Heteronormativity and Developing Masculinities at a Primary School in South Africa

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Abstract

This article explores the development of heteronormativity and the construction of masculinities at a township primary school in South Africa. In this study, boys and girls chastise homosexuality yet maintain their male-to-male and female-to-female social bonds. Homosocial or male-to-male social bonds have a bearing on the construction of male identity. It is argued that homosocial relationships serve as a means through which certain boys negotiate and exhibit their masculinity in a process of identity formation in which heterosexuality is a key component. Qualitative data from focus groups and diary research with Grade 7 students (male and female) in a primary school are used. Boys engage in a number of games and acquire resources for themselves; hence, as a social unit, they portray themselves as heteronormative. Their solidarity plays a role in maintaining their power in relationships even though privately some of them expressed preference for more flexible constructions of masculinity.

Keywords: heteronormativity; homosocial; masculinities; South Africa; boys

Introduction

The following quotation (Lesego, male, focus group) summarises how homosociality and heteronormativity are important concepts in the formation of masculinities.

> Sir, like me Lesego I want to be heard that I am a boy because sometimes sir when you don't do boys' stuff like playing soccer [a South African term for football], like boys do sir, they will call you a gay sir, because if you don't do nothing sitting when you go to a girl and say, can you borrow me a lunch box? I want to go and eat at the kitchen sir, they say you are a gay, or that you are their girlfriend then sir the news will go all over the school. That is why I want to be with boys sir, even if today I don't want to play soccer, I will go just to impress the boys sir, which is not good for me.

The fear of being socially perceived as gay, often referred to as homohysteria (Anderson and McCormack 2015), seems to be coercing boys into specific behaviour in order to be accepted by their respective homosocial groupings. Sexuality, which forms part of the notion of homohysteria, is also an important component in the construction of masculinity (Bhana 2013a; Renold 2007), yet it remains under-researched in young boys, particularly in South African townships.[1] Even though boys' sexual orientation may be heterosexual, their play groupings are usually homosocial. Homosocial is the term used to refer to people of the same sex "hanging around" together for social reasons. Sedgwick (cited in Buchbinder 2013, 82–83) defines homosocial as "a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same-sex."

Boys who spend a lot of time with girls instead of with other boys are often labelled or criticised by their male peers (Flood 2008; Kiesling 2005). Thus, boys may end up doing things they do not like, or are not interested in doing, to please other boys (Flood 2008), as is the case of Lesego above. Homosocial activities play a major role in the formation of masculinities (Thurnell-Read 2012), but being heterosexual appears to be both desirable and manly in many contexts while being juxtaposed with being labelled gay (Bhana and Mayeza 2016; Kinsman 2009; Martin and Muthukrishna 2011; Robinson 2008; Williams 2013). Renold (2007) further argues that to be considered a "real" boy or girl would involve displaying recognisable heterosexuality. When a sexual practice such as heterosexuality is prejudiced as essential, power dynamics come into play and those who do not practise acceptable forms of heterosexuality are marginalised, chastised and reduced to an inferior status.

In this article, the construction of heterosexual masculinities among pre-teens and young teenagers in a resource-poor area is explored. The focus of this article is specific to children in a township primary school and their understanding of sexualities and the construction of masculinities within this context. I use a social constructionist perspective here that recognises that masculinity is arrived at through people's interactions in a particular context. Social constructionist perspectives are inherently qualitative and interpretive and concerned with meaning. Mindful of Connell's (1995) theoretical term hegemonic masculinity and the importance of the local context in understanding such a term (Morrell, Jewkes, and Lindegger 2012; Ratele 2008), I explore the way boys in Grade 7 interact with each other and girls, and how they understand the world around them in the context of gender relations. Hegemonic masculinity in Connell's theory is "defined as the configuration of gender practice

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[1] In South Africa, the term townships refers to geographical areas that were developed during the apartheid years (the period of intense enforcement of formal racial segregation) adjacent to cities or towns and suburbs. Black people were designated to live in these areas according to their "official" ethnic categories (in some cases people were forcefully relocated to these areas) while white people lived mainly in suburbs or the central parts of towns and cities. Distinct cultures developed in townships and are still observable today, more than two decades after the first democratic election in South Africa in 1994.

which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell 1995, 77).

