic stereotypes. ... I think that's the problem ... Those stereotypes have filtered in and not given space to look at the different types of players required and who you need to be in each of those roles.

(He/Him, White)

Acknowledging these **inclusive masculine traits**, according to Soala, encouraged other rugby teams and rugby leagues his team played against and formed part of, respectively, to accept his "openly LGBTQ+ [team]. ... [I]t helped that the league in which we played was made up of progressive, open-minded teams". Other participants cited **context-specificity** as a determining factor for inclusivity. According to Jay, "depending on the team and environment, [inclusivity] would be very situational. I was able to disclose my sexuality when I was playing in a club that was made up of only heterosexual players (as far as I know I was the only gay man)". It is worth noting that so-called hegemonic traits also characterised his view about the ideal rugby player. Interestingly, however, he clearly qualified his response. Jay differentiated between competitive and aggressive players. Although being "competitive is great", being "aggressive [is] less so. A competitive player likes to win. To win, you have to focus on developing your skills, gameplay strategy and teamwork". Conversely, an "aggressive player is good to have around for a few minutes or [in] some situations ... But the match is 80 minutes long. So, in my opinion, the level-headed competitive player is best". Although in support of the above ideals, Soala cited "having a healthy dose of a competitive spirit [and being] a good sportsman and being respectful" were also important tenets to consider. He added, "I think people of all shapes and sizes can play touch rugby. But it definitely helps to have a good level of fitness". He, therefore, aspired to display these tenets during his own game because:

I am competitive but also respectful and always exhibit good sportsmanship. I have a decent fitness level. I am open-minded and progressive, so for instance, although I recognise the difference in men and women, I also

recognise that some of the best touch rugby players are women. So, I never underestimate anyone based on their gender – the same applies to sexual orientation and other diverse qualities and characteristics.

Kyle explained how he negotiated his aggressive and competitive performances on- and off-field. Consider how he related the process of such differential performativity among heterosexual rugby players:

Yeah, they [the rugby players] must be aggressive on the field, and competitive on the field. And then the exact opposite off the field. I have a very strong opinion about that, because a [straight] friend of mine, ... he's an extremely attractive man. He is the longest standing waiter at Beefcakes¹² of all time. So, 'Wow!' Just yeah, he managed to pay for his doctorate by going to a bar and working at Beefcakes in the evening and studying. However, he played for Cape Town 10's ... [wearing] pink shorts. He's this straight man in pink shorts. And a couple of guys from Pretoria took exception to that and put him in hospital. He was in the ICU for about two weeks. Oh, my word! (Kyle, White)

Such aggression, fuelled by heteronormativity, manifests in “all shapes or forms [on and] off the field”. Due to such examples of heterosexism and hypermasculine violence, his current inclusive rugby club “drummed in” the varied roles and performances men could and may portray, depending on the context. He said:

What happens on the field is different from what happens off the field. And so yeah, on the field, you know, by all means, be the best. Try to be the best rugby player. Be aggressive. Be strong. Be competitive within the rules. Yes. But then, as soon as you step outside of that context, none of that is [acceptable in] society. (Kyle, White)

Jay summarised this best. As a “more muscular guy, ... I would say that when I play rugby, I am more aggressive but that is probably because of the adrenaline/excitement of the match”, not necessarily because of the gender performance he wanted to espouse. I next consider

¹² Beefcakes is bar, restaurant and entertainment venue offering drag shows, ladies' nights and strip shows. It is situated in the city of Johannesburg in the South African province of Gauteng (Beefcakes, 2022).

whether and how the participants aspired to display these idealised features when playing rugby.

5.4.4 Choosing to disclose or foreclose one's sexual identity in rugby

Next, I asked my participants two interrelated questions regarding their sexual orientation in the context of rugby. The first read: "Do you think it is acceptable for gay men to 'come out' to their teammates in their rugby teams?" Furthermore, I asked them whether they thought it was "necessary for gay men to 'come out' to their teammates in their rugby teams".

Pertaining to the first question, all the participants regarded disclosing one's sexual orientation to the team as acceptable. Three subthemes emanated from their narratives: the **normalisation of gay representation in rugby**; **challenging and the challenges of heteronormativity**; and **interpersonal consideration and reciprocal respect** among players. Regarding the first, Soala commented on how "important [it is] for professional players to be 'out', as this increases representation and normalises LGBTIQ+ representation in sport". Although laudable, Jay cautioned against the existing heterosexism and homophobia in mainstream rugby teams and clubs. This "narrow view", he believed, continued to "exclude ... gay men in rugby entirely". Although a gay player should "obviously, 100% ... be able to talk to their friends", the question about whether to disclose one's sexual orientation should not be "necessary, not even remotely in a perfect world" (Kyle, White). Yet, Kyle conceded that "we aren't in a perfect world, we're far away from the perfect world".

Kyle argued that if one's team members have questions about one's sexuality, primarily due to the physicality and physical closeness of the game, disclosing one's homosexuality becomes a **necessity**. Rugby, in particular,

... is an incredibly intimate sport with the amount of junk [men's genitals]. I've grabbed people's junk ... specifically as a lock in the scrum. When you get into the scrum, as a lock¹³, you can tuck your finger into sort of what would be the bells [i.e., genitals] of your other lock, depending on which side you're on. And then according to your prop's preference, you either grab through the legs of the prop and grab a shirt or grab around and grab the pocket.

¹³ In rugby, the locks are usually the tallest players in a team. They form the second row. Furthermore, they "scrummage by pushing against the front row thereby providing much of the power and are commonly known as the engine room" (Biscombe & Drewett, 2009).

If such physicality proves to be “uncomfortable for them, because they don’t know if you are or if you aren’t [gay], then perhaps it is a discussion that needs to happen”. Since rugby is perceived to be a heterosexist and hypermasculine sport, such disclosures may be necessary – context permitting. Yet, Kyle asserted that “we shouldn’t put that pressure on anyone”. Four of his fellow rugby enthusiasts similarly criticised the necessity to disclose one’s sexual identity. Puma (Black) responded quite assertively:

... honestly, I don't think it should even matter. Right? I don't think that it must be [like] a MasterChef to come out or not. ... I just think it should be something that is very indifferent. Right? I think you should have the freedom to tell someone if you want to tell them. Or, to talk about your boyfriend if you want to, or whatever the case is, without necessarily feeling like you're under pressure to actually do so.

Jay and Soala echoed the importance of retaining one’s right to privacy. The latter considered gay men’s “sexuality ... a private matter and is no one’s business but their own”. Jay attested, “in an ideal world, a person’s sexual orientation should be of no concern whatsoever”. Owing to the context-specificity of rugby as a sport, Kyle jokingly claimed that since “your teammates aren’t sleeping with you, it’s not their business. ... So, if you want to tell them – by all means. But they aren’t your sexual partners ... If they do find out, they must just deal with it [like] anything else”.

Although Dave and He/Him did not consider such identity disclosure as necessary, they did think it may be **advisable** to do so, for two reasons. First, since his “team [did] not discriminate in any way, regardless of religious beliefs, sexual orientation, or gender identity”, Dave posited that coming out as member of the “LGBTQIA+ family”, everyone may feel “welcome”. Second, He/Him said that foreclosing one’s homosexuality results in “not living your authentic expression”. This, he believed, may put “your psychological welfare ... at risk, you know? You’re taking a knock, you know?” Psychologically, “you’re using energy to portray something that you’re not. So, to never fully be yourself, I think psychologically, screws up any human in any context”.

5.5 THE GAY RUGBY CLUB AND TEAM AS SAFE(R) SPACE

All participants indicated that at the time of the empirical study, they were members of an **inclusive rugby club** (i.e., everyone was welcome irrespective of their sex, gender or sexual orientation). The Rugby Player expressed his impatience with the fact that “it’s still ridiculous

that we need to have ... a rugby club for ... people who identify as non-straight. I mean, it's 2021! I think we're in a country with one of the most liberal constitutions in the world. Why does this still matter?" Notwithstanding his somewhat cynical view, he considered such initiatives as primarily positive:

It [the club] literally gives people an opportunity to be who they want to be. To socialise ... To communicate. To learn. To have fun. Also, their friendships that have been made. ... People that have left the club ... still have those friendships. It brought people together with a need to feel validated. ... Then they feel connected to something. Community is really big.

Gay men are, therefore, able to "be [themselves] with zero pretence. You are surrounded by a team that shares your inclusive values" (Jay, White). Another positive feature of an **inclusive club** relates to its **educational**, **secondary socialisation** and **sensitisation** properties. Heterosexual, gay and trans men can learn more about their teammates' gender and sexual orientation. Puma noted that his club created a "quite enriching and power experience" of "**inclusivity**": "For sure. I mean, I think some of the great things ... is building strong relationships, irrespective of gender. Being able to influence considerations, assumptions and prejudices". The Rugby Player recalled an initiative of the club that provided an "induction" of sorts – namely, sensitivity training about what was acceptable or offensive terminology and behaviour. This created a feeling of having your "Big Brothers ... around us and protecting us. [This was] incredibly empowering. And [it] rubs off" on you. Dave mirrored this view. He cited the non-discriminatory context his inclusive club provides to its members (i.e., "Everyone is welcome!"). Such education extended to gay men as well. During the initial period of managing a gay rugby club, He/Him realised that he had to establish specific "boundaries [and] ground rules, just like any other sport" in order to challenge gay men's own internal biases. Of utmost importance, in this regard, was understanding the "nuances of this whole spectrum of the rainbow in rugby clubs [i.e., the different gender and sexual identities]". This contributed to **challenging the players' lack of self-confidence** about playing rugby based on stereotypes associated with the game. The Rugby Player, for example, said, "I underestimated myself because of the way that rugby has traditionally been made out to be a very masculine [and] straight sport".

As noted earlier in the chapter, Soala (Black) reiterated the importance of making **friends** through one's membership of an inclusive club. He "felt it was important to [establish] a network of gay friends, which I previously had before I relocated. This club was really the only

one I could find that appealed to me”, primarily due to its potential to expand his social connections. Additionally, he commented on how said club encouraged an atmosphere of **mutual acceptance** through an **intersection of gender and sexual identities**, because it:

... is filled with open-minded and accepting people with different backgrounds who respect each other and understand each other. ... [A]t the same time, not everyone was gay, which [provided] great representation, as it showed that people of different sexualities could play together in the same team. Having straight allies is always encouraging!

Kyle articulated how intersectionality promoted inclusivity among gay and straight men. The club was:

... able to create a safe space [for] people from all walks of life, race, creed, denomination gender, or sexuality. [Men are] able to play and form part of what [it means to] be part of this team. [It] actually goes beyond that, in that even though the allies who joined us [i.e.,] ... who identify as heterosexual ... were also free to play. (Kyle, White)

Jay concurred: “It’s great to be surrounded by people who are there to enjoy the sport regardless of any individual’s sexual orientation. I want to be a part of a club that is inclusive of *all*¹⁴ people”.

Limitations of such inclusive rugby clubs revolved around the **decline in membership numbers** due to the **COVID-19 pandemic**, stronger players joining other sometimes more **competitive clubs**, and challenges associated with **attracting sponsors** due to the latter’s potential concern to be associated with the brand of gay players. In addition to these limitations, heteronormative and patriarchal stereotypes associated with rugby continue to stifle attempts to get stronger heterosexual and gay players to “take the club seriously or [inviting the members] to participate in tournaments” (Kyle, White). This, in Kyle’s opinion, was exacerbated by heterosexist *social perceptions*. He noted:

We had to be on our guard, or at least I felt [that] I had to be on [my] guard ... because it’s a hypermasculine environment. We are there openly as the incumbent inclusive competitive rugby team. It was it was tough when playing against homophobes because, you know, the competition will always

¹⁴ Emphasis added.

try and throw you off your game. And it's a lot easier, or it's a lot stronger when you have a giant target painted on your chest [i.e., referring to the logo on the front of the rugby jersey]. And so, you know, the calls of 'moffie' and 'faggot' during games - ... stuff like [that] are far too common.

The final subsections of chapter 5 centre around the physical space of the participants' respective clubs. I used three subtopics, which emanate from my deductive reading of previous theorisation and empirical studies about the topic, to structure the discussion that follows. These include, first, the participants' **reasons for joining** their respective inclusive rugby clubs; second, how they, since joining the club, **experienced and/or expressed their sexual orientation** (with a specific focus on the positive features, experiences and the challenges they had experienced since joining the rugby club); and finally, how their respective rugby clubs afforded them a relative degree of **safety**.

5.5.1 Reasons for joining an inclusive rugby club

Although The Rugby Player mentioned that, at first, he did not play rugby at his current club, he served as its chairperson for a period of three years. Being members of the same club, Puma and The Rugby Player reflected on how their club was:

... founded as a development club. Our goal was to try and redress the ... missed opportunity that would have occurred with mostly homosexual rugby players [who] would have felt that they wouldn't have been able to learn [to play] rugby, because of their sexuality.

Building on this foundation, the founders sought to educate club members about the **technicalities and skills of the game**:

... the first thing was to try and redress [this], you know? [To create the opportunity] and the ability [for gay men] to actually participate in and enjoy the sport. By building a development lab, [we] will teach you from scratch ... the rules. But let's [also] teach [you] how to be technically good at it. The second thing was, let's make sure that ... you do feel, [that] you do know, and you are aware that you are in a safe space, right? Irrespective of your sexuality, gay straight, bisexual, whatever. Like, just know that you're in a safe space. No one's gonna judge you. It's about the sport. (Puma, Black)

Skills and **fitness** outside the parameters of a gym, in Jay's (White) opinion, prompted him to join his club:

I love the sport, it's a great way to stay fit without having to go to a gym. [You] make new friends and compete in something that you enjoy. I think one of the best ways to get exercise is by doing something you enjoy rather than going to the gym a couple of times a week and forcing yourself to workout.

Expanding one's friendship networks was again noted. Dave stated that he "had reached a point in my life where I needed to meet more likeminded people". Soala (Black) joined "to meet new people and to build a network of LGBTQ+ friends". He/Him recalled that although they started with only "six or seven guys kicking the ball around", at the time they boasted a membership of about 36 members before the COVID-19 lockdown.

5.5.2 "Dialling up the gay or straight": Experiencing and expressing one's sexuality through rugby

Playing rugby, according to The Rugby Player:

... showed me [that there are] are a lot of members of our community who feel disenfranchised. They feel that they don't have a voice. ... There is a fear, ... a huge fear of rejection and I understand, you know. ... We've all experienced homophobia. We've all been bullied.

The rugby club, however, provided a context and joint opportunity for gay men, in particular:

... to share lived experiences in a place where they will not be judged. ... It has helped me develop empathy with people who are different than me. And whereas in the past, I wouldn't want to ... connect with people who were more flamboyant. (The Rugby Player, White)

This has made The Rugby Player much less judgemental of the internal variations among gay men – it basically provided him with "an insight into a world or worlds that I wouldn't have experienced". Such reciprocal empathy, sensitivity and respect extended to Puma's narrative. He acknowledged that he might, every so often, meet people who express "moments of ignorance [because] people just don't know better"; he had "seldom met very, very strict homophobes in rugby, right". What was clear from our conversation was how his membership

of the club had made him much more **self-confident** and **assertive** about his sexual identity. In circumstances where he was confronted with homophobia, he would confront it head-on:

But dude, okay, let's ... let's have this conversation. [How] do you think that's [homophobic remarks] gonna make a gay man feel when you say something like that? Yeah, no, it will make them feel [like] shit. ... So, just be careful [with] saying things.

Likewise, Dave, Puma and Soala could not recall pertinent or in-person examples of discrimination as openly gay male rugby players. They, like He/Him and Jay, mainly reflected on indirect homophobic remarks from the side line during their matches. One such instance stayed with He/Him. As reserve player, he recalled hearing:

... the homophobic comments and the slurs [from the opposing team, as well as the spectators of the match], and the tensions that bubbled up, [which] were almost constant. ... As respectful as people want to be, ... their cultural afflictions are way stronger than any sort of conscious sportsmanship that they may have had on the field [on] that day. So, you know, that was quite sad really, to, after having such a wonderful day ... of promoting inclusion and showing visibility. ... It was quite a sad feeling to walk off the property that day, knowing that the reason we were leaving for having a great time was because our physical safety [was at risk] ... It was just time to leave.
(He/Him, White)

Conversely, He/Him has mainly had positive experiences after disclosing his sexual orientation to others. He mainly came across homophobia online having read people's anonymous views about "gay rugby clubs – but I figure that's where most narrow-minded people find an outlet for their prejudice". The use of heterosexist discourse, in his opinion, continued to permeate rugby (and more general societal) contexts:

People have a tendency to use the word 'gay' or 'moffie' to describe people or even a situation. I've have been in many places throughout my life where I've heard that phrase and although it isn't triggering for me, it doesn't change the fact that those people are so used to their heterosexual lives where such words or behaviour was normalised, that they disregard the fact that a gay person is within earshot. In an environment of rugby players, you're probably going to hear that sometimes.

The Rugby Player (White) was, therefore, quite cognisant about “how” he and his teammates:

... use that kind of language. Although it might be used like flipantly or as a term of empowerment, [it] still affects people differently. That’s why I’m so conscious with how I [refer to] players, e.g., [rather saying] siblinghood [and] not brotherhood or sisterhood.

Such use of fag discourse sometimes distinguishes itself from that of gay discourse. He/Him provided a telling example of the latter:

The moment another player or friend jokes with me about being gay, in a friendly way, is the moment I know that person doesn’t have a problem with my sexuality. If teammates banter with me as they would banter with any other teammate, then I know they don’t have a problem with me.

This example of inclusivity, as per IMT, allowed (Jay) to answer questions about his sexual orientation – for example, another player asking him “specific questions about being gay, or even if [he has] a boyfriend. When other players are willing to ask [him] questions then, [he] knows that they are not bothered by [his] sexuality”. This contributed to the noted self-confidence that extended to other participants’ **pride** and **comfort** with being gay. Being able to actually “participate in any kind of rugby event as an actual player” was indeed a redeeming experience for Dave (White): “I enjoyed the experience so much, because of the teammates and the general attitude of everyone involved in the club that I couldn’t wait to go back each week”. He recalled competing in a tournament against a straight club and actually beating them:

[This was] something I had never thought possible because of the stereotypes that had been put in my mind from childhood – that being gay equated with being weak. I was part of not only a club, but a support system that was proud to be who they were. The experiences had made me even more comfortable and proud of who I am as a person. (Dave, White)

Soala, too, felt “comfortable being myself amongst my team members and the other players in the league in which we compete”. He added: “[t]he main positive experience is that I feel like I have found a safe space to play the sport I love within a community that is accepting and open-minded”. Jay responded, “[w]hen I am with my fellow players, I would probably turn up the masculine dial a bit more, especially if the other players are heterosexual. But for the most part, I would say my personality remains the same”.

In conclusion, I provide a discussion of how an inclusive gay rugby club safeguards players irrespective of their gender or sexual identification.

5.5.3 The inclusive gay rugby club as safe(r) space

To be around like-minded people who just don't care, but also to be around allies, which is great. It's very refreshing to be around people who identify as heterosexual who have never had a gay experience, be so supportive and so loving. And then, it's given me hope for future generations. ... It [has] also given me the confidence to be who I am unapologetically, which I've really, really enjoyed. (Kyle, White)

Puma (Black) struggled to answer whether his club was a safe(r) context. According to him, "it's a bit hard for me to answer this question. But I'm trying to see it from both sides". The space, in his opinion, was open and welcoming to all persons. They generally "don't ask about sexual orientation or anything, but people feel comfortable in free to discuss it". The gay rugby players "have amazing, amazing relationships with heterosexual people as well" owing to the inclusivity of the club. This, based on Soala's personal observations, sometimes resulted in him establishing "really good friendships". In addition to their personal identity, Puma and Soala believed that members were provided with a space "to enjoy rugby". Dave best articulated Puma's above hesitation to answer the question as follows: "I do not feel that the rugby community is quite ready to be declared a 'safe space', but with every gay and inclusive club playing [in tournaments], we're getting there".

Jay cited how the "overall ... support for people to feel comfortable" and the coaches being "friendly and understanding" made playing rugby a redemptive experience. The club managers, for example, sought to procure training grounds at a club that supported an inclusive set of gender and sexual values. He noted that these were older clubs "with members that likely have a less inviting view of the gay community, but the club owners made these changes regardless, because it is the right thing to do" (Jay, White). Kyle answered "[a]bsolutely. That was one of the central core values. It was a safe and inclusive space". When new members, or so-called "newbies" join, they were introduced to these values through, among others, seminars at a local gay bar presentation on "how to uphold" the values associated with inclusivity. As a result, Kyle believed all members of his club were "very well educated and very well versed in creating safe spaces".

5.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter explored participant responses collected through the semi-structured interviews. The findings included various codes related to the theory discussed in chapters 2 and 3, such as assimilating into or transgressing both hetero- and homonormative culture, reinforcing or challenging such normative expectations, and expressing one's gay sensibility on the rugby field.

The findings were presented in four subsections. The first subsection focused on how participants identified and navigated their own sexual identities both on and off the field. Six participants affirmed their identities as gay men, whereas one participant affirmed his identity as a bisexual male. Furthermore, the subsection reflected on the challenges and opportunities associated with constructing and performing their gender and sexual identities. The second subsection covered the narratives of the participants regarding their experiences of gender and sexuality in sport. Participants reflected on their sport background, when they were introduced to sport, by whom and their initial experiences. Interestingly, some advocated for partaking in individualistic sport, whereas others commended the role of contact sport to encourage a sense of community.

The third subsection broadly focused on the participants' subjective experiences relating to being a gay rugby player. More specifically, this part of the chapter centred around their reasons for playing rugby; their views about the association between masculinity and muscularity; choosing to disclose or foreclose their gay sexual identity; and how through playing rugby as part of their respective inclusive rugby clubs had made their abstract dream of doing so an empirical reality (amid contextual factors that continue to value heteronormativity).

The final subsection commented on whether and how an inclusive gay rugby club represents a safe(r) space for these participants. On the one hand, the relative safety the club afforded its members contributed to an increase in the participants' self-confidence, making new friends, learning about the technicalities of the game and establishing reciprocal sensitisation, respect and acceptance for and among members. Conversely, some participants reflected on the difficulty COVID-19 posed in terms of the men meeting in person and how accruing and retaining financial sponsorships from (what members assumed to be) heterosexual companies continued to pose challenges to keep the clubs' doors open.

This chapter provided the groundwork for further critical analysis in the following chapter. Theory and literature reviews discussed in the previous chapters were utilised to assist in analysing the reported data. Chapter 6 provides a critical integration between the empirical findings of the study and the theory and literature associated with IMT and experiences of homophobia in contact sport among gay men.

CHAPTER 6:

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a critical discussion of the empirical data collected through seven individual interviews with self-identified gay men who played rugby. This contributes to answering the general research question of the present study, which read as follows: **What is the influence of inclusive masculinity practices on experiencing fear of being socially perceived as gay (homophobia) among self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa?** To this end, I engaged with specific foci that informed said question – that is, the reasons why the participants decided to play rugby; what they viewed as the ideal features that gay rugby players should subscribe to; their reasoning for joining an inclusive or exclusive rugby club; and the challenges they faced regarding homophobia.

The first subsection centres around the social factors that encouraged gay men to play rugby.

6.2 THE DECISION TO PLAY RUGBY: THE MEN'S EARLY YEARS

As noted above, this subsection engages with the varied, yet interrelated, reasons that informed the decisions of self-identified gay men to play rugby. I introduce specific themes that emanated from my discussions with the men and write about the influence of **primary** and **secondary gender role socialisation** and the men's needs to **accrue gender, masculine** and **bodily capital** through playing rugby.

6.2.1 *Primary and secondary gender-role socialisation: rugby as masculine blueprint*

Primary and secondary gender-role socialisation played a meaningful role in the participants' choice to participate in contact sports such as rugby. Exuding the "correct" gendered behaviour allowed the men to "blend in" – that is, through rugby, they adopted gender-appropriate behaviour to avert attention away from their lack of cisgenderism. Gaston and Dixon (2019), for example, mention that gay persons' fear of homophobia and rejection from the sport inform their decision to perform appropriate and correct gender and sexual scripts. Such gender policing (Bullingham *et al.*, 2016) required the participants, particularly when they were growing up, to try to avoid derogatory labels such as fag or sissy, recalling McCormack's (2013) distinction between "gay", "pro-gay", "homophobic" and "fag" discourse. Although the

former two emphasise inclusive practices among heterosexual and gay men, the latter two, according to McCormack (2013), may result from and further reinforce a highly homophobic and homohysterical approach to gender and sexuality (i.e., using language to differentially police and regulate men's behaviour in sport). Kettley-Linsell (2020:243), for example, comment on the supposed "incompatibility between having a sporting career and (or even versus) being gay". "Doing" heteronormative masculinity was, therefore, of the utmost importance to some of the participants when they were younger.

To this end, the participants cited specific persons who served as gender role models (i.e., their fathers and brothers). **Primary gender-role socialisation** refers to the "process by which individuals develop, refine and learn to 'do' gender through internalizing gender norms and roles as they interact with key agents of socialization, such as their family, social networks and other social institutions" (John *et al.*, 2017:6). The findings of the present study showed that such socialisation, in the context of the family, took place through the participants interacting with their significant others who sought to mould them into conforming to and correctly performing predetermined gendered rituals (Andrews, 2012; Butler, 1990; Ingraham, 2002). These processes teach young boys and girls to act in a specific way to establish a direct link between their biological sex (male) and their socially constructed gender (man/masculine) and sexual orientation, conforming to what Rich (1993) refers to as "compulsory heterosexuality". The participants gained their initial understanding of gender and sexual identity (i.e., what it means to be "straight") courtesy of their family members from a young age (cf. Van der Schyff, 2022:177). Considering the sexual orientation of my participants, it is worth noting that said socialisation may require sexual minorities to imitate these ideals insofar as "there are no existing norms to create diverse and unique rituals akin to homosexuality" (Rothmann, 2016:51) – that is, none of them were socialised to "be" or "do gay" (cf. Halperin, 2012).

Relatively recent South African studies speak to how men must carefully select, navigate and ultimately reflect on the particular social institutions that serve as gender-role socialisation agents in constructing their masculinities. Such institutional reflexivity involves a continuous interplay between men's agency and the structural conditions of their culture (Ratele, 2008, 2014). On this point, Odenweller (2016) commented on the influence of primary gender-role socialisation on individuals' internalisation of masculine and feminine ideals. These socially constructed and regulatory cues require people to inertly negotiate the nature of their gender performances in certain situations (i.e., enact "appropriate" male or female behaviour) (cf. Rothmann *et al.*, 2022a, 2022b). Through primary gender-role socialisation, institutions such as family may influence the development of the social, gendered and sexual selves of children (Averett, 2016; Karin & Kazyak, 2009; Pascoe, 2007). Irrespective of recent scholarship that

speak to a democratisation of gender ideals in South Africa that contribute to challenging, displacing and “undoing” cisgender ideals (Adeagbo, 2015; Buiten & Naidoo, 2020; Marais, 2019; Rothmann *et al.*, 2022a, 2022b), under Apartheid, families mostly remained heteronormative, using ideologies to condition children into maintaining heterosexual gender ideals (Sonnekus, 2013). Morrell (1998) comments on how traditional (read heteronormative and patriarchal) understandings of masculinity were perpetuated during Apartheid. Men were, for example, required to display orthodox masculine features to be considered as “real men” (cf. Anderson, 2014). The image of the Puritan father as breadwinner and moral caretaker of the Afrikaner family (Rothmann, 2011) contributed to internalising these masculine ideals. Research has also commented on how one’s male siblings, according to Dunn (2000:293), may encourage men to conform to “more masculine behaviour”. Thus, having an older brother could further pressurise men to display hegemonic forms of masculinity. Dunn (2000:299), for example, found that boys with older brothers appeared to be both more masculine and less feminine, suggesting that the interactions between male siblings may be based on positively sanctioning masculinisation and refraining from overt effeminacy. Likewise, Afrikaner culture placed (and, for some, still attaches) importance to the inherent gender values (e.g., aggressiveness, competitiveness, strength and hypermasculinity) akin to contact sport and rugby (cf. Anderson, 2014; Hamber, 2012; Morrell, 1998). In the process, such importance contributes to developing prescriptive norms around the importance and need for men to play rugby to confirm their masculinity (Bowley, 2006:5), that is, rugby “is regarded as a sport that real men play”.