Despite many South African men exhibiting violent behaviour in their intimate relationships (Jewkes et al. 2009; Ratele 2008), little is known about the development and constructions of young masculinities in relation to dominant sexual identities and behaviour in South Africa (Bhana 2013b; Prinsloo and Moletsane 2013). By seeking the experiences and the views of both girls and boys, the aim is to better understand the development of dominant heterosexual ideals in South African township primary schools. The ultimate hope is that such information can contribute to more diverse and inclusive masculinity constructions in the lives of young South Africans.

Homosocial Acceptance and Heteronormativity

While it is manly to be heterosexual, too much association with girls becomes unmanly. Plummer (2001) refers to the social bonding of young boys at primary school level as "compulsory homosociality."

Masculinity is a social construct (Kimmel 2004a; Sathiparsad, Taylor, and De Vries 2010) that is often used in the presence of others to gain status. Similarly, boyhood as a form of masculinity is socially constructed. Boyhood is also constructed in contrast to femininity (see Kimmel 2004b; McGuffey and Rich 2011; Wetherell 1996). Sport, especially certain forms such as playing soccer, is considered as one way of claiming to be a "real" boy (Bhana 2008; Bhana and Mayeza 2016; Bowley 2013; Paechter and Clark 2007).

In various studies, it was found that at times girls and boys want to play separately or simply be on their own (Francis 1997; Martin and Muthukrishna 2011; Renold 2007; Swain 2005). Bird (cited in McGuffey and Rich 2011, 167) argues that it is imperative to understand how boys and girls organise themselves within groups to understand how they negotiate boundaries between themselves. Spending time with one another helps men to rediscover their masculinity (Buchbinder 2013).

The acceptance of heterosexuality as the norm seems to continue to prevail despite the opposition from gay and other activist movements[2] and the South African Constitution disallowing discrimination based on sexual orientation. Lesbian and gay activist movements, including human rights activists, hold that heterosexuality is not the only natural form of sexuality, but has instead been socially and culturally made the "normal" sexual practice and identity (Kinsman 2009).

The foundation of the concept of heteronormativity can be attributed to the feminist theories unveiling the relationship between gender, sexuality and heterosexuality in the

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[2]   LGBT movements such as GLOW, OLGA and LGEP have played a major role.

1970s and 1980s, and its coining to Michael Warmer (Williams 2013). Individuals' attitudes and behaviours are attributed to cultural and societal prescriptions of heterosexuality and proscriptions of homosexuality. This perspective contributed to homosexual (or gay) activist groups challenging these oppressive gender relations practices. It is argued that as women began to challenge patriarchy and the gender hierarchy, "gay men and women started to contest another aspect of patriarchy—the perception of heterosexuality as the only legitimate and appropriate form of sexuality" (Berkovitch and Helman 2009, 270). The tensions between heteronormativity and other forms of sexual expressions are not only limited to adults, since childhood is also socially constructed and gendered (Prinsloo and Moletsane 2013, 5).

In some South African societies, community members are expected to follow heterosexual norms or risk being shunned by the community (See Ratele 2016). Young (2009, 111) citing Calhoun argues that "persons who transgress heterosexual norms have no legitimized place at all in political citizenship, civil society, or private spheres." Structures of normative heterosexuality constrain lesbian women and gay men by enforcing their invisibility since they are considered to be a threat to the dominance of African masculinities (Ratele 2011). In other words, normative sexualities strengthen normative gender. This is compounded by the fact that some social and cultural norms still continue to value and promote heterosexuality as the most natural, normal and healthy sexuality. It can thus be argued that "[t]he emergence of heteronormativity as an analytical category in gender and sexuality studies has therefore provided an important shift towards understanding the workings of cultures and societies beyond individual attitudes and behaviour" (Williams 2013, 121).

Boys who exhibit feminine attributes are also considered gay and thus relegated to an inferior status (Bhana and Mayeza 2016).

Research Background and Methodology

This article draws on a qualitative study of Grade 7 (the last year of primary school in South Africa) children in a township school in the Gauteng province of South Africa. Although all the participants were in Grade 7, their ages varied between 12 and 17 due to some children repeating grades or starting Grade 1 at a later age than the expected age of six or seven. Table one below lists the pseudonyms, sex and ages of the participants.