Conversely, he found that boys with older sisters were more feminine but not less masculine, suggesting their female siblings’ support of their effeminacy without necessarily “de-masculinising” them. Likewise, traditional African approaches continue to socialise young men to mainly be dominant and violent (Rwafa, 2016). Such a configuration of dominant masculinity, therefore, valorises “being rough, [and] show[ing] high levels of aggressiveness”, being financially secure and refraining from overt displays of emotionality (Rothmann *et al.*, 2022a:4). The participants’ narratives reflected the varied influences of socialisation. For some, their female role models encouraged them to engage in stereotypically feminine sport (e.g., netball), whereas others had to conform to a complicit approach to gain social, sexual and cultural capital (Connell, 2005), that is, refraining from being labelled as either marginal or subordinate men.

Additionally, the findings reflected the work of Gennrich (2013). He speaks to the role of rugby as source of **secondary socialisation** (cf. Andrews, 2012; Morrell, 2001, 2017; White *et al.*, 2017). White *et al.* (2017) showed that sport, as a secondary socialising agent, may reinforce

the ideals of hegemonic masculinity. Traditional and conventional understandings of masculinity suggest that sportsmen are expected to display the main features of hegemonic masculinity. The context of sport, according to Connell (2008), contributes to reinforcing hegemonic ideals that men and, in the present study, self-identified gay men, either emulated or transgressed. For the participants, primary gender-role socialisation provided them with the basis to continue their masculine socialisation amid similar ideals on the rugby field. The findings showed that playing rugby meant having to enact masculinity in a specific way – that is, being physically tough (Kerr, 2019; Stephenson, 2012), aggressive (Anderson & McCormack, 2018; Clayton & Harris, 2009) and mentally agile (Cupido, 2014). These findings mirror the work of South African scholars (Morrell, 1998, 2017; Rothmann *et al.*, 2022a, 2022b) as well as those studies conducted in the US (Pew, 2013; Roberts 2013), UK (Anderson *et al.*, 2012; Gaston & Dixon, 2019), Australia (Drummond *et al.*, 2015) and New Zealand (Van Campenhout & Van Hoven, 2014). Van Campenhout and Van Hoven (2014:1094), among others, liken the game of rugby to a “battle” – a practice that displaces presentations of “weakness” in favour of being seen as courageous and heroic (cf. Messner, 2002). They contend that if a player “performs poorly on the field”, his identity can be judged as being “less masculine” in relation to that of his teammates.

Conversely, White *et al.* (2012:2) commented on the process of the “softening of masculinity” in sport. By partaking in rugby when they were younger, the participants of the present study were granted (albeit temporarily) some acceptance and heterosexual privilege (i.e., complicit masculinity) by performing their masculinity in this specific context (cf. Van Campenhout & Van Hoven, 2014). Chappell (as cited in Van der Schyff, 2022) debates that South African “mainstream homosexual cultures” privilege individuals who imitate Westernised traditions of hegemonic identity – specifically, masculine, muscular and athletic men. This point warrants reflection on an important socialisation agent in rugby – that is, **the coach**. Coaches are important figures in an athlete’s life; they may either encourage or inhibit their trainees’ professional and personal potential (Griffen, 2016; Sheadler *et al.*, 2021; Schinke *et al.*, 2018). Narratives of some participants in the present study echoed the contributions of scholars who commented on coaches’ **unease with homosexuality** (Anderson, 2005), the **toxicity of coaching** in rugby (Anderson *et al.*, 2016; Anderson & McGuire, 2010; Yohannes, 2021) and the **possibilities of inclusionary practices** through gender role socialisation (Blais *et al.*, 2015; Gaston & Dixon, 2019; Granger & Rhind, 2014; Schinke *et al.*, 2018). As regards the latter point, some participants acknowledged how their own roles as coaches and their support of heterosexual men who may have faced stigmatisation for availing themselves to train with gay men spoke to the potential for encouraging inclusivity along homosocial lines

(Griffen, 2016). Conversely, Anderson and McGuire's (2010:256) study among rugby players of a UK university showed that some coaches tend to use homophobic and misogynistic discourse as source of gender policing (i.e., to "hurt, degrade and objectify" them). As noted in chapter 5, participants recalled how their coaches' generation (i.e., Generation X) (cf. Anderson, 2014:3) encouraged stoicism, aggression, homophobia, hostility and "abuse" – a finding to which Anderson and McGuire (2010:256) attest.

6.2.2 Dialling-up the testosterone: accruing idealised gender and bodily capital

Men also identified the need to accrue gender and bodily capital through playing rugby. This, according to them, centred around the requirement to emulate the expected **complicit masculine attributes** associated with ideal men and rugby players in South Africa akin to those typologies under Apartheid (i.e., Puritan) (Du Pisani, 2001; Morrell, 1998) and among some men in contemporary South Africa (i.e., complicit, ruling and, arguably, hegemonic) (Ratele, 2014; Rothmann, 2022; Sonnekus, 2013). By playing rugby, the participants were able to exude the stereotypical features of aggressiveness, competitiveness and stoicism – features that South African (Allen, 2016; Morrell, 1998; Niehaus, 2014; Stephenson, 2012; Van der Walt, 2012) and international (Kerr, 2019; Messner, 2002, 2009; Roberts, 2013; Scheadler *et al.*, 2021; Saeed & Pandey, 2015; Travers, 2018; White *et al.*, 2017) scholars associate with contact sports, including rugby and soccer. They did this to divert attention away from their sexual identity – a finding that recalls IMT proponents' references to homo-erasure and homohysteria (Anderson, 2009; Anderson & McCormack, 2018; McCormack, 2020). Gender capital, according to Bridges (2009:92), refers to "the knowledge, resources and aspects of identity available – within a given context – that permit access to regime-specific gendered identities". Although "[b]odies are not the only source of gender capital" and "the value of bodies is dictated largely by the contexts in which they are presented", Bridges (2009:92) is of the opinion that they remain "an important source".

Bridges quotes Goffman (1967:167) in this regard. The latter argued:

[a] body is a piece of consequential equipment, and its owner is always putting it on the line. Of course, he can bring other capital goods into many of his moments too, but his body is the only one he can never leave behind.

Closely associated with said form of capital is body capital. This form of capital, according to Alvarez (2009:234), may encourage gay men to attain the necessary musculature as "the social mask that illustrates [their] manhood" (Rothmann, 2022). Previous and contemporary

research indicates men's genderist performances, displaying personality traits and performances that favour authoritarianism, aggressiveness, dominance and competitiveness. A genderist approach to performing one's masculinity may thus disavow overt displays of effeminacy and homosexuality (Mitchell & Lodhia, 2016) to avoid "discriminations [that might stem from] not conforming to the rigid categorization of man/woman, male/female" (Browne, 2004:343). Accruing and exuding one's gender capital "correctly" provides men with the required gender and sexual respectability (Martino *et al.*, 2020; West & Zimmerman, 2002). For gay men, this would mean projecting a "very straight gay" persona – that is, presenting as assertive, independent and strong (Connell, 1992) and refraining from overt displays of emotionality (Anderson & Magrath, 2019).

Alvarez's (2009) work relates to another important scholarly contribution on gay masculinity – the work of Levine (1998) and the gay clone. Anderson's (2009) discussion about the three conditions for inclusivity in contemporary society refers (i.e., **homoerasure**, **homohysteria** and **inclusive masculinities**). Homohysteria arose during the 1980s and 1990s in the US and UK when the HIV/AIDS pandemic inhibited the potential for the agentic "homosexualization of America" (Altman, 1982). During this period, the supposed "gay cancer" resulted in social, religious and political condemnation and pathologizing of specifically gay men. The gay clone came to exist alongside the frailer and more fragile image of gay men who were dying of AIDS. It was based on the "hot", "buff" and "mesomorphic" rhetoric (Halkitis *et al.*, 2004, 2008; Levine, 1998) and came to represent a healthy, muscular, rugged and athletic gay man dressed in either Levi's, leather boots or fitted muscle t-shirts. Although arguably seen as complicit, the gay clone masculine typology, according to Alvarez (2009:100), "was also the embodiment of gay men reclaiming those things that society had denied homosexual men for centuries: their body, their masculinity, and, ultimately, their manhood". The importance of said typology persists to this day. Consider relatively recent studies about some gay men's partiality for the "gay clone" look (Kousari-Rad & McLaren, 2013; Rothmann, 2022; Varangis *et al.*, 2012).

"Dialling up the testosterone", as one participant noted, afforded (and continues to afford) some of the gay players the necessary respect and social integration into a perceived hypermasculine context. As such, gay men "borrow bits and pieces" from their heterosexual counterparts (rather than necessarily vice versa) (Bishop, 2018; Bridges, 2014; Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Demetriou, 2001). In so doing, the participants perform their "very straight gay" (Connell, 1992) and "good gay" (Taulke-Johnson, 2017) personas to overcompensate for their supposed lack of cisgenderism. This could also be linked to the supposedly stark distinction between the good gay and bad gay. The "good gay" is perceived as a straight acting, private,

discreet and moderate gay man. As opposed to this, the “bad gay” is depicted as being effeminate, promiscuous and predatory.

Interestingly, the findings of the current study showed that some gay men were able to exude their masculinity and muscularity on the field whilst, concurrently, such hypermasculinity allowed them to embrace their sometimes more effeminate and “stereotypically” gay self in other contexts (Rothmann, 2022). Some participants, for example, referred to how they used their gender through androgynous gender performances and the fluid displays of their sex characteristics, for example, using cosmetic products and wearing clothing that may be considered feminine (Adams, 2011). Scoats (2017), for example, suggests that that no single masculine archetype necessarily represents the apex of masculinity. Rather, the narratives of some of the participants express a partiality towards the display of multiple, often paradoxical, masculine ideals that encompass feminine expressions (cf. Adams, 2011; Murray & White, 2017). In keeping with the cited scholarship, this study contributes to findings on how rugby players increasingly value displays of softer masculinities along inclusive and horizontal homosocial lines (Anderson & McGuire, 2010; Murray & White, 2017).

Next, I discuss the additional reasons why the participants continued to play rugby (i.e., their enjoyment of the game and learning its basic skills).

6.3 RECLAIMING GAY MASCULINITIES THROUGH RUGBY: CHALLENGING HOMOHYSTERIA IN AN “EXCLUSIVE-INCLUSIVE” CLUB

Although none of the participants formed part of a mainstream rugby team at the time of the study, they reflected on how their membership of their respective inclusive gay rugby clubs contributed towards their overall enjoyment of and passion for the game. As was clear from their narratives, they did not necessarily play a different type of rugby as their mainstream counterparts; what is different, however, is the sense of connection and sociality they gained from their membership of their clubs – a finding evident in the scholarship of Gaston and Dixon (2019) and Muir *et al.* (2020). As was the case in the latter’s research, participants in the present study sought to establish and extend their social networks within and outside the club’s parameters – that is, building friendships with gay and heterosexual men alike (Muir *et al.*, 2020:338). In so doing, they could meet like-minded people in their club without the need to engage in intense impression management to either disclose, foreclose or explain their sexual orientation or sexual identity to others. Similarly, Madden’s (2013:264) research among gay rugby players in Ireland showed that such inclusive clubs allow rugby players to “enjoy the thrill of being around other gay rugby players ... as opposed to being hidden in [another] rugby

club". Furthermore, the participants decided to play rugby to retain their fitness and to learn the skills associated with rugby (Wong, 2016). Said fitness extends to my preceding references to the gay participants' need to accrue body, masculine and gender capital (Bridges, 2009; Muir *et al.*, 2020).

Building on their initial decision to play rugby, the following inductive themes emerged from the preceding chapter on the **reasons** why the participants joined an inclusive rugby club. Here, I integrate their **reasoning** for doing so with a discussion of the **implications** of joining the clubs. The five inductive themes include **inclusivity through exclusivity**, **establishing a homosocial brotherhood**, **being a "champion for inclusivity"**, **creating a safe(r) space to educate and sensitise men**, and expressing an **appreciation of diverse identities and bodies**.

As precursor to the following discussion, I first conceptualise my reference to the "**exclusive-inclusive**" club.

6.3.1 *Inclusivity through exclusivity*

Although arguably exclusive in nature, the South African inclusive rugby clubs provided the participants with a sense of belonging and security – a finding to which previous scholarship attests (Baiocco *et al.*, 2018; Denison & Kitchen, 2015; Gaston & Dixon, 2019; Channon & Matthews, 2019). Owing to the perceived conservatism, religious prejudice and persistence of heteronormativity and patriarchy that privileges heterosexuality in South Africa (monakali & Francis, 2022), having a separate (or segregated) **exclusive-inclusive safe(r) space** has proven invaluable for gay men. My reference to the **exclusivity** of the club refers to its geographical (and symbolic) segregation from mainstream society (or rugby teams). **Inclusivity** relates to the fact that this club arguably provided an exclusively separate context for players who mainly (albeit, not exclusively) self-identified as LGBTIQ+. Participants, for example, expressed their awareness of existing challenges that sexual minority and non-binary South Africans continued to face in South Africa. This speaks to the sustained incongruence between the enviable provisions of the South African Constitution that is committed to protecting all persons irrespective of their gender and sexual identification (RSA, 1996) and persisting heterosexism, patriarchy and homophobia in civil society (Dube, 2016; Gqola, 2021; monakali & Francis, 2022; Morrell *et al.*, 2012; Ratele, 2014).

This thought extends to relatively recent American (Ghaziani, 2017) and South African (Rink, 2013) scholarship that speaks about the mainstreaming of gay identity in a "post-gay era".