Table 1: Demographics of participants

	Name	Sex	Age in years
1	Ntombi	Female	13
2	Dian	Female	13
3	Samantha	Female	13
4	Colletta	Female	12
5	Prudence	Female	12
6	Precious	Female	12
7	Nandipha	Female	13
8	Dineo	Female	13
9	Jadagrace	Female	14
10	Tyra	Female	13
11	Noxolo	Female	12
12	Ayesha	Female	12
13	Palisa	Female	12
14	Lucky	Male	12
15	Sandile	Male	13
16	Pleasure	Male	14
17	Kagiso	Male	13
18	John	Male	14
19	John 1	Male	13
20	Eminem	Male	13
21	Andy	Male	12
22	Kenny	Male	13
23	Mpho	Male	14
24	Ngamla	Male	13
25	Gift	Male	16
26	Lungelo	Male	14
27	Sibusiso	Male	17
28	Prince Charmer	Male	14
29	Sibusiso 2	Male	13
30	Lesekgo	Male	15

Data collection took place over a period of two months. Data was collected from 30 research participants—17 boys and 13 girls—by means of focus groups and individual diaries. The 30 research participants were divided into three heterogeneous groups. David and Sutton (2011) point out that if young men spend most of their time interacting with other young males, then a homogenous group is appropriate, and if they spend most of their time in mixed groups, then a heterogeneous group would be more appropriate. Since the primary school concerned is co-educational and the learners spent most of their time together, heterogeneous groups consisting of boys and girls were thus

considered more appropriate. Each focus group met twice over a period of four weeks for discussions.

Focus groups were used because they allow communication that occurs naturally in most communities (Savin-Baden and Major 2013) and also help participants to formulate and modify their views and make sense of their experiences (Barbour and Schostak 2011). Focus groups also help in understanding how meaning is collectively constructed (Bryman 2012). It is imperative to understand that focus groups "provide a forum that facilitates group discussion, to brainstorm a variety of solutions and to establish a mechanism of opinion formation" (Sarantakos 2005, 195–96). It is through these discussions that members' thinking is stimulated by others which cannot happen in individual interviews (Lichtman 2014). While the focus groups are important in uncovering social views on the formation of masculinities, they are not suitable in uncovering sensitive information, especially on issues of sexuality. Scott (2008, 94) argues that "[o]ne relatively novel method of collecting sensitive information from children is the diary method." Focus groups can thus be used alongside other methods (Cronin 2008). The use of multiple methods in data collection also increases the trustworthiness and credibility of the research (Nieuwenhuis and Smit 2012). It is against this background that participants were also asked to keep diaries over a period of two months.

Diaries answer a wide range of qualitative research questions relating to experiences, perceptions and constructions (Braun and Clark 2013). Both the focus groups and diaries sought participants' views and experiences on masculinity construction by young boys by discussing and documenting their relationships within the school environment and exploring how these affected them in their daily lives. While the focus groups explored the social face of gender identity construction, the diaries give insight into its private face.

To ensure anonymity, the research participants' identities were protected by using fictitious names and locations (Neuman 1997). Common themes were identified from the collected data and an analysis of these themes followed. Heteronormativity and homosocial relationships or groupings were among the major themes identified. Transcription conventions are indicated in the following formats. Short pauses are indicated by a hyphen (-), while pauses of more than a second are written numerically; for example (4) means a four-second pause. An equal sign (=) indicates two people talking over each other. Elongated words which seem to show some emotional significance are shown by putting two colons in between, for example bu::lly. Some words are signified in parentheses, for example laughing. Laughing indicates one person and laughter indicates several people laughing (see Frosh, Phoenix, and Pattman 2002; Renold 2007). Strong emphasis by the participants is represented by capital letters, for example "Some boys love NATURAL GIRLS." Bless, Higson-Smith, and Sithole (2013, 237) point out that "when a researcher describes exactly how data was collected,

recorded, coded and analysed, and can present good examples to illustrate this process, one starts to trust that the results are in fact dependable."

Ethical clearance and various forms of permission were obtained prior to entering the research field. Since all the participants were minors, informed consent was obtained from their parents/guardians and assent from them to partake in the research. The Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) gave permission to carry out the research at the chosen school and ethical clearance for the study was given by the University of South Africa. Participants and their parents/guardians and the school were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Participation in the research was voluntary; thus participants had the option to withdraw at any given point of the research.

The author of this article, a black male teacher (teaching at a different school), conducted all the interviews. The interviews were held in a mixture of English and Zulu, the dominant languages used in the school. Although the interviewer has a basic proficiency in Zulu, a translator was also present. The language used in the transcripts and the diaries was left unchanged (grammatical errors were not corrected) to demonstrate the importance of multilingualism in this context. In cases where common English words have a different meaning in the local lingua franca, it is indicated in brackets.

Since both the translator and the interviewer are men, which could have prevented the girls from speaking freely, an engaging non-threatening atmosphere was strived for and to some extent achieved as the research progressed. The dynamic between the interviewer and the participants is also evident in the way he is addressed as "sir" in the quotations. Since all male adults are addressed in such a formal manner in this environment, this practice was not undermined since conventional practices help to create an "everyday atmosphere" for the participants.

The results are discussed next by focusing on how the participants discuss heterosexuality and homosexuality, the ways in which the male participants refer to girls and the description of male homosocial groups.

Heterosexuality versus Homosexuality

As a result of heteronormativity, people often see sexuality in terms of binaries (heterosexual vs homosexual). Although Hawkesworth (1997) argues that the concept of heteronormativity is now a familiar criticism, in South African township primary schools it seems a highly regarded way of emphasising male identity. In this research, placid views on homosexuality were found, but there were also vehement reactions such as that of Sandile, a male participant, who replied as follows about his views on homosexual people:

> Sir, I hate them because, eish the things they are doing is improper sir … Eish sir, *ayijwayelekanga ukuthi umfana nomfana bashade, ayikho. Abantu bakuthola kanjani*

sir? *BAZOKUTHOLA KANJANI? Awusiye owabo*. [Eish sir, you cannot get used to the issue of boys wedding boys, there is nothing like that. What will people think of you, sir? HOW WILL THEY CONSIDER YOU? You don't belong to them.]

The fact that some of the research participants, such as Sandile, are so vehement in their dislike of same-sex behaviour implies that they believe their views are in accordance with those of the dominant society.[3] Thus the boys at this school constructed masculinity according to the norms of their understanding of society (or local community), which regards heterosexuality as "more manly" than homosexuality (Kinsman 2009; Martin and Muthukrishna 2011; Robinson 2008; Williams 2013). John, a boy in another focus group, pointed out that if their mothers heard about them behaving like girls (meaning that they exhibit homosexual behaviour), they would spank them. His views introduce the importance of the family in policing heterosexual masculinity. In the words of Paechter and Clark (2007, 6), "[w]e see individual masculinities and femininities as constructed through local communities of practice in which children and adults collaboratively develop relational understandings of what it is to be male or female in a particular context."

Nandipha, a girl in a different focus group from Lesego and Sandile, cutting short another participant said the following: "No sir! They need to accept, if you are a boy you must accept that you are a boy, if you are a girl you must accept, not to do FUNNY things." When the interviewer asked her what she would do if a person regarded as gay wanted to play with her, Nandipha said, "I run away. I don't want to play with gays sir." Another girl, Diana, seemed to be furious about the issue of gays: "*Ngifuni* gays! [I don't like gays!]. Why do they have to be treated like girls when they are not? I hate them. They are not girls!" These views seem to suggest it is unmanly for a boy to behave like a girl, which in their view is the same as being gay, a derogatory term that reduces them to an inferior status. It can be argued that gayness is easily assimilated to femininity (Connell 2013). As stated by Bhana and Mayeza (2016, 37), "less masculine boys are targeted as effeminate and therefore gay and subordinate to heterosexuality." According to Nandipha, girls are also supposed to be feminine, not masculine. Commenting on adults, Ratele (2011) argues that the main aim of this is to discipline female sexuality so as to perpetuate masculine domination. In this society "servicing" any sexuality other than heterosexuality is thus considered a threat to the continued existence of patriarchal power and masculinity.