This era sees sexual minorities increasingly assimilating into mainstream heterosexual culture as opposed to segregating themselves into “gay ghettos” or “gay villages” (Ghaziani, 2017). This is attributed to, among others, a greater degree of acceptance of homosexuality in contemporary society and a decline in homophobia (Anderson, 2014). Although scholars may view such assimilation as normalising the “ordinariness” of gay rugby clubs (Vilanova *et al.*, 2020), the participants’ narratives showed that they did not necessarily conform to an essentialist understanding of gay masculinity. They rather opted to engage in a strategic essentialist approach (Spivak as cited in Van der Berg, 2016). This means that they critically assimilated into a specific group for the purpose of jointly mobilising their efforts to realise their needs (e.g., belonging, support, making friendships or simply playing rugby). In so doing, they did not inevitably conform to an essentialist understanding of gay masculinity; they rather negotiated the localised intricacies of what it meant (or could mean) to be a gay man who formed part of this exclusive-inclusive rugby club (cf. Van der Berg, 2016).

Writing from a South African perspective, Morrell (2017) commented on the possibility of such inclusionary practices among South African men. Drawing on his recollections of how touch-rugby provided a space that was conducive to “do masculinity better” under Apartheid, he showed how playing rugby promoted inclusivity among men – irrespective of their race. At the time of the present study, the participants reflected about the importance of establishing this “sense of community” in a country that remained somewhat polarised about same-sex rights. Retaining this sense of community has proven to be challenging, especially for financial reasons. A lack of sponsorships makes it difficult for such inclusive clubs to survive (Igual, 2016). Although some considered such a context as resembling a utopian ideal (cf. Kettley-Linsell, 2020), the exclusive-inclusive rugby club continues to facilitate introductions among gay men outside an overtly (or overly) mainstream, heteronormative and potentially homophobic rugby context (Allen, 2016) – a finding that emerged from participants’ recollection of homophobic slurs during a match against a mainstream team.

Furthermore, echoing the views of Gaston and Dixon’s (2019) study, the participants told me that playing rugby allowed them to become “part of [a] ... community”. It provides gay men with a “brotherhood” that is based around the love of rugby rather than confluent sex. Added to these challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic stifled attempts for gay men to come together between 2020 and 2021. Apart from the general social and psychological impact of the compulsory lockdown periods in South Africa and abroad,¹⁵ recent studies showed that the

¹⁵ Lockdown in South Africa took place at different levels. On the one side of the spectrum, there was level 5, which was implemented in March 2020, which indicated a higher likelihood of COVID-19 infection and resulted in the closure of social institutions (including rugby clubs). On the other side of the spectrum was level 1, which was

pandemic also had a significant impact on their psychological and physical well-being. The results of the study conducted by Uroh and Adewunmi (2021) noted the following: some athletes, competing in individual and group sports, experienced higher levels of psychological suffering during the pandemic due to a lack of access to training facilities.

6.3.2 Establishing a homosocial brotherhood

Two meanings of **homosocial brotherhood** refer. On the one hand, some participants commented on being “half gay” and “half straight”, depending on the context. Hierarchical homosociality, according to Hammarén and Johansson (2014:1), may posit homosociality as a “concept referring to how men, through their relations to other men, uphold patriarchy” – that is, an “almost descriptive [use of the] term ... to show how men bond, build closed teams, and defend their privileges and positions”. This definition shows how heterosexual members of the exclusive-inclusive club projected a “very gay straight” persona, whereas their gay counterparts perhaps opted to enact their “very straight gay” self (Bridges, 2014; Connell, 1992). Consequently, both performances could be read as being complicit as opposed to inclusive (Connell, 2005; Demetriou, 2001). Reflecting on their *formative years in school*, it was apparent that some of the participants sought to project a “normalised” image of masculinity (i.e., remaining closeted) to establish rapport, a sense of “self-worth” and camaraderie with their teammates on the field, in the locker rooms and socially (Van Campenhout & Van Hoven, 2014). In so doing, they distanced themselves from overt displays of effeminacy and homosexuality, which, as they noted, would be read as “weakness” (Matlebyane, 2020) and a lack of masculinity (Denison & Kitchen, 2015) that could result in discrimination (Gaston & Dixon, 2019; Taylor, 2021). Taylor (2021) reported on a gay rugby player, Kenneth Macharia, who originally hails from Kenya and plays for the Bristol Bisons in the UK (an inclusive rugby club). He was faced with being deported back to Kenya where he feared he would be victimised because of his sexuality. After he won his appeal in the immigration tribunal against the Home Office’s attempts to deport him from the UK, he exclaimed “It has been such a long time living with fear and uncertainty, but I will be celebrating this evening when I go for rugby training ... I feel that I can live a full life” (as cited in Taylor, 2021).

Conversely, the second meaning of homosocial brotherhood (i.e., horizontal homosociality) foregrounds the men’s *present-day* experiences as exclusive-inclusive club members. In this

implemented from 1 October 2021, allowing much more leeway for freedom of movement among persons (South African Government, 2022).

regard, homosociality refers to evidence that points “toward relations between, for example, men – relations that are based on emotional closeness, intimacy, and a nonprofitable form of friendship” (Hammarén & Johansson, 2014:5; cf. Anderson, 2008a, 2008b; Murray & White, 2017). Having heterosexual allies facilitates establishing a **homosocial brotherhood** among men irrespective of their sexual orientation (Anderson, 2005, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Anderson & McCormack, 2018; Borkowska, 2020; Ralph & Roberts, 2020; White & Anderson, 2016). This finding recalls Anderson’s (2009) optimism about the decline (albeit “uneven”) in homophobia and homophobia in particularly the US and UK (Anderson & McCormack, 2018). He argued:

In a culture of diminished homophobia, boys and men will be free to express emotional intimacy and physical expressions of that relationship with one another. Accordingly, this culture permits an ever-greater expansion of acceptable heteromale behaviours, which results in a further blurring of masculine and feminine behaviours and terrains. (Anderson, 2009:97)

This decline in the stigmatisation of homosexuality and concurrent increase in homosocial tactility among men in the rugby club encouraged “camaraderie” among gay men and their heterosexual allies (cf. McCormack & Anderson, 2014). By acknowledging the joint “battle” during their games, the participants favoured displays of amicable sportsmanship through displays of reciprocal respect and competitiveness during games as opposed to overly excessive aggression before, during or after their games – a tenet of IMT to which Anderson (2014) attests. Of importance in this regard is how the participants acknowledged, negotiated and valued the display of “multiple masculinities” arranged horizontally (i.e., equally dominant) versus a vertical stratification that distinguishes between hegemonic and subordinate men (cf. Anderson, 2014; Campbell *et al.*, 2018; Connell, 2005; Hearn *et al.*, 2012).

6.3.3 Being a “champion for inclusivity”: Encouraging the “fuck you” response

I would be remiss if I did not recall one participant’s reference to espousing a so-called “**fuck you! Watch this! I can do this!**” attitude as openly gay rugby player. In so doing, one becomes a “champion for inclusivity”: it is imperative to disclose one’s sexual orientation to other members of your club to facilitate open communication about homosexuality (Anderson & McGuire, 2011; Gaston & Dixon, 2019). This encourages acceptance, social change and inclusivity and further resulted in participants’ increased sense of **self-confidence**, **assertiveness** and **validation** (Blais *et al.*, 2015; Gaston & Dixon, 2019; Morrell, 2017) as gay men. Of interest is the fact that most of the present-day experiences of participants

differed from their recollections of experiencing marginalisation and subordination due to their supposed inability to reflect hegemonic ideals when they were younger (i.e., their club membership allows them to challenge homoerasure by publicly proclaiming their sexual orientation with pride). Being a part of said club is a “courage builder” for gay men – it “normalises” gay men playing rugby and challenges stereotypes that seek to monolithically posit them as solely effeminate or predacious (Gaston & Dixon, 2019:8-9).

The rugby club allowed men to **negotiate** – that is, **use their sexuality and gender** – to reflexively democratise their unique gay masculinities through interpersonal interactions with their teammates (cf. Johnson, 2009). This finding echoes Gaston and Dixon’s (2019:11) assertion that gay men who play rugby are given the opportunity to “do ‘being a gay man’ differently”. Similarly, McCormack (2013) asserts that homosocial bonds between younger men are no longer solely based on hegemonic ideals but rather more “democratic” features. These include being more “emotionally supportive, socially fluid, charismatic and authentic” – that is, “men of all masculine archetypes are able to achieve esteemed status” (White & Anderson, 2016). In so doing, participants were able to transgress their internalised homophobia in a twofold way. To begin with, by joining the club helped them to become “more comfortable in engaging in activities in which at one time they felt they were previously excluded” (Gaston & Dixon, 2019:10). The participants also echoed the sentiments of *Jozi Cats* members who credited said club with providing them with an alternative to a mainstream “organized club structure” where they “wouldn’t feel 100% comfortable [because] they couldn’t be their authentic selves if they were there” (Morley & McKenzie, 2016). Furthermore, they were able to confront their own internal biases and homonegativity towards other gay men, arguably challenging an internal hegemony that stratifies gay men based on specific stereotypes (cf. Demetriou, 2001; Messerschmidt, 2012).

6.3.4 *Creating a safe(r) space to educate and sensitise men*

An inclusive rugby club provides gay men with a **safe(r) space to educate, sensitise and belong**. Such education requires gay men to disclose and openly discuss their sexual identity with their fellow team members. Disclosing one’s sexual orientation may result in the normalisation of homosexuality in a stereotypically hypermasculine sporting context (Allen, 2016; Connell, 2005). Additionally, participants noted how such openness provide the club members with mentors and role models (France24, 2018; Outsports.com, 2021; Robinson, 2016; Wong, 2016), a sense of familial belonging (Eisen & Yamashita, 2019) and the opportunity to live one’s authentic self (Buzinski, 2020; Morley & McKenzie, 2016). Irrespective of the noted importance of said disclosure, the participants also cited the need to respect the

privacy of those members who wished to refrain from discussing their sexual orientation (Yohannes, 2021). For them, it was about playing rugby and establishing friendships and social networks (Robinson, 2016).

The club also sensitised gay and heterosexual persons about permissible and impermissible language and behaviours. Owing to the physical closeness of men on the field, participants cited the importance of clearly demarcating homosocial boundaries on and off the field. Furthermore, participants noted the need to educate the club's membership about the use of specific discourse. Of interest, in this regard, is how such training encouraged the use of "pro-gay" language: "the use of homosexually themed language that has a *positive* social effect ... [it] is used to bond people together in socio-positive ways or to demonstrate pro-gay attitudes" (McCormack, 2013:128). I regard it as applicable to recall the following quote from chapter 5 on the topic:

The moment another player or friend jokes with me about being gay, in a friendly way, is the moment I know that person doesn't have a problem with my sexuality. If teammates banter with me as they would banter with any other teammate, then I know they don't have a problem with me.

Findings of the present study, therefore, show that gay and heterosexual men "appropriate a softer masculine archetype" that values sexual diversity and homosociality (White & Anderson, 2016; also see Anderson & McGuire, 2010; Murray & White, 2017; White *et al.*, 2012). Recalling the use of queer pedagogical approaches to sensitise students to gender and sexual diversity, Kumashiro (2002) and Msibi (2015), among others, noted that such education could inform and sensitise individuals to the unique (and similar) features of the so-called "other" (i.e., gay persons). This may encourage heterosexual and gay rugby players alike to work towards improving the social conditions in the various contexts of the club. These clubs may, using such a queer pedagogy, serve as an "affirming, supportive and empowering space" for all its members (Kumashiro, 2002; Msibi, 2015).

6.3.5 "Everyone is welcome": An appreciation of diverse identities and bodies

A final reason the participants sought to join the rugby club centred on the need to generate and express their need for mutual respect and appreciation of **diverse identities** and **bodies**. In principle, rugby should encourage the display of **diversity** and **inclusivity**. Rugby allows one to "play with all sorts of body types" due to the specificity of skills that every player, based on their position, brings to the game. That is the "beauty of rugby as a sport" – that is, "the

diversity ... it requires" (Cleland, 2016; Twenge, 2014). Gaston and Dixon's (2019:11) findings on openly gay UK rugby players is worth quoting here. They argued that their participants' membership of a gay/inclusive rugby club provided the men with a "place to explore maleness and masculinity safely [albeit not solely] away from the heteronormative mainstream, but from the pressures and expectations of the gay community itself". As one participant noted, "everyone is welcome" (cf. Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2018). An inclusive club allowed men to socially construct and reconstruct their gay identities along a spectrum. Participants referred to being "quite a mess", displaying a "mixture" of effeminacy and masculinity and adapting their masculine expressions to either present as the gay clone (i.e., wearing tight t-shirts) (cf. Alvarez, 2009; Levine, 1998), "very straight gay" (Bridges, 2014; Connell, 1992) or their "authentic" individualised and reflexive self (Plummer, 2015). Irrespective of their gender and sexual identification, participants' narratives mirrored the work of previous scholarship about how inclusive practices allow for men to be "noticed" (Buzinski, 2020), "respected" (Pringle, 2005) and acknowledged (Anderson *et al.*, 2011) as opposed to being excluded from the gay and heterosexual community for failing to conform to hetero- and homonormative expectations (Channon & Matthews, 2019).

Furthermore, due to the unique prerequisites of the respective players in the game, the inclusive clubs allowed for an appreciation of **diverse bodies** – a finding that recalls my previous references to the tongue-in-cheek marketing campaign of the *Jozi Cats* (Robinson, 2016; Wong, 2016). As noted in chapter 3 (refer to § 3.4.1), the marketing campaign employed homophobic insults as means to reclaim ownership of heterosexist and homophobic language (e.g., gay men as queens, fairies, pansies, and pillow biters) (Epstein, 1996; Jagose, 1996; Robinson, 2016). The images of the *Jozi Cats* marketing campaign that accompanied the messages provided a plethora of male bodily ideals (refer to § 3.4.1). A representative of the *Jozi Cats*, Chris Verrijdt, is worth quoting here. In an interview with the CNN (Morley & McKenzie, 2016), he disassociated homophobic and fag discourse from their inclusive club's membership. He noted that "[t]he only time we've seen any kind of slurring, or anything like that, has been in mainstream sports publications in South Africa, but again it's that jocular [humour] ... it's very offensive". Through their campaign, however, he remained hopeful that "people will just check themselves" before engaging in homophobic behaviours.