Boys seem to be aligned with more strenuous activities such as playing soccer, while girls are aligned with less vigorous activities such as just sitting and looking after kitchen utensils. For example, as indicated by Lesego above, boys are expected to play soccer and not sit with girls and ask for food. Thus, boys and girls are supposed to perform certain social functions (Butler 1993; West and Zimmerman 1987).

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[3]   This is despite the fact that same-sex unions have been legalised by the Civil Unions Act of 2006 in the Republic of South Africa (RSA 2006).

Boys who fail to toe the heterosexual line are often laughed at and teased (Martin and Muthukrishna 2011). Mpho, one of the male research participants, wrote in his diary that he had noticed a gay being teased and laughed at in class. Other boys referred to him as a *stabane* (gay). Lesekgo, another male research participant, pointed out during a focus group discussion that if you show signs of "girlish behaviour," such as crying, boys would call you *masabasabayo* (gay). Thus, this name-calling is a way of making boys behave according to a heterosexual norm or confirming heteronormativity. The concept of heteronormativity asserts that heterosexuality is the only sexual orientation or the only norm for doing gender (Berkovitch and Helman 2009; Williams 2013). Failure to be heterosexual may result in being placed at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men (Connell 2013). Cranny-Francis et al. (2003) point out that heterosexuality is a vector of oppression.

In this study, the participants also introduced the notion of bisexuality, although they easily equate it with being gay. Nandipha, a female research participant, pointed out that a Grade 7 boy at this school loved her and also loved another boy in the same class. To show total disdain, one male research participant (Ngamula) punched this boy after he had professed his love for him. Nandipha clustered bisexual behaviour and being gay in the same category during a focus group:

> He wants to play with Ngamula and Ngamula does not want. The gay always say, Ngamula I love you, Ngamula I love you. It's not a fine thing because Ngamula does not love him. Ngamula loves girls, NATURAL GIRLS sir! … Like Andy's friend sir, he wants Ngamula, he wants me too sir … he loves girls, he loves boys. That is why I don't like gays.

Both participants attach certain characteristics to what it entails to be labelled gay or a "real" boy, such as loving both boys and girls. The views of Nandipha and actions of Ngamula once again show that both boys and girls are thus policing heterosexuality. As was found in other research (Bhana 2013b, 60), children maintain current gender hierarchies by policing and ridiculing deviant forms, thus reinforcing gender sanctions.

A few research participants stated that potentially gay identified male learners knew how to dress fashionably while others acknowledged that these boys were less violent than "real" boys. However, all of them were quick to point out that although they appreciated the way gays dress and their actions, they did not like their homosexuality. Although there is thus an admission of non-hegemonic ways of "doing boy," it is not condoned since there are too many constraints on deviating from heteronormative scripts of acceptable boyhood (Renold 2004, 248–49). The views of Lesego also indicate that some boys may want to sit and talk to girls but due to fear of other boys they end up joining them even if they don't feel like it.

Sex Talk and Heteromasculinity

In light of these heteronormative spaces, the pressures of being a "real" boy are ample. Boys spent a considerable amount of time talking about girls with other boys. This talk indicates heterosexual masculinity. When asked what most boys spend their time doing, one girl was quick to point out that boys spend most of their time talking about girls. One boy, Kagiso, said that they spent most of their time talking about beautiful and attractive girls in particular. Lucky added, "[s]ir, they most time talk about girls. Let's say I want Diana and sir, some of them sir talk about many girls they want." When the research participants were asked if this meant that boys wanted many girlfriends, there was a chorus of "yes." The interviewer then asked if this meant that for one to be a "real" boy one needed to have many girlfriends; again the male research participants chorused "yes." These views are in line with the views of Jewkes et al. (2009), although they are being experienced at different age groups. One of the boys, Pleasure, tried to explain what boys want from girls when they talk about them.

> Pleasure: These boys want to talk about girls because they say e-eh they must go deep there; they must make sex *uyabona* [you see].
>
> Interviewer: Ok, so boys talk about girls because they want sex?
>
> Pleasure: They don't love girls. They love sex.

For Pleasure, to be a "real" boy meant to have sex with a girl. In this case sex is not about desire or a way of showing love but a way of showing manhood instead. Along the same lines, Shefer et al. (2005), in a study in South Africa with young men, note that to be a man is to have sex with a woman. Other local studies reveal that having sex and being able to handle multiple female sexual partners are equated with manhood (Sathiparsad, Taylor, and De Vries 2010; Sauls 2005; Wood and Jewkes 2005).

Boys use persuasive language to win over the girls. Diana, a female research participant, describes how boys try to lure girls: "Because he is always begging you like Pleasure (laughter) … He always talks [like that] to me, tomorrow is the day. Like, I will take you out."

Having a girlfriend is regarded as a manifestation of heterosexual masculinity, and thus failure to have one may lead one to being labelled gay or a girl (Renold 2007). Boys who do not have girlfriends feel that they lack the vocabulary of "sex talk" and become uncomfortable in the homosocial grouping. Pleasure expressed his feelings in a diary:

> Every time when I go [out] with my friends [they] always talk about girls they say are beautiful, intelligent, talented, charming and hot. Me, I don't have a girlfriend. I am always quiet and I wish I have a girlfriend. … I felt so bored [frustrated] because every time they talk about their girlfriends.

For Pleasure, real boys are thus supposed to talk about girls and comment on the way they walk, their legs, their "bums" and their miniskirts. As this is done in groups, homosociality thus plays a pivotal role in the formation of heterosexual masculinity. However, this talk by the boys was not always welcomed by the girls. Girls complained about the lack of sensitivity in the way boys talked about them. Below are some excerpts from girls in a focus group discussion (Nandipha and Precious, respectively).

> Some boys when we are sitting together talk about girls, how they wear, how they talk … They say we are wearing short skirts … They say look at this girl's legs.

> Sir, what I like to add e-e, to what Nandipha said is that boys also look at our bums [buttocks] sir (laughter), they talk about how we walk sir, and sir I don't like what they are saying sir.

It would seem that the boys regard girls as sex objects that are under scrutiny and discussion, as boys parade their talk of heterosexual masculinity. From the boys' perspective this type of talk shows that you are a "real" boy. Describing a girl using sex names boosts the boy's status in the eyes of the other boys. Bhana (2013b, 61) argues that "[h]eterosexual desirability is thus the means through which girls are included, but overall they are belittled by boys who seek recourse to misogynistic mockery."

Boys also show their heterosexuality by having girlfriends and encouraging each other to have girlfriends. However, many boys talked about hanging around with their girlfriends and not being intimate. At times, boys tease or use derogatory terms in an endeavour to push other boys into having girlfriends. Indeed, this form of masculinity construction affects them negatively as one boy, Sibusiso, recorded in his diary how his friends had tried to coerce him into dating a girl:

> Today me and my friends we were playing the soccer and two girls came. My friends say go and date her and I say no, and they say to me I am an idiot because I am scared of the girls. I run and cry alone on the way back home. I felt angry and lonely because my friends say I am an idiot. I did not like that word and I felt like I can hit them with rocks [stones].

Sibusiso may not have been afraid of girls since he had a girlfriend in the same class. The boys who were pushing him had multiple girlfriends, and they may only have wanted him to conform to their multi-partner homosocial group.

Homosocial Groups

The relationship among boys appears to be based on friendship and is not associated with romantic or sexual acts. Similar to other research, it was found in this study that the boys and girls preferred to keep to their homosocial groups (Francis 1997; Martin and Muthukrishna 2011; Renold 2007; Swain 2005). Solidarity plays a significant role in maintaining male power (Kiesling 2005). Bhana (2013b), reflecting on research among younger children (6- to 8-year-olds) in South Africa, argues that having girls as

friends would contravene ideal masculinity. In as much as boys encourage each other to have girlfriends, they must maintain their homosocial groupings to be "real" boys.

In the opening quotation of the article (by Lesego) it was shown that even if boys want to play with girls, the fear of other boys associating this with being homosexual makes them play with other boys instead. Given that Lesego played soccer, even if he did not feel like it, the performance of masculinity is demonstrated, stressing the social construction of a gendered identity while endorsing a perception of hegemonic masculinity. The fear of being labelled homosexual or gay makes boys hang around with other boys even if at times they want to interact with girls. Thus, heterosexual male conformity entails boys actively (or consciously) maintaining their homosocial groups.