As is clear from the views of the participants, their exclusive-inclusive rugby clubs had become (like its *Jozi Cats* counterpart), "a people association first, a sporting organisation second and a community change-maker third" (Brand South Africa, 2018). His view echoes the body positivity of Kat Amrhein (2021), a former collegiate team member of the *Miami Women's Club*

Rugby in the US. She writes that “rugby is for **every body**”¹⁶. Reflecting on playing alongside players of the of “different shapes, sizes, races, sexual orientations and gender identities”, she believes that each player conveys and contributes their unique abilities to the team. By playing rugby, she developed a greater appreciation for her body’s imperfections. She writes that her teammates initially told her that the game is for “**every body**”. This is more than a recruitment slogan; this is the creed by which rugby is played. Rugby is a sport that is, fundamentally, for everyone’s body (Amrhein, 2021).

6.4 CONCLUSION

The participants’ experiences *inside* the club suggested a display of inclusive masculinities. They did, however, remain cognisant of the challenges patriarchal and heteronormative ideologies (e.g., homosexuality being an “unnatural vice”, “un-African” or “sinful”) (Dlamini, 2006; Epprecht, 2001; Rothmann *et al.*, 2022a, 2022b) pose to them to disclose and perform their gay masculine in mainstream society. This notwithstanding, the findings of the present study are encouraging. The participants reflected on how their present-day experiences as members of their exclusive-inclusive gay rugby club partly displaced and challenged attempts at erasing their homosexuality through homophobia (Anderson, 2009) or simply making them “into men” (Allen, 2016). Their narratives arguably show that they had progressed a long way from being mainly fearful, insecure and closeted gay boys under Apartheid, to mostly proud, assertive and self-confident gay men. The findings show that although some of them continued to attach importance to the accrual of gender, masculine and body capital to appeared more masculine and attractive to themselves and others; they socially constructed and performed their gay masculinity based on the context.

The participants’ membership of what I term the **exclusive-inclusive safe(r) rugby club** provided them with the opportunities to establish homosocial brotherhoods with gay and heterosexual men; to champion inclusive masculinities; to educate and sensitise men about gender and sexual diversity; and to encourage the appreciation of diverse sexual and gender identities and bodies. Next, in chapter 7, I conclude the dissertation with a summarised demarcation of the central findings of the present study. Here, I provide answers to each of the general and specific research questions posed in chapter 1.

¹⁶ Emphasis added.

CHAPTER 7:

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In her conceptualisation of gay men in sport, Elizabeth Cavalier (2019:88) wrote the following:

Gay men challenge deeply entrenched institutions and combat firmly held beliefs about masculinity. As mainstream understandings of gender are closely tied to assumptions about sexuality, gay men in sport, especially those participating in traditionally masculine sports (such as football, basketball, or rugby) challenge neat gender and sexuality binaries as well as stereotypes that posit that masculine men can't be gay.

IMT has never been used to examine the changing social dynamics among gay and heterosexual men in South African contact sport. Apart from implicit references to such tendencies among men in touch rugby under Apartheid (Morrell, 2017) and a recent quantitative inquiry into the attitudes of South African university students about the overt displays of inclusive masculinities among rugby players (Rothmann *et al.*, 2022b), there exists a lacuna of such research in the country. Consequently, the present study sought to qualitatively explore the influence of inclusive masculinities on self-identified gay rugby players' experience of homophobia in their respective inclusive or exclusive rugby clubs.

In conclusion, in this chapter, I discuss how I achieved the **general** and **specific research objectives** (**theoretical**, **methodological** and **empirical**). I introduce the reader to the **Exclusive-Inclusive Safe(r) Rugby Club Model** (EISR-CM) as culmination of my critical reading of my research findings. Finally, I make practical and theoretical recommendations.

7.2 ACHIEVING THE THEORETICAL RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The first set of specific research questions centred on the **theoretical** and **methodological** foci of the present study. The first of these specific research objectives required an identification and discussion of the present study's **central theoretical argument** – that is, **inclusive masculinity theory (IMT)**. As introduction to discussing IMT, chapter 2 introduced the reader the contributions of proponents of HMT. Here, I related information about the contested nature of HMT as the dominant theoretical approach to studying masculinities during the 1980s and 1990s (i.e., “the apex of homophobic attitudes”) (Anderson & Magrath, 2019:77). I distinguished between hegemonic, complicit, subordinate and marginal

masculinities and related Connell's (2005) typologies to South African masculinities – that is, Puritan, ruling and violent masculinities. This was followed by an introduction to IMT and a demarcation of its main tenets, namely homoerasure, homophobia and homosociality. Drawing on the work of Anderson and his colleagues, I emphasised how IMT favoured a view of “multiple” and “softer” masculinities amid “uneven” cultural and social changes associated with masculine expression. As was clear from chapter 2, IMT acknowledges the valuable contributions made by the proponents of HMT during the 1980s and 1990s. Anderson (2014) does, however, contend that HMT is no longer able to adequately explain the ever-changing social dynamics among younger men (specifically in the US and UK) that favours horizontal homosociality and an aversion for homophobia and orthodox masculinity. The chapter concluded with a critique of IMT. Although Magrath *et al.* (2020:5) acknowledge that most of the criticism on the “overall whiteness of the field of inclusive masculinity research” and its supposedly overly optimistic view of the concurrent changes in sport and masculinities (cf. De Boise, 2015; O'Neill, 2015), they contend that recent empirical work speaks to how the tenets of IMT are evident among Black (Magrath, 2017b), working-class (Blanchard *et al.*, 2017) and heterosexual men in the UK (Gaston & Dixon, 2019), Australia (Drummond *et al.*, 2015), New Zealand (Van Campenhout & Van Hoven, 2014) and South Africa (Rothmann, 2022), among others.

The second specific research objective entailed a contextually nuanced focus on previous and **existing academic scholarship** about the association between **masculinities and rugby**. Chapter 3 discussed the contributions of current and previous research on the experiences of gay men in the context of rugby and other contact sport in South Africa and abroad. I noted how rugby, as a contact sport, was initially – and as some may argue, continues to be – used as “a crucial vehicle for making men” (Allen, 2016; Nauright & Chandler, 1996) and to sustain Afrikaner nationalism under Apartheid (Winch, 2022). As introductory remarks, I recalled how institutionalised heterosexuality, heteronormativity and patriarchy may marginalise, isolate and discriminate against gay athletes (including rugby players). Furthermore, I considered how social constructions of masculinity inform the experiences of male rugby players on and off the field, how said ideologies are associated with the historical trajectory of rugby as a contact sport, and how gender, race and sexuality intersect with contemporary South African and international rugby. In closing, I drew on relatively recent theorisation to consider how men may either “do” or “use” their masculinity in rugby (i.e., conforming to hegemonic, orthodox and violent masculine expressions, or transgressing such fixed typologies through inclusive practices) before, during and after their matches.

Chapter 4 focused on the **research methodology** used for the study. I adopted a **qualitative approach** with social constructionism and interpretivism forming the ontological and epistemological bases of the research, respectively. In addition, I used the **non-probability sampling** procedures of **purposive** and **snowball sampling**. The former required the identification of relevant and knowledgeable persons to relate insider information about their lived experiences as openly and self-identified gay men playing rugby as part of an inclusive South African rugby club. Due to the “hidden” nature of the research population (Francis, 2017; Maake *et al.*, 2021; Rumens, 2011), snowball sampling also proved to be an indispensable means to recruit participants. Of interest is the fact that the prospective participants’ unwillingness or fear to partake in **semi-structured in-person** or **virtual interviews** reflected some of these men’s (and the seven who agreed to participate) internalised homophobia in a country characterised by increasing gender- and sexually based violence towards men and women. Of the seven men who participated in the study, the average age was 36, with the youngest being 29 and the oldest being 47 years old. Using some of the deductive topics that emerged from my reading for chapters 1–3, I also employed **thematic analysis** to code inductive themes that emanated from my seven interviews. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the ethical considerations of the study.

To ensure the **trustworthiness** of the findings, I provided thick descriptive accounts of the narratives of the seven interviewees in chapter 5. The content and contributions in chapters 5 and 6 are represented in figure 7.1. Chapter 5 provided an in-depth account of the reasons the participants chose to play rugby; their views on what constituted ideal masculinity in general and in rugby; their reasons for joining an inclusive/exclusive rugby club (or refraining from doing so); and how inclusive masculine practices informed their experiences of homophobia as part of their rugby team. Chapters 5 and 6 addressed the general empirical research objective of the study: **To explore the influence of inclusive masculinity practices on the fear of self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa of being socially perceived as gay (i.e., experiencing homophobia)**. Five specific research objectives were formulated to address the general research objective:

- to explain the reasons why the gay men play rugby.
- to explore the ideal features that gay rugby players ascribe to masculinity in rugby.
- to explain the reasons why gay rugby players decided to join or refrain from joining an exclusive gay rugby club.

- to explore how inclusive masculine practices influence gay rugby players regarding their experiences of homophobia in their respective teams and/or clubs.
- to draw conclusions on the influence of inclusive masculinity practices on self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa in their experience of homophobia.

I discuss these empirical research objectives as part of the next subsection that culminated in the **Exclusive-Inclusive Safe(r) Rugby Club Model** (hereafter **EISR-CM**). Figure 7.1 provides an illustration of how I addressed the general and specific research objectives of the present study.

	Inhibiting homosociality Encouraging homophobia	Inhibiting homophobia Encouraging homosociality	
REASONS FOR PLAYING RUGBY	Context-specificity		REASONS FOR PLAYING 'GAY' RUGBY
Primary socialisation ↑ Parental and sibling influence Secondary socialisation ↑ Coaching influence ↑ School teacher influence ↑ Parental friends' influence	↑ Heteronormativity ↑ Doing gender ↑ Homoerasure ↑ Homophobia ↑ Vertical homosociality ↑ Subordinate masculinity ↑ Toxic masculinity	↑ Inclusivity ↑ Using gender ↓ Homoerasure ↓ Homophobia ↑ Horizontal Homosociality ↓ Complicit masculinity ↑ Multiple masculinities	Assimilation into exclusive-inclusive safe(r) rugby club for safety
			Homosocial brotherhood ↑ Self-confidence ↑ Male friendships and bromances ↑ Mutual acceptance and respect ↑ Homosocial camaraderie
			Being a "champion for inclusivity" ↑ Leadership ↑ Mentoring ↑ Role-modelling
			Creating a safe(r) space to educate and sensitise men - Allowing and respecting self-disclosure ↑ Education about and for 'the other' ↑ Education that critiques 'othering' ↑ Education to encourage inclusivity
Passion, enjoyment and skill accrual	- Lack of sponsorships - COVID-19 lockdowns	Public awareness campaigns	
Need for gender, masculine and body capital	Rugby as "masculinity" maker, i.e., conforming to stoic, aggressive and hegemonic ideals	Masculinity as internally diverse, i.e., reclaiming gay masculinity through playing rugby	An appreciation of diverse identities and bodies ↑ Open communication and negotiation "Everyone is welcome"

Figure 7.1: Exclusive-Inclusive Safe(r) Rugby Club Model (EISR-CM).

7.3 ACHIEVING THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The **first specific research objective** was to explain the **reasons gay men play rugby**. It was clear from chapters 5 and 6 and figure 7.1 that **primary** and **secondary gender-role socialisation** played a meaningful role in the participants' choice to play rugby from an early age. Participants cited specific persons who served as gender role models who encouraged them to play rugby. Specific references were made to their fathers, brothers, male coaches and friends of their parents. Regarding primary gender-role socialisation, the findings indicated that parental influences varied from encouraging the men to exude predetermined gendered rituals or, in the case of some participants, to express their softer side through stereotypically feminine activities (e.g., sport). Of interest, in both cases of socialisation, the participants critically reflected on how such gender binarism influenced their upbringing and youthful views and experiences as boys. Additionally, the role of schoolteachers and male coaches facilitated secondary socialisation. As important figures in an athlete's life, the participants commented on their coaches' unease with homosexuality and the toxic masculinity they sometimes experienced or witnessed from the coach. Like the work of proponents of IMT, the participants attributed some of this homophobia to generational dynamics (i.e., the coaches being part of Generation X) that informed their coaches' emotional stoicism, their coaches subscribing to vertical homosociality, aggressiveness and monosexuality (cf. Anderson, 2014:33). The second reason for playing rugby related to the participants' need to gain **gender, masculine** and **body capital** (Anderson, 2002; Bridges, 2009). Some of the participants, for example, opted to dial up their levels of testosterone, to generate the respect of their heterosexual teammates, to be socially integrated into the masculine rugby context, to "avoid ... homosexual stigma" (Anderson, 2014:32) and potentially accrue more masculine status and power (Anderson, 2002). Therefore, some gay men enact hybrid and complicit masculinity to compensate for their homosexuality.

The **second specific research objective** relates to the preceding one. It focused on the exploration of the ideal features that gay rugby players ascribe to masculinity in rugby. Here, the participants mirrored the work of South African and international masculinities scholars who have commented on how the "very straight gay" persona (Connell, 1992) which allows gay men to project an idealised version of masculinity through assertiveness, independence and strength, among others. Growing up, the participants valued stoic, orthodox and vertical displays of masculinity and homosociality. At the time of the study, however, they provided varied responses. On the one hand, they confirmed the "attractiveness" of traditional masculinity and muscularity for themselves and others (cf. Rothmann, 2022). This may, arguably, speak to their partiality towards complicit (rather than inclusive) masculinity. Willis (2015:388), for example, states that although the "inclusion of gay players ... challenges the prejudices of some men who see gay masculinities

as somewhat weaker or less competitive ... [inclusion] is more likely to occur when gay players embody those traditionally masculine traits and [behaviours] that have previously been used to exclude them". Regardless, the findings showed that the gay players perform their hybridity to express their personal desirability and partiality towards an idealised masculinity as opposed to uncritically subordinating themselves through vertical stratification. Consequently, they opt to *act gay* based on their unique intrapsychic and interpersonal negotiation *within themselves* and *with others* (Plummer, 2015; Pronger as cited by Cavalier, 2019:94). Although critics may argue that such assimilation may only serve to normalise gay masculinity and adhere to the directives of orthodox masculinity (Cavalier, 2019), I found that they do not uncritically conform to naïve essentialism but rather strategically assimilate into said club to better understand, express and value their gay masculinity and that of their teammates (Gaston & Dixon, 2019; McCormack, 2013; Morley & McKenzie, 2016; also see Van der Berg, 2016).