Boys also want to move around with other boys because of their passion for soccer. Thus they spent their time together both playing and discussing soccer. Lesego also pointed out that he could not talk about soccer with the girls. It can be argued that masculinity is constructed by playing soccer as well as knowing how to talk about the professional game knowledgeably (Epstein et al. 2001).

Boy-to-boy relationships bring comfort and confidence to some participants. Mpho, a male research participant, stated that engaging in sporting activities such as soccer and talking about issues related to their shared sex and gender identification with other boys made him comfortable. He said that he could share his problems with other boys, something he could not do with girls. He proceeded to point out that apart from sharing his problems with the other boys, he could also talk to them about "boys' stuff." During a discussion with one of the groups, Mpho said the following when asked whether the boys liked playing on their own or with girls:

> Mpho: I play with boys. I feel comfortable. I tell them my problems.
>
> Interviewer: So, you don't want to share problems with girls?
>
> Mpho: Yes, because I always talk with boys, boys' stuff.
>
> Interviewer: Which stuff?
>
> Mpho: Like, like problems at home.

Mpho in his diary encouraged gay boys to play with other boys so that they could also be familiar with boys' stuff. This would help them discover their masculinities, as was also found in other research (see Buchbinder 2013). Although boys and girls usually preferred to keep to their homosocial groups, at times they also mixed and played together (see Swain 2005), especially when there was a coach present. Some girls in this study did not see anything wrong in including boys in their play, while most boys rejected the desire to include girls in their activities.

Homosociality could be observed in boys as they played different games such as marbles and chess. Gambling was also reported to be rife among the boys. These games were played in a classroom that was no longer in use. In all these games, girls were not welcome. If girls were allowed to enter the classroom where boys were playing, they were just supposed to watch. The same sentiments were aired by another popular boy when talking about soccer. This boy pointed out that he did not like his girlfriend to join him in playing soccer. He preferred that she sits and watches him play. This shows that the boys wanted to dominate and pacify the girls in their relationships with them.

Conclusion

In this article I argue that both heteronormativity and homosociality as informers of male identity are enforced and re-enacted by both boys and girls, and that homosocial interaction plays a significant role in achieving and maintaining a heteromasculine status. The word "hate" was used by many boys and girls to express their disdain for gays or any homosexual acts. During the group discussions the research participants reiterated the belief that such behaviour is not acceptable. Thus, the boys at this school constructed masculinity along the norms of their understanding of society, which regards heterosexuality as being "more manly" than homosexuality.

Both homosexuals and bisexuals were ridiculed in an attempt to get them to fall in line with the norms laid down by the heterosexual males in the school. In this study, it was found that although homosexual organisations and other civic groups have challenged the dominance of heterosexuality in the broader society, the participants from this school in a township setting were rooted in the practice of exclusive heterosexuality, thus endorsing hegemonic masculinity.

Heterosexuality in boys was also demonstrated through sex talk. The boys in this study spent a considerable amount of time talking about girls and especially about the girls they liked. "Real boys" were supposed to be able to talk about girls: the way they walk, their legs, their "buttocks" and their miniskirts. In this study, boys also demonstrated their boyhood by having a girlfriend. Most of the boys believed that to be a "real" boy, one should have many girlfriends. The notion of having many girlfriends emanated from the boys' need to reinforce their dominant versions of masculinity. Similarly, Sathiparsad, Taylor, and De Vries (2010) point out that having sex and being able to handle many women are equated with masculinity. The data illustrates that a relationship with a girl is regarded as a status symbol.

The boys constructed their heteromasculinity through homosocial groups. Boys wanted to play sports such as soccer, which they did not allow the girls to play, and also enjoyed talking to each other about the sport. Boys also wanted to spend time together because they felt it was nice to be with other boys rather than with girls. Therefore, it was found that the homosociality of the boys helped them in achieving and upholding heteronormativity. The norms of being a real boy were thus observed in keeping

company with other boys while being heterosexual. Deviation from the norm resulted in name-calling which was enforced by both boys and girls.

Yet, not all aspects of the social construction of boyhood are welcomed by the female participants as they know they are often depicted in sexualised or derogatory terms. Although it is thus difficult to admit publicly, boys also long for a more dynamic and flexible way of being a boy. These insights show that interventions in the social construction of masculinities in South Africa may be welcomed by children as they realise the negative implications of some of these constructions.

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