This means that they knowingly assimilate into a specific group for the purpose of jointly mobilising their efforts to realise their needs (e.g., belonging, support, friendships, or simply playing rugby). Therefore, depending on the social (and club) context, gay men espouse their hybridity to accrue their desired gender, masculine and body capital (Anderson, 2002; Bridges, 2009). Pronger's (as cited by Cavalier, 2019:94) examination of gay men in sport exemplifies this point best. He argues that "the masculine implications of sport may also have a special significance to homosexual men" – that is, gay men do not simply "secretly exist [...] in sport" but are actually "*drawn* to sport precisely because of the covert homoeroticism in sport (in addition to the camaraderie from team competition and enjoyment of physical activity)" (Cavalier, 2019:94). Participants of the present study echoed these sentiments, having increasingly started to value horizontal homosociality, emotional expressiveness, inclusivity and authenticity as idealised features of what constitutes *ideal* masculinity (White & Anderson, 2016) versus aspiring towards achieving hegemonic male supremacy.

The **third specific research objective** read as follows: "To explain the reasons why gay men decided to join or refrain from joining an inclusive or exclusive gay rugby club". First, gay men sought to join their respective inclusive rugby clubs to attain a relatively safe(r) space of inclusivity in an exclusive (or geographically separate) rugby club. Creating such safe(r) spaces are important. Although such segregation risks increased visibility (and potential victimisation) of either openly gay or closeted gay men, if executed well, it could encourage reciprocal understanding and respect among all the players irrespective of their gender identity or sexual

orientation (Fox & Ore, 2010¹⁷; Rothmann *et al.*, 2022a, 2022b). Such spaces remain imperative in a country where heteronormativity, patriarchy and homophobia remain deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric and individuals' mindsets (Buiten & Naidoo, 2020; Graaff & Heineken, 2017; monakali & Francis, 2022). In so doing, the gay men expressed their need to establish a homosocial brotherhood with gay and heterosexual men alike. This related to a third reason men cited for joining the club – to champion gay inclusivity by becoming role models, mentors and leaders in and for the gay community.

The **fourth specific research objective** sought to explore the influence of inclusive masculinity practices on self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa in their experience of homophobia in their respective teams and/or clubs. Here, I draw on the preceding three specific research objectives to summarise the **implications** of joining the clubs. Figure 7.1 (i.e., the **EISR-CM**) lists the five implications of joining an inclusive/exclusive rugby club in South Africa – that is, how joining their club influenced the men's experiences of inclusive masculinities and homophobia. In each of the following cases, participants noted experiencing **higher levels of horizontal homosociality** and **lower levels of homophobia**:

- Men established horizontal homosocial brotherhoods with gay teammates and heterosexual coaches and allies.
- Joining the club encouraged gay men to adopt a “fuck you! Watch this! I can do this!” attitude as openly gay rugby players. This encouraged acceptance, social change and inclusivity. It further resulted in them expressing an increase in their self-confidence, assertiveness and validation from and towards other players. In so doing, they did not necessarily “erase” their homosexuality through a denial of their gay identity. Depending on the context, they rather projected a hybrid performance to best “use” (Johnson, 2009) and newly “(un)do” (Adeagbo, 2015) their unique gay masculine selves to accrue body, sexual, masculine and gender capital in the club.
- Members came to appreciate diverse and multiple gay (and heterosexual) masculine identities and bodies; they sought to challenge their own and the internalised homophobia and homonegativity of other gay men. This facilitated them disavowing internal hegemony among gay men (i.e., the deterministic distinction between the good and bad gay male typologies) in favour of encouraging gender and sexual agency on the part of the players to

¹⁷ By adding the “r” so safer, Fox and Ore (2010) contend that there is no existent space in which sexual minorities will be completely safeguarded against homophobia. These spaces, however, are more “gay-friendly” and protective of members of the LGBTIQ+ community.

redress homoerasure, homophobia and homophobia (cf. Francis, 2017; Kumashiro, 2002; Msibi, 2015; Rothmann, 2018).

- Through championing inclusivity, the club's management and membership strove to educate and sensitise the men about homosexuality (in general) as well as acceptable and impermissible uses of language and behaviours (in particular). Such socialisation challenges misconceptions and stereotypes aimed at gay men within and outside the club.
- A meaningful implication (and contribution) of the study is how men, irrespective of their age cohort, construct and perform their gay masculinities along inclusive lines (Magrath *et al.*, 2020). Considering that the participants formed part of Generations X, Y and Z adds to the hypothesis that differentiations of masculinities exist among *and* within generational cohorts (cf. Anderson, 2014; Magrath, 2017a; Rothmann, 2022; Rothmann *et al.*, 2022a, 2022b).

These implications emphasise the present study's critique of a monolithic conceptualisation and understanding of what constitutes a "true reflection" of *homophobia*, *homophobia* and *inclusive masculinities*. This, I contend, is the study's most meaningful inductive contribution to existing studies about gay *and* heterosexual masculinities (and sexualities). Echoing the work of IMT proponents, the study implores readers to acknowledge the intersection and reciprocal interplay between the *intent* of gay and heterosexual players' behaviour among and towards each other, the *specific context* in which this occurs and the "shared cultural norms" that contribute to understanding and engaging with the meanings of homophobia, homophobia and inclusivity by *and* among gay and heterosexual men (Anderson & McCormack, 2018; McCormack *et al.*, 2016:762-763).

7.4 LIMITATIONS

The first limitation centred around the difficulty to recruit the planned 10 to 12 research participants. I made inquiries into their unwillingness to participate in the study and some men noted their unease with sharing personal information about their sexual identity with others (Tourangeau & Yang 2007). In other instances, some participants who initially consented to participate voluntarily refrained from replying to my follow-up messages to schedule an interview. However, it is worth noting that I was able to recruit the noted seven participants who, in my opinion, provided insightful and in-depth accounts of their experiences.

Second, recalling the earlier references to gay men as a "hidden community" (Rumens, 2008, 2011) owing to, among others, their fears of patriarchal, heteronormative or toxic masculinity

made it difficult to recruit participants. Said limitation extends to some participants who questioned my interest in researching gay men. As a self-identified heterosexual woman, I had to be sensitive to carefully negotiate my “outsider” status to gain the trust and respect of the men. I did this in a number of ways. First, I provided them with clear and detailed information about the purpose of the study, their rights and obligations and my own research affiliation. Maake *et al.* (2021), for example, note that researchers should always remain aware of the fact that they are “entering THEIR [the participants’] space as a researcher seeking information from them”. Furthermore, I acknowledged my own gender and sexual identity at the outset of the interview. In keeping with this, I confirmed by position as ally to the LGBTIQ+ community, hence my interest in and commitment to conducting this study about an under-researched topic (cf. Magrath, 2017a).

The third limitation relates to the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although I initially planned to conduct in-person semi-structured interviews with all the participants, the lockdowns prohibited me from doing so. Fortunately, I was able to redirect the interviews to the virtual platform of Zoom. Although I was able to continue with my fieldwork through this platform, some participants opted to switch off their video during the interviews, disallowing me to notice specific facial expressions or other nonverbal communication that may have contributed to the findings in some way.

Finally, although not necessarily a limitation but rather an *opportunity* for me to make an inductive contribution to sociological research about gay men and rugby in South Africa, I found it difficult to source South African literature that specifically addresses inclusive masculinities and gay male players in rugby. These studies are, as I have argued earlier, non-existent. Therefore, undertaking my literature review reminded me of the need to continue with my investigation into this unique sociological focus.

The **final research objective** sought to provide specific recommendations for future research and practical initiatives to be taken to create a safe(r) *inclusive* and/or *exclusive* space in contact sports such as rugby.

7.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Two subsets of recommendations, as informed by the study, were formulated. The first of these recommendations focuses on **further sociological research** about related topics.

7.5.1 Recommendations for future research

First, I want to encourage gender and sexuality scholars to conduct qualitative studies about the reasons for the discrimination and marginalisation of sexual minority and non-binary persons in

South African sport. This could contribute to a better understanding of the nature of homophobia, homophobia and even how homophobia may still characterise the life chances of such athletes. In conducting such research, one would not only focus on conceptualising homophobia (as risk factor) but also explore the nature of inclusive and softer masculinities in mainstream South African sport.

Related to the above limitations of the study, a second theme could focus on how the researcher's insider and/or outsider position to the research topic and the prospective participants encourage or inhibit their conceptualisation, investigation and reporting. A subtheme may focus on, for example, how the primary investigator's self-identification as gay or heterosexual allows them access to their prospective participants to employ ethnography, participatory observation or a phenomenological approach to intersubjectively explore themes associated with sexual minorities and non-binary persons in South African sport. Such an investigation would require the researcher (and the participants) to challenge processes of "othering" individuals with whom they do not share a similar gender or sexual orientation. This could provide a much-needed platform for the researcher and the participants to create awareness of the research foci to educate themselves and others and to provide the interviewees a platform to speak their truth.

Third, South African scholars should consider conducting a sequential mixed-methods study to first accrue quantitative data on the attitudes or perceptions among self-identified heterosexual respondents about homosexuality in South African sport. Based on this dataset, a qualitative phase could then follow during which focus groups and in-depth or semi-structured interviews are conducted to further elucidate the numerical findings.

In addition to the noted recommendations, the chapter concludes with recommendations for **practical initiatives**.

7.5.2 Recommendations for practical interventions

Based on the findings of the present study, I implore mainstream rugby clubs, teams or leagues to invite openly gay players to join as members. As noted above, participants expressed the need to create an inclusive and safe(r) space for self-identified gay rugby players to thrive alongside their heterosexual peers. This objective could be achieved through further educating and sensitising mainstream clubs about gender and sexual diversity. This could result in a merger between existing exclusive/inclusive rugby clubs and mainstream clubs. This would, however, require the sharing of knowledge and reciprocation of respect. Therefore, start by encouraging the creation of an inclusive rugby culture in South African sport. This is the first step – thus,

allowing openly gay rugby players to play in mainstream rugby teams without having to suffer the consequences of homophobia. Not all self-identified gay rugby players necessarily want to be part of a gay club. They may want to be part of mainstream rugby. This could be that initial *nudge* in that direction.

Second, to encourage the creation of this inclusive culture, mainstream and inclusive teams should play more friendly games. This could unite them, create a context to get to know each other instead of being judgemental or fearful of the “other”. Life itself is already a battlefield for some individuals. Sports should endeavour to be more welcoming and accepting. One of the participants in Muir *et al.*’s (2021:20) study noted “[r]ugby is an inclusive sport, and it is important that we [are not] ... ghettoised by only playing other International Gay Rugby [Board] teams at their tournaments. We are ambassadors for the gay community [and] have broken down stereotypes such that we are no longer ‘distant’ but seen as ordinary human beings, just like them”.

Third, the South African Rugby Union (also known as SA Rugby) should be at the forefront to drive initiatives to encourage the inclusion of sexually diverse matters and members. On their web page, they note that they have been “at the forefront of change on the South African sports scene over the past ten years, and management structures and strategies in SA Rugby have continuously evolved to keep up with changes and challenges on the South African playing field” (SA Rugby, 2022). This playing field should include emphasis on safeguarding the basic human rights and dignity of openly gay rugby players as part of local and national rugby in the country. Citing their commitment to a sustainable “growth strategy that covers both participants and supporters”, SA Rugby plans to develop and implement “programmes to establish sustainable rugby clubs. In addition, *education* and training programmes are in place to develop and hone the *skills* of coaches, referees and administrators”¹⁸ (SA Rugby, 2022). The references to “education” and “skills” development could benefit from a further demarcation that includes references to sensitisation courses about diversity along intersectional lines.

7.6 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In conclusion, I contend that the present study contributes to the so-called “third phase” (Magrath *et al.*, 2020) of masculinities research – a period Borkowska (2020) refers to as “Andersonian” based on Eric Anderson being the driving force behind this theoretical shift from hegemonic to inclusionary masculinities. I embarked on this research journey to investigate how diverse sexual

¹⁸ Emphasis added.

actors navigate their individual and interpersonal journeys in the larger cultural context of the country. South African scholarship and lay discourse about the place of gay men at this table, however, remains virtually non-existent. I hope that this study is an introductory study to many more sociological inquiries about the topic. In practical terms, by restructuring policies, mainstream and inclusive rugby clubs could encourage the acceptance of diverse masculine identities as opposed to a singular hegemonic typology. In so doing, gay men may feel safer to join such clubs and encourage their teammates, rugby fans, SA Rugby and even *themselves* to embrace an era of multiplicity in rugby.

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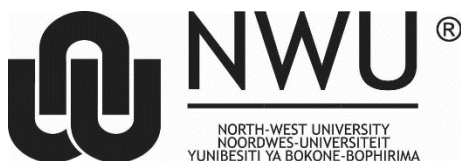
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ADDENDUM A: LETTER OF INVITATION



Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1595

Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Sociology

21081719@nwu.ac.za

meiringnadia54@gmail.com

Date: ...

The Club President
Jozi Cats
Sandton, Gauteng
2146

RE: APPLICATION FOR POTENTIAL SUPPORT WITH AND COLLABORATION IN MASTER'S STUDY IN SOCIOLOGY ON THE EXPERIENCES OF SELF-IDENTIFIED GAY RUGBY PLAYERS IN SOUTH AFRICAN OF HOMOHYSTERIA

Dear ...

My name is Nadia Meiring. I am currently registered for my Master's degree in Sociology at the North-West University (student number: 33069174). I completed my Honours at this institution in 2019. The focus of my Master's study is the potential effects of homophobia (i.e. the fear, on the part of self-identified LGBTIQ+ persons to be identified as LGBTIQ+ by others based on, among others, the potential effects of homophobia, hence the title of my proposed study, "A sociological exploration of the influence of inclusive masculinity practices and experiences of homophobia among self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa". The objectives of the study include an exploration of the reasons gay men choose to play rugby, whether they have chosen to join inclusive (i.e., a club/team with heterosexual and gay players) or exclusive rugby clubs/teams (i.e., with only gay players), the reasons for and consequences of this and the potential benefits of doing so in contemporary South Africa. The study will be informed by a qualitative research design which seeks to gain an in-depth insider's perspective of the lived experiences of participants (i.e., self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa). In-keeping with this, the researcher, Ms. Meiring, will seek to conduct a single 1–2-hour interview with 20 individual male participants for the purpose of the study, using either face-to-face, telephonic and/or Skype or Zoom interviews (depending on the request of the participant and the current challenges faced due to the Covid-19 pandemic). The study seeks to contribute to the limited sociological inquiry into the topic of inclusive masculinity among South African men – particularly during a period characterised by mainly negative reporting on the violent nature of men in general. The supervisor of the study is Dr Jacques Rothmann. He is a National Research Foundation (NRF)-rated researcher and widely respected and published gender and sexuality studies scholar.

The research proposal for the present study has been approved by the Central Academic Committee of the Faculty of Humanities. The next step requires ethical approval to undertake the empirical component of the study (i.e., the interviews with the male participants). Given the sensitivity of the topic and the importance I ascribe to undertake an ethically sound sociological inquiry into the topic, I hereby wish to request your assistance. As part of the ethics application, I am required to submit the following documentation:

- My approved research proposal.
- An Informed Consent Statement that should be signed in advance of any interview by myself and the male participant who **voluntarily consents** to participate in the study. This document clearly demarcates the title of the study; my name, organisational affiliation and contact details; the main objectives of the study; the role (rights and obligations) of the researcher and the participants and most

importantly, how I will seek to observe academically ethical principles and procedures (e.g. ensuring the confidentiality and privacy of participants; avoiding the infliction of any emotional, psychological, physical, economic and social harm on them and to obtain the voluntary informed consent from participants before commencing with any interview).

- A letter of agreement from individuals, institutions and/or organisations who agree to assist the researcher with gaining access to potential participants for the study – **hence my letter to you**. This process involves the following:
 - As soon as ethical clearance is obtained and an Ethics Number is awarded for the study, the researcher will forward a summary of the study to the said individual, institution and/or organisation who has consented to assist the researcher to obtain access to potential participants for her study.
 - The said individual, institution and/or organisation will be requested to post the summary of the study on their social media platforms (e.g., online blogs, Facebook or Twitter-pages, among others) or email it to individuals who may possibly wish to participate in the study. Potential participants may then contact the researcher for further information about the study and decide on whether they want to schedule an appointment for an interview with the researcher.
 - In terms of the latter, the researcher will gladly oblige to forward the Informed Consent Statement and interview schedule to the participants beforehand, if they request this.
 - The researcher has also gained approval from a registered psychologist (affiliated with the North-West University), to assist participants if they experience any unforeseen emotional, social and/or psychological distress during or directly following the interview. The researcher will, of course, conclude the interview at any time at the request of the male participant.
 - The above procedures therefore foreground the fact that the researcher will *at no time* during her study, directly contact participants if the latter have not already agreed to participate in the current study beforehand. Any contact from the researcher will be restricted to gaining informed consent from the participant and arranging and conducting the actual interview. The researcher will also, at the request of the participant, share the final draft of the research report with the participants for member-checking before submission for examination or eventual publication of the results in a peer-reviewed academic journal.

Based on the preceding background to the study and the sensitivity surrounding its thematic focus, the undersigned parties hereby wish to request your participation in assisting the researcher to gain access to gay men who are currently members of/or who were previously members of inclusive and/or exclusive rugby clubs/teams in South Africa and may want to participate in the study. You are, of course, welcome to note requirements from your side to further inform your decision and to also safeguard yourself and the participants.

If you **consent** to assisting the researcher in this way, please complete and sign the document on the next page. You are, of course, welcome to also draft your own letter to indicate your willingness to help.

If you require any further information from myself or my supervisor, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Jacques Rothmann
Research supervisor and Senior lecturer
Sociology, North-West University
Potchefstroom campus
Email address: 21081719@nwu.ac.za
Cellular phone number: 0765413454

Ms Nadia Meiring
Master's student and primary researcher
Sociology, North-West University
Potchefstroom campus
meiringnadia54@gmail.com
Cellular phone number: 0712712926

Please complete and sign the declaration on the following page after reading the above documentation.

I, _____, identity number / staff number:
_____, affiliated _____ with

_____, has
hereby read and fully understand the request from Ms Nadia Meiring to assist her in gaining access to participants (i.e. self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa). I hereby express my willingness to voluntarily share information regarding the title, background, objectives, ethical considerations and requirements from myself, the potential participants and researcher, which will enable interested parties to voluntarily contact Ms. Meiring if they wish to participate in the study.

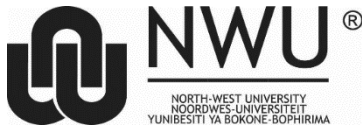
I further note that:

- I may contact Ms. Meiring if I require any further information regarding the study.
- That I will not be required to contact individual persons directly to participate in the study. I will simply share the noted information about the study and participants are then able to voluntarily contact Ms. Meiring to gain more information or to schedule an appointment for a semi-structured interview.

Signature: _____

Date:

ADDENDUM B: RECRUITMENT MATERIAL – GAY RUGBY PLAYERS



Gay men and rugby

A sociological exploration of the influence of inclusive masculinity practices and experiences of homophobia among self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa

About the study

The study aims to contribute to a South African focus on the experiences of self-identified gay men playing rugby – either professionally or socially as part of a South African rugby club and/or team. The study contributes to current international social studies about the reasons for playing rugby, the challenges men face and the benefits they have gained by joining rugby clubs and/or teams.

Who should participate in the study?

- You are a **gay man**; **and**
- you are **18 years and older**; **and**
- you play rugby professionally or socially; **and**
- form part of an inclusive (gay and heterosexual players) or exclusive (gay-only) rugby club and/or team.
- Apart from these criteria, **anyone** may participate.

What will be expected from participants?

- If you want to participate you may contact the researcher for more information.
- You will be required to complete and sign an informed consent statement in which you *agree voluntarily* to participate in the study.
- You will participate in a once-off online (e.g., over Skype or Zoom or Google Hangouts) or a personal face-to-face interview¹⁹ of no longer than 1-2 hours.
- If you prefer, you may complete the questionnaire on your own and email it back to the researcher.

What will be expected from the researcher?

- She will send you information about the study, arrange the interview and answer questions you may have.
- She will schedule a once-off interview with you or send you a questionnaire to complete.
- She will protect your:
 - **Anonymity**, i.e., you can choose a pseudonym to ensure that no one knows who you are.
 - **Privacy**, i.e., he will not ask you about matters that make you uncomfortable or that is private.
 - **Confidentiality**, i.e., he will ensure that no information in the report will be linked to you.

How will participants benefit from the study?

- You will contribute to a better understanding of South African gay men's experiences in the world of rugby.
- You will be provided with the findings of the full study after it is completed.

About the researcher

¹⁹ Personal face-to-face interviews will only be conducted if the specific Covid-19 restrictions, legal obligations and NWU prescriptions allow this. This is to protect the health of participants and the researcher. If you require more information about this, feel free to contact the researcher.

My name is Nadia Meiring. I am currently registered for my Master's in Sociology at the North-West University.

Who do I contact if I want to participate?

Ms Nadia Meiring

Email address: meiringnadia54@gmail.com

Phone numbers: 071 271 2926.

If you require any further information, please do not
hesitate to contact me.



ADDENDUM C: MEIRING TITLE REGISTRATION



Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa, 2520

Tel: (018) 299-1111/2222
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Higher Degree Administration

Tel: 0182994194
Email: 24510785@nwu.ac.za
Enquiries: MRS R JAFTA

22 April 2021

Dear MS MEIRING
University number: 33069174

REGISTRATION OF TITLE

At the recent meeting of a relevant committee meeting of the NWU Faculty of Humanities your title was approved as follows:

A sociological exploration of the influence of inclusive masculinity practices and experiences of homophobia among self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa

The above-mentioned title may under **no circumstances** be changed without consulting your supervisor and obtaining the approval from the relevant committee in the mentioned faculty, in regard of which this office must be furnished with the latest approved title.

In the instance that you wish to submit for examination, please inform your supervisor/promoter accordingly. *Also ensure absolute adherence to the prescripts of A Rule 4.10 for the submission of a Master's study and of A Rule 5.10 for the submission of Doctoral thesis.*

Upon approval of your supervisor/promoter, please ensure that the Notice of Submission form is submitted THREE months in advance to this office.

Note that the Notice of Submission form is available on the [NWU DIY portal](#).

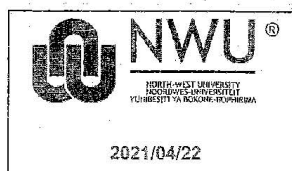
For ease of reference, herewith a reference to the following useful resources:

- [General Academic Rules \(A-reëls\)](#)
- [Manual for Higher Degree Studies](#)
- [Policy on academic integrity](#)

We wish you a pleasant and successful period of study.

Kind regards

Registrar



Reference number: 7.1.11.1.2

ADDENDUM D: C MEIRING ETHICS APPROVAL



PO Box 1174, Vanderbijlpark
South Africa 1900

Tel: 016 910-3111

Fax: 016 910-3116

Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Faculty of Humanities

Tel: 016-91003441

Email: Chrizanne.vaneeden@nwu.ac.za

19 December 2020

Dear Me N Meiring and Prof J Rothmann,

ETHICS APPLICATION APPROVED

This letter serves to inform you that your request for ethics approval of your study was approved by the Ethics Committee for Basic and Social Sciences (BaSSREC) of the NWU.

Application of Ms N Meiring:

Ethics reference number: NWU-02093-20-S7

Title of project: A sociological exploration of the influence of inclusive masculinity practices and experiences of homophobia among self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa.

Supervisor: Prof J Rothmann.

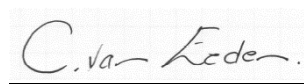
Researcher: Me N Meiring

DURATION: 19 December 2020 to 19 December 2021. An annual monitoring report is required.

ETHICS APPROVAL DATE: 15 December 2020.

After a successful review process, your application for ethics approval of your study was granted by BaSSREC on the 15 December 2020 and this REC wishes you well with the rest of your study.

Yours sincerely



Prof C Van Eeden
Chair: BaSSREC

Original details: (10057013) P:\Daleen\BaSSREC\Prof C van Eeden-letter.docm
10 September 2019

File reference: 9.1.5

ADDENDUM E: BASSREC APPROVAL



Private Bag X1290, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Fax: 018 299-4910
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Senate Committee for Research Ethics
Tel: 018 299-4849
Email: nkosinathi.machine@nwu.ac.za

18 November 2021

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the **Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC)** on 18/11/2021, the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee hereby **approves** your study as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-SERC) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title: A sociological exploration of the influence of inclusive masculinity practices and experiences of homophobia among self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa

Study Leader/Supervisor (Principal Investigator)/Researcher: Prof J. Rothmann

Student/Research Team: N. Meiring (33069174)

Ethics number:

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Institution

Study Number

Year

Status

Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation

Application Type: Single Study

Commencement date: 18/11/2021

Risk:

Low Risk

Expiry date: 18/11/2022

Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable):

General conditions:

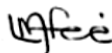
While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:

- The study leader/supervisor (principle investigator)/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the BaSSREC:
 - annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the study; and
 - without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the study.
- The approval applies strictly to the proposal as stipulated in the application form. Should any amendments to the proposal be deemed necessary during the course of the study, the study leader/researcher must apply for approval of these amendments at the BaSSREC, prior to implementation. Should there be any deviations from the study proposal without the necessary approval of such amendments, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- Annually a number of studies may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the study may be started.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-SCRE and BaSSREC reserves the right to:

- request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the study;
- to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process;
- withdraw or postpone approval if:
 - any unethical principles or practices of the study are revealed or suspected;
 - it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the BaSSREC or that information has been false or misrepresented;
 - submission of the annual (or otherwise stipulated) monitoring report, the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and / or
 - new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.
- BaSSREC can be contacted for further information or any report templates via 21081719@nwu.ac.za / 13128388@nwu.ac.za.

The BaSSREC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your study. Please do not hesitate to contact the BaSSREC or the NWU-SCRE for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely



O.b.h. Prof Jacques Rothmann

Chairperson NWU Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Original details: (22351930) C:\Users\22351930\Desktop\ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY.docm
8 November 2018

File reference: 9.1.5.4.2

ADDENDUM F: INFORMED CONSENT



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET AND CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:

“A sociological exploration of the influence of inclusive masculinity practices and experiences of homophobia among self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa”.

ETHICS NUMBER: NWU-02093-20-A7

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Ms. Nadia Meiring

STUDENT NUMBER: 33069174

ADDRESS: 55 Benade Drive, Fichardt Park, Bloemfontein

CONTACT NUMBER: 071 271 2926

You are hereby invited to take part in a research project that forms part of my **Master of Arts in Sociology** research. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project. Please ask the researcher any questions about any part of this project that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied that you clearly understand what this research is about and how you could be involved. Also, your participation is **entirely voluntary**, and you are free to decline to participate. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part. Prior to publication of the study's results (or the point that publication is in process), you may also withdraw the data you generate.

This study has been approved by the **Basic Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC) of the Faculty of Humanities of the North-West University (NWU Ethics number: NWU-02093-20-A7)** and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the international Singapore Statement on Research Integrity (2010) and the ethical guidelines of the National Health Research Ethics Council. It might be necessary for the research ethics committee members or relevant authorities to inspect the research records to make sure that we (the researchers) are conducting research in an ethical manner.

What is this research study all about?

- This study will be conducted amongst self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa on their experiences homophobia (i.e., “a fear of being identified as gay”) in their respective rugby teams and how the principles of inclusive masculinity (i.e. a form of masculinity that favours a greater degree of emotional and physical support and/or intimacy among men), potentially inform their experiences in such contexts.
- The objectives of this study centre on an exploration of the lived experiences of self-identified gay South African rugby players, with a particular emphasis on how they potentially experience discrimination and/or acceptance in their respective rugby clubs and/or teams.
- This study will be conducted in South Africa and will involve either telephonic, online or face-to-face interviews, depending on the preference of each participant. Face-to-face interviews are subject to COVID-19 restrictions. The researcher has been trained to use the methods mentioned in the previous sentence.
- Approximately 20 participants will be included in this study. If more participants wish to participate, an additional five (5) interviews will be conducted until data saturation has been reached.

Why have you been invited to participate?

- You have been invited to participate because you are a self-identified gay man, 18 years or older, that plays rugby in South Africa.
- There are no further exhaustive criteria for this study, i.e., your race, social class, gender identity, educational status, nationality and whether you have disclosed or foreclosed your sexual orientation to others (i.e., whether you are ‘in’ or ‘out of the closet’), will not exclude you from participating.

What will your responsibilities be?

- You will be expected to participate in a 1-2-hour semi-structured interview via Skype, Zoom or telephonically (based on your personal preference), whereby you will answer questions that contribute towards the topic regarding your experiences as self-identified gay rugby player.
- Based on your preference and the specific Covid-19 restriction levels and NWU and governmental guidelines, you may choose to participate in a 1-2-hour personal face-to-face interview, provided that you observe the necessary guidelines.
- You may also indicate your preference to rather complete a self-administered questionnaire (which is identical to the interview schedule) if you do not want to participate in an online, telephonic or personal face-to-face interview. In such instances, the researcher will email the self-administered questionnaire to you and arrange a date and time with you to return it to her via email.
- After concluding the interview, the researcher may ask you to recommend the study to other friends or acquaintances who qualify to participate in the study and who might be willing to do so. In this regard, you will be requested to liaise with these people and request that they contact the researcher.

Will you benefit from taking part in this research?

- *The direct benefits for you as a participant will probably be*
 - Whilst the experience of reflecting on your experiences as self-identified gay rugby player may be of value to you, your participation will hold minimal direct benefits for you.
 - A summarised version of the findings of the study will be made available to you by the researcher through a personal email once all is finalised.
- *The indirect benefit will probably be*
 - A better understanding of the principles of inclusive masculinity (i.e., a form of masculinity that favours a greater degree of emotional and physical support and/or intimacy among men) and the possible influence of homophobia which may be used

by academics, therapists, general public and other sexual minority persons who are considering joining an exclusive or more inclusive rugby club and/or team.

Are there risks involved in your taking part in this research and how will these be managed?

The risks in this study, and how these will be managed, are summarised in the table below:

<i>Prombable/possible risks/discomforts</i>	<i>Strategies to minimize risk/discomfort</i>
Due to you having to spend between 1-2-hours completing the interview telephonically, online, face-to-face or in written form, it is possible that you may become bored or experience minor inconvenience to your daily routine.	The interviewer will ask every 20 minutes if the participant is still okay and if they require a comfort break, in which case the interviewer will phone back after an agreed time or resume the interview after a comfort break in the instance of a face-to-face interview. The participant may at any time request a comfort break or a call-back in order to deal with possible unforeseen distractions.
The sexual and personal nature of the questions may induce discomfort or stress.	Possible questions will be provided to the participants before the interview in order for them to familiarise themselves with the line of questioning prior to them giving consent. The questions are attached to this invitation as an addendum. The participant will also be informed that they may leave the interview or decline to answer the questions at any point during the interview with no repercussions. A registered clinical psychologist (Ms Avalene Bateman) will be available to engage with the participants should they require intervention as a result of the interview process.
Possibility of exposure	All participants will have the option of individual online, telephonic or personal face-to-face interviews at a time and place of the participants own choosing, thereby minimising the possibility of exposure. Face-to-face individual interviews will be conducted at a time and place of the participant's choosing, which also minimises the risk of exposure. This is subject to the particular Covid-19 levels of restrictions and the comfort of the participant and interviewer to do so. During such instances, additional care will have to be taken to safeguard the health of both parties involved during the interview (e.g., the sanitisation of the immediate interview environment, taking the temperature of the researcher and participant (using a thermometer) and providing the participant with a three-ply facial mask and hand sanitizer with 80% alcohol content). In those instances, where an online or telephonic interview is conducted, both the researcher and participant will be in a context of their own choosing.

	The researcher will request that the participant chooses their own pseudonym at the beginning of the interview. This will be used throughout the transcription of the interviews, the writing-up of the findings and eventual reporting of the research findings. The actual names and any other biographical information that may identify the participant, will not appear in any discussion and publication of the research.
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- *However, we do believe that the benefits to you and to science (as noted in the previous section) outweigh the risks we have listed. If you disagree, then please feel free not to participate in this study. We will respect your decision.*
- *Should we learn, in the course of the research, that someone is harming you, or that you are intending to harm someone, then we must tell someone who can help you/warn the person you are intending to harm.*

Who will have access to the data?

- *Anonymity (i.e., in no way will your results be linked to your identity) will be ensured by having you choose your own pseudonym before the start of the interview. Only this pseudonym will be used in the data analysis, writing-up and reporting of findings.*
- *Confidentiality (that is, I/we assure you that we will protect the information we have about you) will be ensured by assigning the noted unique pseudonyms to each participant in order to ensure that their personal information is not accidentally divulged to third parties.*
- *Reporting of findings will be anonymous by reporting as group findings and not as individual findings.*
- *Only the researchers and her supervisor will have access to the personal data of the participants.*
- *Data will be kept safe and secure by storing it on the researcher's password protected laptop.*
- *Audio-recorded data will be transcribed by the researcher personally. As soon as the data has been transcribed and checked against the recording, the recording will be deleted. The transcripts (printed and electronic) will be stored on a password-protected computer and locked cabinet in the personal office of the researcher, respectively, for a period of five (5) years.*

What will happen to the data?

The data from this study will be reported in the following ways:

- *It will be written up as a Master's dissertation in fulfilment of the researcher's Master's degree.*
- *In all of this reporting, you will not be personally identified. This means that the reporting will not include your name or details that will enable others to know that you participated in the study (e.g., your address, the name of your rugby club, etc.).*
- *The data may be reused for secondary research involving the same general topic. This will be undertaken by the researcher at a later stage.*
- *The data will be published in peer-reviewed academic journals. As is the case with the dissertation itself, the anonymity and confidentiality will be observed throughout the process.*

Will you be paid/compensated to take part in this study and are there any costs involved?

No, you will not be paid to take part in the study. However, the researcher will email a summarised copy of the findings to each participant once the research has been finalised.

If you require data for Skype or Zoom interviews, the researcher will arrange for this before the commencement of the interview.

How will you know about the findings?

- The general findings of the research will be shared with you by via email.
- If you would like feedback on your personal results, then you will be able to obtain this from the researcher via email.

Is there anything else that you should know or do?

- You may contact Nadia Meiring at 071 271 2926 or meiringnadia54@gmail.com or her supervisor, Dr Jacques Rothmann at 018 299 1595 or 21081719@nwu.ac.za if you have any further queries or encounter any problems.
- You can contact the chair of the Basic Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Prof Chrizanne van Eeden) at 016 910 3441 or chrizanne.vaneeden@nwu.ac.za if you have any concerns or complaints that have not been adequately addressed by the researcher.
- You will receive a copy of this information and consent form for your own records.

Declaration by participant

By signing below, I agree to take part in a research study entitled: "A sociological exploration of the influence of inclusive masculinity practices and experiences of homophobia among self-identified gay rugby players in South Africa".

I declare that:

- I have read and understood this information and consent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person obtaining consent, as well as the researcher (if this is a different person), and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is **voluntary** and I have not been pressurised to take part.
- I understand that what I contribute (what I report/say/write/draw/produce visually) could be reproduced publicly and/or quoted, but without reference to my personal identity.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- I may be asked to leave the study before it has finished, if the researcher feels it is in my best interests, or if I do not follow the study plan, as agreed to.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 20

Signature of participant

Signature of witness

- You may contact me again ☐ Yes ☐ No
- I would like a summary of the findings of this research ☐ Yes ☐ No
- I would like feedback on my functioning/wellbeing as reflected in the questionnaires I completed ☐ Yes ☐ No

The best way to reach me is:

Name & Surname: _____
 Postal Address: _____
 Email: _____
 Phone Number: _____
 Cell Phone Number: _____

In case the above details change, please contact the following person who knows me well and who does not live with me and who will help you to contact me:

Name & Surname: _____
 Phone/ Cell Phone Number /Email: _____

Declaration by researcher and participant

Personal face-to-face interviews during Covid-19 restrictions

Additional declaration by participant in those instances where the participant requests to participate in a personal face-to-face semi-structured interview:

By signing below, I _____, acknowledge the following information related to the required measures regarding Covid-19:

I declare that:

- It is my personal choice and preference to participate in a personal face-to-face semi-structured interview with the researcher.
- This requires that I consent to the following strict measures to safeguard the personal health and safety of myself and that of the researcher/interviewer/primary investigator:
 - I consent to the researcher taking my temperature before the interview using a thermometer. ☐ Yes ☐ No
 - I confirm that my temperature measured at _____ degrees. ☐ Yes ☐ No
 - I consent to use the three-ply mask provided by the researcher. ☐ Yes ☐ No
 - I consent to wear the three-ply mask for the full duration of the interview. ☐ Yes ☐ No
 - I consent to the researcher sanitising the interview context using a sanitiser with an 80% alcohol content before the commencement of the interview. ☐ Yes ☐ No
 - I consent to the researcher using a sanitiser with an 80% alcohol content before and during the interview if required. ☐ Yes ☐ No

Signed at (place) _____ on (date) _____ 20 _____

 Signature of participant

 Signature of researcher

Declaration by researcher

I (*name*) _____ declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to _____. encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use an interpreter.

Signed at (*place*) _____ on (*date*) _____ 20 ____.

Signature of participant

Signature of researcher

ADDENDUM G: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE



SECTION A BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION*

Surname and Initial(s)	
Age	
Sex	
Race	
Nationality	
Relationship status	
E-mail address	

*It is not compulsory for the participant to fill in or provide further information in Section A. A fictitious name will be allocated to all participants

SECTION B: IDENTITY-RELATED QUESTIONS

1. Is there a specific pseudonym or fictitious name that you want to use?
2. Why do you self-identify as gay?
3. Are there any particular stereotypes that you have to conform to because of your sexual orientation? Please elaborate by providing reasons and examples.
4. How would you describe your gender identity? (E.g., as 'masculine', 'effeminate' or more 'androgynous'?). Please explain.

SECTION C: GENDER AND SEXUAL IDENTITY IN SPORT (Childhood)

5. Briefly describe your sport background. (e.g., What was the first sport(s) you engaged in? At what age did you start?).
6. Who encouraged/required you to participate in these particular sports? (e.g., Your parents, friends, teachers, etc.?).
7. Why did the persons (you noted in question 5) encourage/require you to participate in this particular sport(s)?
8. Was there particular gendered behaviour you had to display to participate in these sport(s)? Could you please elaborate?
9. How did participation in this/these sport(s) influence the way in which you enacted your masculinity?
10. Did you feel that being gay would affect your sport participation? (e.g., choice of sport). In what way?

SECTION D: GENDER AND SEXUAL IDENTITY IN RUGBY (Adulthood)

11. Why have you chosen to still play rugby?
12. How has playing rugby influenced the way in which you experience your physical appearance? (e.g., the importance of being more muscular, rugged or athletic and thin?).
13. Who, or what, in your opinion, is the 'ideal' rugby player? (i.e., in terms of appearance and behaviour).
 - a. E.g., do you have to act more aggressive or competitive?
 - b. E.g., do you have to have a specific physical appearance? (e.g., being more muscular).
 - c. E.g., deciding to disclose your sexual orientation or choosing not to do so.
14. Do you display the features above in your current rugby team? Please explain why.
15. Do you think (a) it is *acceptable* for gay men and (b) necessary for gay men to 'come out' to their teammates in their rugby teams? Why?

SECTION F: THE GAY RUGBY CLUB AND TEAM AS 'SAFE SPACE'

16. Why did you decide to join a rugby club?
17. Are you a member of a gay-inclusive rugby club/team? (i.e., with heterosexual and gay members).
 - a. If *yes*, why did you decide to join a gay-inclusive club/team?
 - b. If *no*, please explain your reason(s) for not doing this.
 - c. What are the positive features of such an inclusive club/team?
 - d. What are the limitations of being part of such an inclusive club/team?
18. Are you a member of a gay-exclusive rugby club/team? (e.g., with only gay members).
 - a. If *yes*, why did you decide to join a gay-exclusive club/team?
 - b. If *no*, please explain your reason(s) for not doing this.
 - c. What are the positive features of such an exclusive club/team?
 - d. What are the limitations of being part of such an exclusive club/team?
19. How, if at all, has joining a rugby team influenced (i.e., changed or strengthened) your personal experience of being gay?
 - a. How does your behaviour differ or remain the same, when you are among your fellow rugby players? Why?
 - b. What are your experiences as an "open" and self-identified gay man in a mainstream sport such as rugby?
 - c. What are some of the challenges that you have faced as a self-identified gay rugby player in your team? How did you overcome these challenges?
 - d. Talk about some of your positive experiences that you came across by being a self-identified gay rugby player.
20. Does your rugby team/club provide you with a safe space/environment"?
 - a. If *yes*, please provide reasons for your answers.
 - b. If *no*, please provide reasons for your answers.
21. Have you ever experienced homophobia because of being a gay rugby player?
 - a. In your particular rugby club/team? Please describe your experiences.
 - b. In society in general? To what do you attribute this?

ADDENDUM H: LANGUAGE EDITING

Dr. JACKIE DE VOS

Academic copy editor / Akademiese teksredakteur

BA (Psychology & Communication studies), BAHons (Psychology) (NWU)
MEd, PhD (Educational Psychology) (NWU)
BAHons (Translation) (UNISA)
MA (Linguistics) (UNISA)
BA (Sielkunde & Kommunikasiestudies), BAHons (Sielkunde) (NWU)
MEd, PhD (Opvoedkundige Sielkunde) (NWU)
BAHons (Vertaalkunde) (UNISA)
MA (Linguistiek) (UNISA)

072 435 8024

Jackie de Vos

acadwritingconsult@icloud.com

EDITING

31 October 2022

To whom it may concern

This letter serves to confirm that the following thesis was edited:

**A sociological exploration of the influence of inclusive masculinity practices
and experiences of homophobia among self-identified gay rugby players in
South Africa**

The onus is on the client(s) to work through the proposed track changes and to accept or reject proposed changes. Clients might amend the content after the editing process. Clients should also make certain that all sources/references have been cited.